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SHOWCASING SELF: AN INTERSECTIONAL EXAMINATION OF BODY TYPE
PRESENTATION IN ONLINE DATERS

by
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B.A. University of Florida, 2010

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts
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ABSTRACT

Using data collected from the online dating site Match.com, this paper performs a content analysis examining the relationships between race, gender, and sexuality as both independent variables and as intersections on impression management strategies in online dating. Impression management strategies form a foundational core of how people interact with others in social situations. This analysis focuses on impression management strategies by examining how people advertise their body type in a public arena. Analysis also draws upon the types of bodies these people desire in an ideal date, as a second method of looking at the norms surrounding the ideal body type for a given group. Drawing upon intersectionality theories, this paper looks at potential biases in previous online dating literature towards white heterosexuals. Taking this idea into account, this analysis utilizes 892 profiles from major urban centers within the United States, approximately equal in the numbers of whites and blacks, gay/lesbians and heterosexuals, and men and women, in order to examine underrepresented populations in previous online dating literature.

Findings show that body type norms based on intersectional race and gender literature appear to be more accurate predictors of proclaimed body type than only those using gender literatures. In addition, sexuality, race, and gender interactions appear to have an effect in the terminology an online dater uses in describing both themselves and the types of bodies desired in ideal dates. Contrary to prior online dating and gender literature, findings also indicate a greater willingness of women compared to men to use terms that indicate their body might be overweight. Theoretical explanations look at how positions relative to hegemonic power may be an overriding influence in the importance of body type impression management strategies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Impression Management and Online Dating	1
Introduction to Intersectionality.....	3
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Impression Management/ Symbolic Interaction.....	6
Impressions in Cyberspace	7
Gendering Bodies and Gender Surveillance.....	9
Hegemonic Gender Roles and Online Dating Research.....	11
Gendering Racialized Bodies.....	14
Gender, Sexuality, and Race.....	16
Conflicts of Interest: Ideal Bodies in White Hegemony.....	19
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	21
Research Question	21
Data Collection and Sample.....	22
Variables	26
Methods/Analysis	27
CHAPTER 4: HYPOTHESES.....	30

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS	33
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS	49
Limitations	53
APPENDIX: CODING STRUCTURE.....	56
LIST OF REFERENCES	59

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographics of Online Daters	34
Table 2: Proportion of Sample Which Claims a Standard Body Type (Gender).....	35
Table 3: Proportion of Sample Which Claims a Standard Body Type (Race and Sexuality)	37
Table 4: Chi Squared Analysis: Intersectional Breakdown of Poster Body Type [Female Sub-Sample]	39
Table 5: Chi Squared Analysis: Intersectional Breakdown of Poster Body Type [Male Sub-Sample]	41
Table 6: Results of Chi-Squared Analysis on Body Type of Preferred Date	44

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Impression Management and Online Dating

Impression management strategies form a foundational core of how people interact with others in social situations (e.g., Goffman 1956; Goffman 1959). Impression management explains certain strategies of symbolic interaction: that when a person enters into a social situation, they take upon a role that could be described like an actor (Goffman 1959). Every person they interact with is considered part of their social audience, people who are viewing the physical, verbal, and social cues of the person, and interpreting a meaning to the display that the social actor commits to (Goffman 1959). Although some things such as speech appear to be in the control of the actor, there are a myriad of social assumptions that are carried by default into any of these social presentation (Gardner III, Peluchette, and Clinebell 1994), such as the gender of the actor (West and Fenstermaker 1995). In order to minimize the risk of potentially negative social fallout, social actors draw upon social norms they have learned in life that dictate the ideal standards of their society, for example, proper clothing, body expectations, and manners expected of men versus women (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). These strategies, drawn upon what a social actors believes is the socially standard norm, describe the basis of impression management.

In the area of online dating, researchers are given a unique opportunity to experience a combination of a competitive, real life, impression management situation (Robnett and Feliciano 2011), and the very large level of control of how this public self is presented that Goffman (1976) restricted to the realm of advertising and photography in his day. Prior online dating research has indeed primarily focused on avenues of impression management, usually asking the

question of where people are willing to inflate the positive elements of their self-presentation. For example, Hall et al. (2010) found that women in online dating stated they were more likely to lie about their weight, while men were more likely to state that they had personality traits they didn't really feel they had. Photographs of people online in the modern era can often be those done by professional photographers (Haferkamp et al. 2012), and independent judges find that most online dating photographs are deceptive, with people attempting to make themselves more socially desirable by misrepresenting weight and age (Hancock and Toma 2009). Whereas Goffman (1976) could showcase how such impression management strategies manifested themselves in the use of models, posing, etc. in advertisements, the rise of digital cameras, imaging software (such as Photoshop), and the popularity of the public sphere found in the internet, creates a situation where every person is implicitly needing to advertise themselves in some manner, if they wish to be competitive with everyone else in the online dating arena.

However, there are problems to be found in previous studies of online dating and impression management. Online daters have been treated as one large sample, exclusively heterosexual, and with almost all differences generally broken down on gender focused lines (e.g., Hancock and Toma 2009; Haferkamp et al. 2012; Hall et al 2010; Whitty and Buchanan 2010). When race is taken into account, it is often similarly restricted to a focus on racism or racial exclusion instead of impression management, and with the same focus on heterosexuals (e.g., Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely 2006; Robnett and Feliciano 2011). As such, this research proposes to look at how impression management in online dating plays out on race, gender, and sexuality based lines. Furthermore, by drawing upon intersectional ideas, to not look at each variable in isolation, but to examine if the combinations of race, gender, and sexuality have their

own unique role in what bodies online daters present themselves as. Furthermore, impression management is not a one way interaction, actors must account for what they believe others expect, and respond to how they expect others will react (Goffman 1959). To examine this idea, a look at the ideal body of their preferred dates is performed. These analyses allow a look at multiple sides of the impression management idea in online dating, while also holding onto intersectional principles, asking in what ways are gender, race, and sexuality showing up in the ways that people present themselves online. One question that could be raised, is why do this examination? Would we truly expect to find differences based on racial and sexuality lines, when even the demographics of online daters show a white bias (Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan 2010)?

Introduction to Intersectionality

Intersectional researchers such as Collins (2000) argue that racism and sexism “combine in such a way that they create a distinct social location” (Dugger 1988: 425). Focusing primarily on Blacks/African Americans norms, scholars such as Collins (2000) and Jackson II (2006) note that ideas about the role, personality, and body of Blacks are informed by institutions as old as slavery and impact the modern era. For example, the stereotype of the Jezebel and Mammy (Collins 2000) are specific to the identity of a Black female, while the Uncle Tom and Brute (Jackson II 2006) are specific to ideas about Black men. Black women and men’s ideas of gender are influenced by uniquely race and gender based notions such as the single parent Black female led household (Roberts 1997), the hypersexualization of the Black female body (such as the infamous Hotentot Venus), hypermasculine norms about the Black male body (Helg 2000), etc.

These racialized ideals describe fairly conventional gendered roles in some respects, but tied to a racialized ideal that influences perceptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine.

Adding issues such as sexuality further complicate the issues related to race and gender, opening up life experiences such as gay and lesbian pride identity, conflict between loyalties to race versus sexuality, and identities such as the 'butch lesbian' female (Moore 2011). Each of these experiences potentially contributing to the ideas of what ideal bodies are when attempting impression management. Collins (2000) includes sexuality as one of the intersections to account for in intersectionality, but notions connected to sexuality are relatively invisible in the literature or the way that literature discusses race and gender. For example: the notion of the Welfare Queen is tied to heterosexuality, the notion of the Black female welfare mother makes no sense to lesbian Black females (whose marginalized social identity denies her legitimacy in having children recognized at all) (Moore 2011). Often ideas related to these racialized notions of gender are taken into consideration, but they provide incomplete pictures. In the case of Black lesbian women, scholars have noted such things as how assumed heterosexual hypersexuality is uniquely part of the narrative that Black lesbian women must deal with (Willingham 2011). These are part of a picture that while sexuality is an element that can be examined, it is often an area that is treated as independent of the context of race and gender in research (Estrada et al. 2011).

Overall, this paper attempts to address these gaps in online dating research, and expand beyond even the usual observations found in intersectional research. By quantifying how actual public presentations of self are influenced by factors such as race, sexuality, and gender as intersecting identities. Online dating offers a uniquely popular, competitive, real life public arena

(Robnett and Feliciano 2011) where a person is overtly asked to state information and traits about themselves and a hypothetical ideal date about ideas tied to gender, race, and sexuality. This paper builds upon these areas of research by utilizing 892 profiles from the online dating website Match.com from four urban areas in the US. Then examining the intersections from two racial identities (White and Black), both heterosexuals and gays and lesbian, and gender on impression management strategies change the distribution of self-described body types, and the ideas that the online daters hold about their ideal date's body. This will add intersectionality-based analysis of impression management to previous research online dating literature, and examine how race, gender, and sexuality taken together impact a person's public presentation in her or his online profile.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Impression Management/ Symbolic Interaction

In an early text outlining part of his ideas of impression management, Goffman (1956) describes how individuals must cope with a risk of exposing themselves to embarrassment in any face-to-face encounter with another person. In this interaction, Goffman (1956) described two possible situations where embarrassment is at risk for the internal identity of the individual: That a person may be representing a “faction or subgroup” (1956: 265) and worry about acting as a poor representative, and the second occurring when the “ego boundaries” (265), or a sense of self, comes in conflict with social expectations or circumstances.

This drives people into social situations that can be described as one between an actor and a social audience (Goffman 1959); where each person takes upon themselves these social roles, and communicates by drawing upon these ideas in order to facilitate non-embarrassing/socially congruent interaction. Social actors are expected to present social symbols to the audience, gestures that hold meanings that are interpreted by the people watching. These gestures can consist of anything with a social meaning, from verbal communication and language, to non-verbal communication, such as body language (Goffman 1959). Although many of these symbols are given a manner of control, some, such as gender, tend to be tied to interpretations and ideas that we as social actors have overall little control over. As Goffman (1977) describes, the often physical differences of men and women are used to justify very different social elements and ideas about gender based social character. For example, researchers describe how when a person enters into a social situation, they are automatically classified into basic levels of social categories (Gardner III, Peluchette, and Clinebell 1994). These social

schemas are used as a form of shortcut for the interaction, and include such attributes as race, sex, and gender (Gardner III, Peluchette, and Clinebell 1994). Responding to these pressures, people create “displays” (Goffman 1976: 3) of behavior that attempt to reduce social friction and miscommunication by conforming to social norms about a given person’s role in society.

In almost any social situation, we are expected to call upon these notions to some extent. Factors such as gender are very powerful influences on most any social interaction, and the interactions expected between genders will color these social plays (Goffman 1977). However, researchers discuss when there are moments where our displays of impression management are even more heightened than usual. For example, Goffman (1976) discusses how, in photography, there is a great degree of control that is possible in the production of a picture and a great perceived importance to the idea of if said picture is ‘real’ or ‘fake.’ In the case of advertising for photographs, he describes a quality called “commercial realism” (1976: 15), where there exists a bleeding between the advertising message and the make-believe reality of the social stage. Goffman describes how this bleeding leads from a nude advertisement to questions about the social character of a model or the social standing of a product being presented, particularly in how this commercial realism can create an impact based on the power of things like celebrity testimony and the perceived relevance and honesty of it in the advert (1976).

Impressions in Cyberspace

Considering the time of Goffman’s writing, there is a great irony that these exact questions of authenticity get raised today about photographs, in a similarly public setting, but with the personal social context of the internet. For example, men on social media websites such

as Facebook are more likely to use a full body shot photograph, while women are more apt to use a portrait style photograph (Haferkamp et al. 2012). These tendencies mimic the ideas Goffman (1976) noted about the positioning of male and female bodies in advertising all those years ago. Drawing upon the ideas of impression management, research about the facets of online dating and online interaction today primarily focus on the concept of strategic misrepresentations in online dating (Hall et al. 2010), using screen names as signals for gender and gender norms (Whitty and Buchanan 2010), and the authenticity/accuracy of photographs of online daters (Hancock and Toma 2009). In the realm of impression management, social interaction, particularly in online dating, involves the same complex issues of presenting ourselves to the world, but with opportunities that are not presented to people in face to face interactions (Hancock and Toma 2009).

In the realm of online social media, researchers have examined ways in which impression management of identities, such as gender, has an influence in how people interact online. For example, women have confessed in surveys to being more apt to lie about gendered notions like weight, while men lie about such things as personal income (Hall et al 2010). In another example, the perceived gender of an online friend changed the likelihood that intimate topics would be breached, with both genders being more open when they thought the other person was of the same gender (Wan, Chung, and Chiou 2009). Yet, when it comes to these fears and specifically gendered notions of impression management in the online realm, what are these people conforming to? Although impression management explains the need to draw upon social norms, where do these come from, and why can they be as consistent as they are between genders, even in an online setting?

Gendering Bodies and Gender Surveillance

In a classic paper on the topic of gender, West and Zimmerman (1987) describe their sociological theory of 'doing gender' as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (1987: 126); this describes gender not as something one is, but as a performance that is reinforced socially through gendered interaction. West and Zimmermann (1997) argue that the process of gender is socially constructed and taught to children through a myriad of social institutions and that each has various impacts and possible influences on both children and adults. In the United States, this is generally expressed in a gender binary, where all persons are expected to behave either as female or male based upon their biological sex characteristics (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008).

Starting early on, young children are taught at institutional and familial levels about their gender and the behaviors expected of being either male or female (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). However, the processes that create the behaviors expected of a person's gender are not one sided or restricted to familial and institutional levels, for "to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*" (West and Zimmermann 1987: 136). As Goffman (1959) described, social interactions are not one sided in impression management. We rely upon "mutual monitoring" (Goffman 1977: 5), where both the actor and audience of social theatre are constantly responding to signals, like disapproval/acceptance, or expectations that are constantly ongoing in a given interaction. West and Zimmermann (1987), critiquing Goffman's ideas of impression management, describe how gender displays are not a subsidiary or optional part of the impression management

performance, but a foundational part that defines basic attributes about how people deal with their social audience. It is under this level of perceived importance, that researchers have looked at how from very early ages gender influences are socially constructed for children.

In an examination of pre-school children, Martin (1988) found various gendered identities enforced on children at early ages, such only females being made to wear pink clothes or dresses by their parents when sent to preschool. Further, within the school itself, boys were allowed more discretion over their behavior by teachers; in contrast, girls were disciplined into formal behavior. In interviews of parents of similarly aged preschoolers, Kane (2006) noted how parents describe efforts to allow their children to break certain gendered norms. However, parents still showed gendered biases, particularly in restricting male children into masculine behavior and by the punishing of feminine behavior in sons by fathers (Kane 2006).

When children begin to age, they move a realm where the impression management of gender is further reinforced and watched by the mutual monitoring of peer groups. Fahs (2011) challenged college aged women to grow out their body hair and record reactions to defying the social norm related to women and hair for ten weeks. While conducting such a challenge to bodily gender norms, the women noted that, among other things, they were directly asked by co-workers and family if they were lesbians; they also had friends reject that hair growth could ever be a feminine trait and state fear that people would deny these women as possible sexual partners (Fahs 2011). Ignoring a social norm like this caused a snag in the typical formulations of impression management, and participants noted outright gawking from others that made them feel akin to being a “circus freak” (Fahs 2011: 463); even when one attempts to break away from traditional gender stereotypes, they can instead place themselves in situations that are also

stereotypically gendered, but with an illusion of rebellion (Wilkins 2004). Taken together, these influences are ways in which manipulate their impressions of self when dealing with others in a social context.

Hegemonic Gender Roles and Online Dating Research

As a result of these influences, men are expected in American society to be large, muscular, and dominant breadwinners (Kimmel 2008). For females, there is a perceived natural bias to be bodily small and slim through avenues such as dieting (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). The literature in regards to online dating has thus far been fairly consistent in both examining gendered ideas about impression management and, in general, confirming them to be true. For example, Hall et al. (2010) found that, when questioned about what areas of their profile people misrepresented, men lied about issues such as personal income and presented themselves as having a greater amount of appealing interests/hobbies and positive personality traits. In contrast, fitting exactly with the stereotype, Hall et al (2010) also found that women confirmed to be lying more often about their weight in these environments. Similarly, research has found that these gendered forms of impression management appear to be effective on some level. For example, Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely (2006) found gendered differences in date preferences that included a female's showing greater concern about their partner's income.

However, in spite of the growing popularity of online dating (Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan 2010; Match.com 2010), the research of the phenomenon has been impacted by the common tendency to choose to focus on the majority, hegemonic group in the United States. As

the results above show, the study of mostly White heterosexuals has found stereotypically normal, gender based divisions that fit with typical gender norms. As intersectional scholars such as Collins (2000) note, minority groups tend to be either ignored in research or used in such a way as to fit into the narrative that already predominates (such as ‘welfare queen’ stories about Black mothers). This same phenomenon has been prevalent in the research in regards to online dating; creating data that tends to focus on the major hegemonic subgroups.

Similar to the intersectional criticism in general, this review of the online dating literature finds that there are systematic, but common, issues that could easily affect the results of online dating literature or give more meaningful results if included. In the case of race, two common issues occurred repeatedly in the review of the literature. First, is the focus in online dating research upon the possibility and problem of racial exclusion or racism in how online daters communicate or desire others. Examples from the research of this type of use of race include Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely’s (2006) major race finding being focused on their research being consistent with the low rates of interracial marriage in the United States. Also focusing mostly on racial preference, both Robnett and Feliciano’s (2011) and Sweeney and Borden (2009) research on race and online dating exclusively focused on the likelihood in for certain races to exclude others, and date only in-group. The second issue typically seems to be ignoring race as a whole, making no mention of race based differences or if race based influences even occurred. Examples of this found in the research include Hall et al. (2010), who makes no distinction in their gender based findings about racial differences, but do make accounts for education and income level, and Whitty and Buchanan (2010), whose focus on gendered screen names made no note about possible racialized indicators in online dating screen names. In part because of this,

this research intends to expand upon these issues with a dataset that looks directly at the impacts of race and gender.

Drawing upon a second intersectional theme, online dating research suffers from a similar generalized lack of discussion about sexuality (Bartholome, Tewksbury, Bruzzone 2000; Latinsky 2012). Part of this derives from an institutional issue: some of the online dating websites have only recently begun to expand into gay and lesbian daters. One of the major American sites, eharmony.com, was sued in 2007 over the lack of a gay and lesbian dating option, and still today directs gay and lesbian users to compatiblepartners.net instead. As the practice of allowing gays and lesbians was more haphazard before this time, and many of the websites are unnamed in the social research, this leads to the first issue of being unable to determine if sexuality was known, or implied to be heterosexual, at the time. For example, Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan's (2010) attempt to gauge the demographics of online daters does not appear to have included sexuality as a variable. An alternate form of this scenario can be seen in Whitty and Buchanan's (2010) paper: it does not explicitly state if their unnamed online dating site included gays and lesbians, but their analyses conjure the language of heterosexual gendered assumptions of attraction. Other researchers, such as Hancock and Toma (2009), explicitly declare a use of heterosexuals. Although some discussion of gays and lesbians in regard to online dating do exist (e.g., Groom and Pennebaker 2005; Lawson and Leck 2006; Reynolds 2008), the literature is overall limited in contrast to the quantity of focus on heterosexuals.

Drawing upon these criticisms found the literature, this research adds to the online dating research discourse by using intersectional ideas to look beyond typical norms of gender based

differences in online dating. In order to do so, an examination of the criticisms and answers that prior intersectional researchers have performed also allows us to answer similar questions that were raised in regards to impression management for hegemonic groups. Fundamental questions have to be answered to address why we should care about these intersectional divisions: Do we have any reason to believe that the symbols that are used in the impression management of online dating are different based upon race and sexuality? Are there characteristics, stereotypes, backgrounds, or social behaviors that would influence the beliefs and identities of such groups to a degree that gender would not dominate regardless?

Gendering Racialized Bodies

Intersectional scholars have expanded upon the complexities of gendered ideas and identities in intersectionality research, arguing that the actual experiences of minority groups never existed in the idealized, heterosexual, and White hegemonic structure that the best known stereotypes of gender appealed to (Collins 2000). Instead, Black gender identities were defined in the United States by ideas and institutions as old as slavery (Helg 2000; Jackson II 2006; Roberts 1997). Economic incentives during the slavery era compelled dominant social narratives about slave women as sexual beings (Roberts 1997). Fears of uprisings led to the labeling of Black men as an existential threat to Whites (Jackson II 2006), and the idea of Black men as hypersexual, deviant criminals are still present in modern stereotypes from such racialized notions (Helg 2000). Slightly more modern racialized ideas of Black men continued under the guise of a genetic disposition, deeming them inherently 'primitive' and sexual due to traits like facial structure and penis size, standing in contrast to the idea of the 'cultured' and more

educated/intelligent White male (Jackson II 2006). From this Social Darwinist standpoint, Blacks were still a cultural and existential threat, who could out-breed the White race (Roberts 1997). Black women as the model of Welfare Queen and the rise of the inner city criminal as a Black male would follow (Jackson II 2006). These ideas are commonly incorporated or expressed in stereotypes such as the Jezebel or Black Widow for a Black female, who uses inherent notions of Black sexuality to get things they desire (Collins 2008). Black men are given stereotypes that either play to a docile, acceptable stereotype, such as the Uncle Tom, or as an inherently criminal body that threatens White purity, such as the Brute (Helg 2000; Jackson II 2006).

These outside ideas and history bleed into more general identities of ideal gender for Black bodies. Ideal Black female body types pull from ideas of Hotentot Venus of the large butt and curvier body (Collins 2000). In contrast, Black male bodies are expected to be hypermasculine, large, imposing, and having embraced the notion of being a 'thug' (Jackson II 2006). Complicated mixes of gendered ideals also uniquely apply to Blacks; Black females have a unique matriarch role, in part due to high rates of single motherhood (Bridges 2011). This is connected to the high incarceration rate of Black males (Bonilla-Silva 2003) and the modern Black male's perceived criminality and likelihood to abandon fatherhood responsibilities (Bogle 1996). This conflicts and causes a described loss of masculinity for the Black male, who attempt to compensate with norms of hypermasculinity (Chun 2011). These notions are also connected to race based ideas such as connections and roles within the Black church, and the need to be 'authentically' Black (Chun 2011; Jackson II 2006).

Gender, Sexuality, and Race

West and Fenstermaker (1995) have criticized how gender research has a White, middle class bias, in part due to the nature of academia as being a primarily White institution. When we try to expand upon these ideas in intersectional analysis, researchers would ideally focus on such multiple intersections such as race, class, gender, and sexuality all at once (Collins 2000). Actual observation of such a complex intersection is generally limited due to how complex the entangling of minority statuses becomes under such observation. As such, much research tends to focus on only two areas at any given time, such as race and gender, sexuality and race, etc. (Brown 2012). Taking into account these criticisms of gender research and intersectional research, this literature looks at the possible influences and reasons why gender, race, and sexuality combined might have its own unique impact.

For example, a Black lesbian Woman is a unique area of observation compared to the heterosexual Black female (Willingham 2011). One reflection of this is that Black race based stereotypes, such as the Jezebel, Matriarch, Mammy, and Brute (Collins 2000; Jackson II 2006), all come with inherent assumptions of heterosexuality and do not make sense in the context of gay and lesbian Blacks. A gay Brute does not impose an omnipresent existential rape threat to White women (due to attraction to men), and a lesbian Matriarch cannot be emasculating to Black men in the traditional sense because her partnerships are not with men.

Additionally, broader institutional pressures exist that uniquely apply to the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender. Black Americans have a long historical and modern association with the Christian church (Collins 2000), a notably higher level of religiosity and religious fundamentalism, and correspondingly an issue and distrust with homosexuality (Cunningham

2012). This leads to greater Black use of more liberal churches as a means of dealing with connecting to the church as part of race identity (Moore 2011). There are limited, but known differences where the impacts of race and sexuality can be felt on gendered identity, generally focusing on qualitative observations and issues related to the gay and lesbian community. For example, racial identity appears to play a particular role in partner selection, with Black men (Mustanski, Newcomb, Clerkin 2010) and women (Moore 2011) expressing preferences in regards to same race partnerships. Black women (Moore 2011) discuss an attempt to stay true or 'authentic' to their ethnic heritage due to the perceived conflict caused by sexuality.

Additionally, gay men and lesbian women both feel different pressures and reactions in regard to their gendered roles on the public scale. Media tends to overemphasize sexuality as a selling point when focusing on gay men of any race, while lesbian women are comparatively ignored (Sender 2003). In the realm of online dating, Groom and Pennebaker describe a "report" versus "rapport" (2005: 458) style that differentiates gay men from lesbian women in online profiles about themselves. With gay men utilizing masculine ideas of reporting information about themselves, contrasted to the lesbian women's focus of establishing a political or social rapport as expressions of gender in dating. Research also describes dating profiles for gay men having a more varied sexual lexicon and a greater focus on masculine physical appearances than heterosexuals (Bartholome, Tewksbury, Bruzzone 2000; Thorne and Coupland 1998). These highly gendered stereotypes and identities betray the global tendency to lump together gays and lesbians of all races into one homogeneous 'group' and the presence of traditional norms of masculinity and femininity even at this complicated level of intersection.

In spite of these hegemonic pressures, intersectionality-based ideas allow an area where minorities like gays and lesbians could potentially escape such direct gendering. Intersectional ideas encourage the idea that their lived experiences can act as buffers and creating unique resistances to stereotypical expectations (Collins 2000). Indeed, findings suggest that gays and lesbians deal with greater gender role conflict and may be more tolerant views in regards to gender roles (e.g., Blashill and Hughs 2009; Szymanski and Carr 2008). Even when examining under the conclusion that stereotypical gender role-playing in gay and lesbian relationships does in fact occur, Marecek, Finn, and Cardell (1982) found nonetheless that such stereotypical gender conformity was less common than in heterosexual relationships. In more general terms, Shechory and Ziv (2007) found that same-sex gay and lesbian couples held more liberal and open views on gender roles than heterosexual couples—put in another way, “homosexual males are more tolerant of individuals displaying gender discordant behavior than are heterosexual males” (Moulton III and Adams-Price 1997: 448).

However, do these more liberal views continue to hold when the pressures of finding a potential partner via online dating come into play? As impression management ideas point towards, the ways that we present ourselves in the public domain is influenced by the want to be socially desirable and avoid embarrassment (Goffman 1976). As gender research also suggests, regardless of race or sexuality, there are broader norms of ‘proper’ masculinity and femininity that a person is pushed into as a child (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008) before these other identities take root. As such, is there an argument that, despite these differences, pressures from these generalized social norms might take precedence in the form of public yet personal presentation in online dating.

Conflicts of Interest: Ideal Bodies in White Hegemony

Although intersectional analysis focuses on lived experiences that inherently defy hegemonic, White, heterosexual norms (Collins 2000), the connections that all racial and political minorities have in the United States are their minority status and definition by the White power structure. Scholars describe issues of colorism and that White ideals of gender norms have powerful influence in perceptions related to what ideal gender bodies should look like (Hunter 2007). Evidence suggests that multiple minority groups, such as Latina, Black, and Asian women, all exist under certain shared pressures of proper femininity and appearance as defined by White standards, such as the proper lip size, nose, and eyelids, as revealed by the “Anglicizing” (Hunter 2005: 60) that racial minorities are performing via plastic surgery. Ideal heterosexual femininity for multiple racial groups are defined by the motherhood role (Collins 2000; Villegas, Lemanski, and Valdéz 2010; Shimizu 2007). The ritual of the beauty pageant is still dominated by White standards and White contestants of what is to be a woman (Banet-Weiser 1999). Less idealized minority women instead deal with consistent hypersexualization (Collins 2000; Villegas, Lemanski, and Valdéz 2010; Shimizu 2007), with Black women and Latina women even described on similar terms in regards to how their bodies represent hypersexualization via large hips and butts. Men deal with standards related to being a ‘breadwinner’ across multiple races (Jackson II 2006; Stephens 1973).

Even when sexuality is taken into account, White and heteronormative standards inform presentations of gender related to sexuality. Some Black lesbian women describe ideal lesbian relationships between one more masculine, butch partner, and a more feminine partner (Moore 2011). Lesbian women still deal with assumptions of heterosexuality and the heterosexual male

gaze while attempting to define their sexuality (Shimizu 2007; Willingham 2011). Both genders suffer from homonormative ideals, generally resulting in idealized hypermasculinity for gay men and a more mixed picture for lesbian women (Rosenfield 2009). As such, one purpose of this research is to untangle these mixed pressures in the realm of online dating and see, with a greater level of certainty, if we can find if or where the gender, racial, and sexuality based lines either draw upon these hegemonic notions, or intersectional differences.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Question

In examining the online dating and impression management research, one of the central themes is the importance of authenticity about oneself, particularly in regards to ideas of an authentic perception of one's body. Impression management work, even in the era before Photoshop, described the need for commercial authenticity in how bodies were presented in advertising (Goffman 1976) and how bodies become a reflection of beliefs about the proper appearance and role of gender (Goffman 1977; Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). Online dating research has also focused on forms of bodily deceptions with the rise of the profile picture (Hancock and Toma 2009) and issues such as those regarding weight (Hall et al. 2010). In addition, online dating allows a unique opportunity in regards to impression management. Although such features as online profile pictures exist, the descriptions of self are primarily controlled by the creator of the profile (such as what profile picture to use). As online dating "provide[s] a rare opportunity to examine people's stated preferences in a real-life situation" (Robnett and Feliciano 2011: 807) where active competition for ideal dates occurs, it also provides a unique opportunity to answer questions related to perceptions of idealized selves in an arena with high tension and incentive for impression management strategies.

Pulling from these ideas and intersectionality research questions, this paper asks: What is the impact of multiple intersecting identities (race, sexuality, and gender) on the self-described public presentations of bodies used in online dating? Are gender body type ideals the primary determinant of impression management strategies (e.g., athletic men and slender women)? Or instead, do intersectional combinations such as race and gender literatures better predict how

impression management is performed (e.g., hypermasculine black men and hypersexual black women compared to white counterparts)? As a corollary, online dating is like most social interactions, not a one sided exercise. Online daters typically engage in stating what they desire in their potential date, and draw upon their personal ideas of attractiveness when conjuring the idea of their ideal date's body. As such, one can ask, how do these same intersecting identities influence what bodies' online daters' desire?

Data Collection and Sample

This research performs an analysis of 892 public dating profiles selected from the online dating website Match.com. All profiles collected were gathered by selecting the website's visibility option to "off." This renders the profile used to observe other online daters completely invisible to other users who search profiles, and makes users unaware if their profile is being observed. Under normal online dating circumstances, this fairly standard privacy feature would be crippling because it eliminates all ability for a possible date to interact with the user. For the purposes of this paper, it instead ensures that the full ability to search is enabled on the profiles, and no interaction with those being observed occurs during the collection.

At the time of data collection, posting an online profile is free; however, full functionality—such as the ability to send and receive messages with other members—requires a paid subscription (a common model in modern online dating). Match.com's unique selling point is its size, having acquired many other fairly large online dating competitors, including Chemistry.com and Yahoo Personals, and transforming them into one huge standardized pool of daters, which as of 2009 consisted of over 1.3 million paying subscribers and 20 million users

(Match.com form 10-K 2010). As such, Match.com (2010) claims to be responsible for starting more dates, relationships, and marriages than any other online dating website, representing nearly a fifth of the total market.

The sample of online daters was collected using the internal search engine for Match.com. Minimum requirements for performing a search include: stating a gender, the gender of a preferred date, an ideal age range, and a zip code. Gender based search options as such result in: male seeking male, male seeking female, female seeking male, and female seeking female. This option was used to determine the sexuality of a participant. For example, a search conducted using the male seeking male selections would give a list of gay men who are also seeking men, while claiming to be a female seeking male would result in a list of heterosexual males profiles. The minimum searchable age of the website is 18 years old (the minimum age required to create a profile), and goes as high as 100+. To limit outliers due to age, the age range was restricted to a maximum of 50. The zip code used for each city was chosen for its proximity to the geographic center of the city, and restricted to a 50 mile radius using advanced options. The following zip codes were used for each city: Los Angeles (90012), New York (10025), Chicago (60608), and Atlanta (30303).

Advanced search allows for restrictions on the profiles being viewed based upon any of the demographic data that a user is allowed to put about themselves, for example, users without photos could be excluded; only people with conservative political backgrounds could be selected, smokers vs. non-smokers, etc. This was used in order to restrict the race variable (this is called ethnicity in the Match.com search engine).

As an example, in order to retrieve the black, female, heterosexual portion of the sample, the following search would be conducted: male seeking female (retrieves heterosexual females), age 18-50, within 50 miles of zip code 90012, and restricted to the users who select Black/African descent ethnicity. Match.com will then return up to the first 2000 users who meet those criteria, or less if less than 2000 meet the specifications. This is presented as a 6x3 grid of profiles per page spanning up to 112 pages of users. Each profile in the grid will use approximately half the space to display the users picture (if they have one), with the other half showcasing the users' username, age, location (city), how many photos the user has in their profile, and how recently they were last active. By default, the order of the profiles is given by a criterion called 'match picks'. In order to remove the risk of an abandoned profile, this order was instead changed at this point to 'activity date', which instead sorts profiles by how recently the user was active (with those who are currently online having the greatest priority). Starting with page one, and thus the most recently active users, each user's full profile profile could be examined in more detail by clicking on their username. It is in these full profiles where detailed information for each profile could be collected.

Upon entering the full profile, the first variable examined is the users claimed ethnicity(ies). Because the search engine does not distinguish between those who claim more than one ethnicity, it is at this point that the race of a user can be confirmed. Because of the risk of a user who claimed multiple ethnicities ending up in both the black and white sample, all multi-ethnic users would be passed over, and the next user would be examined in a similar manner. This resulted in users who only claimed one ethnicity being used as this studies' race variable. Upon confirming this status, the collection itself could begin. This would be repeated

until approximately twenty-five users for the particular zip code were collected, who met the single race criterion. These series of observations would then be repeated and recorded for each of the four cities by repeating the search criterion, but with a new zip code for a different city.

On each profile, posters selected demographic information from checklists about themselves, such as age, education level, ethnicity, religion, etc. In order to create a profile, potential users are required to provide their age, height, and gender. All other options, both about oneself and a potential date, are optional on the profile. Each characteristic a poster may give about themselves can also be selected about their ideal date. However, instead of being restricted to one choice, they also may choose, from a checklist, any or none of the possible options listed. All of this information is posted on the full profile, allowing other people to see information about the poster and their preferences in a potential date or contact. Choosing no option from the checklist is often a choice, and results in default answers of either ‘I’ll tell you later’ if about the poster of the profile, or ‘No Preference’ if about a potential date. For example, in the category of Education posters selected from these six choices to describe their academic achievement: High School, Some College, Associates Degree, Bachelor’s Degree, Graduate Degree, and PhD/Post-Doctoral. Using this, posters could either designate a personal education level or refuse to answer (“I’ll tell you later”), both of which show up under the “ME” section of the profile. For date preferences, posters could select any number of options (including all six at once) or none at all (“No Preference”), which show up under the “MY DATE” section for education. For this paper, many of these categories are simplified or collapsed based on various conditions. For example, Education is grouped into five major categories for presentation: No Answer = 0, High School Education = 1, Some College = 2, College Graduate = 3, and Post-College education = 4. This

collapses the redundancy found in an associate's degree and some college. A full list of the data collection coding structure can be found in Appendix A.

Although the analysis focuses on poster body type and date body type claims, various variables were also collected for demographic purposes, but are not analyzed in this paper. These variables provide some level of insight into the possible attributes of the sample. In addition, these allow a form of baseline that allow us to know how much information people tend to be giving about themselves on their online dating profile. For each user, demographic variables included the posters' stated education, religious views, and political ideology.

Variables

Body type options taken from the Match.com site for posters are collected as given by the dating website, with a total of six choices for men and nine choices for women's body types. Taken directly from Match.com, men (and all male ideal dates) are given the following body type descriptions as choices: Athletic and Toned, Slender, Average, Stocky, A few Extra Pounds, and Heavysset. Females (and female ideal dates) are given the same six options, but with 3 female specific bodily options: Big and Beautiful, Curvy, and Full Figured. Preferred date body types are given similar consideration, accounting for the fact a poster can choose multiple options.

Height was measured in centimeters, converted from the foot and inch height given by the poster, for ease of recording as an interval variable. Age is determined by giving a birthdate to the website upon account creation, listed in years, with a minimum required age of 18 to use the website. Ethnicity in this study examines posters who claim only a White/Caucasian = 0 or

Black/African American = 1 ethnicity. Although a poster can list multiple ethnicities, only those who listed a single ethnicity category were collected in order to eliminate the chance of a poster being listed in both the White/Caucasian and Black/African American sample. Religion of the poster was simplified into those who gave no answer = 0, Any Jewish or Christian denomination = 1, spiritual but not religious = 2, and all others (including atheism and agnosticism) = 3. Political affiliation was simplified into those who gave no answer = 0, independent = 1 (any answer that did not explicitly state a liberal or conservative leaning, such as middle of the road or non-conventional), liberal or extremely liberal = 2, and conservative or ultra conservative = 3.

Methods/Analysis

For the purposes of simplifying the initial categorical impression management analysis, the poster's body type variables were first grouped into collections of the multiple body types, standard = 0 and overweight = 1. Standard body (0) descriptions in this paper consist of the Athletic and Toned, Average, and Slender option for both males and females. These were chosen because average implies a 'normal' body type regardless of gender, athleticism biases towards male stereotypical ideal bodies, and slender biases towards stereotypes of female stereotypical bodies. This is contrasted to the overweight (1) body type descriptions which consist of all other options, including the three female specific choices. Although Stocky is arguably biased towards an ideal of athleticism, conjuring a strong build, its popularity as an option was much more consistent with each of the other overweight choices. Each of these overweight choices, using average as a reference point, implies an idea of a weight that is greater than this defined average, although with terms that vary in perceived positive and negative feelings. As a percentage, this

allows testing of the popularity of conventionally attractive norms of body type. This variable will also be examined as an odds ratio looking at possible significant differences between the individual variables of gender, race, and sexuality.

Additional analysis of the categorical variables related to body type will be performed using chi-squared tests. Resulting in tables where each category lists the observed, with an unstandardized residual in parenthesis underneath. These residuals are calculated by (Observed - Expected), with the expected value being a weighted average of the category that would be predicted if choices were made randomly. By moving from the binary standard body variable, a more in-depth examination of specific body type representations and preferences can occur using these categorical variables. This analysis collapses the poster body type variable on the following lines: Athletic and Toned = 1 (the only 'masculine' body type option), Average/Slender = 2 (the 'feminine' body type option), General Overweight = 3 (the three overweight categories that include any gender), and Female Specific Overweight = 4 (the three overweight categories specific to females). This analysis eliminates the 13 users who do not claim any body type. Similar chi-squared analysis is performed in regards to the stated preferences in a date's body type. However, because users could answer more than one option in this category, the groupings needed to account for multiple answers. This results in the following categories used for analysis: Default/'no preference' = 0 (those who give no answer for a date body type preference), Athletic and Toned only = 1 (only select Athletic and Toned), Average/Slender only = 2 (Selects average, slender, or both), Standard Bodies = 3 (selects Athletic and Toned and Average and/or Slender), and those who overtly selected from Standard Bodies and the Overweight category = 5.

The overweight only category and any single group combination were removed from analysis due to the lack of responses.

CHAPTER 4: HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Impression Management:

Drawing upon Goffman's (1976) ideas related to mutual monitoring and symbolic interactions, online dating presents a controlled "scene" (1976: 22) where an exaggerated form of impression management takes place. Due to incentives to maximize the potential for an ideal date (Hitsch, Hortaçsu and Ariely 2010), and known biases in positive self-representation (Hancock and Toma 2009), this research proposes that conventional norms of attractiveness will be a powerful force in poster and date body type selections no matter the gender, race, and/or sexuality. In online dating, this is particularly tied to the profile picture (Hancock and Toma 2009) and stereotypical norms of the fit and slender body as being ideal compared to overweight bodies (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). These result in the following hypotheses:

1a: Online dating profiles, regardless of gender, race, and sexuality, will utilize impression management and report extremely positive-biased overall body types. This will be represented by selecting from the standard body descriptions for self-claimed body type.

1b: Posters as a whole, regardless of gender, race, and sexuality, will seek ideal dates that fit stereotypically attractive body types. This will be represented by choosing standard body type descriptions for their ideal date.

Hypothesis 2: Gendered Impression Management:

Stereotypes about bodies are influenced by social factors, with social notions about masculinity and femininity influencing how people perform impression management (Goffman 1977). Men

are expected to have athletic, muscular bodies, while women are expected to have lithe, skinny bodies that are not muscular (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). Consistent with known biases in reporting in online dating (e.g., Hancock and Toma 2009; Hall et al. 2010), the following gender biases are expected in self-reports:

2a: Male posters will be more likely to state that their body is athletic compared to female posters.

2b. Female posters will be more likely to state that their body type is slender or standard compared to male posters.

2c. Female posters will be more likely to state that their body type is average or slender compared to male posters.

Hypothesis 3: Racialized Gender Norms

Hypersexualized notions of the Black female body, such as large hips and butts (Collins 2000; Hunter 2005), and hypermasculine racialized ideals of the 'brute' for normative Black male will act as racial influence in presentations of self; used for impression management (e.g., Helg 2000; Jackson II 2006; Roberts 1997). Because the racialized norms occur during development, under assumptions of heterosexual norms (Willingham 2011), this will be seen regardless of sexuality.

3a: Black males will be more likely to claim athletic bodies compared to their White counterparts.

3b: Black females will be more likely to claim curvaceous bodies (overweight category) compared to their White counterparts.

Hypothesis 4: Sexuality and Impression Management

Representations of gay white men in media showcase a combination of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality compared to lesbian white women (Oakenfull 2007). Although literature is limited on gay black men, stereotypes while developing gender norms tend to be influenced by the assumptions about heterosexuals of the same gender (Willingham 2011). This allows for the possibility that ideals of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality for gay white men also showcase themselves for gay black men. In addition, identities such as 'butch' (athletic/masculine) lesbian women are unique to influences of sexuality (Moore 2011).

4a. Hypermasculine and hypersexual influences on gay white men will result in an increase in both the likelihood of stating having an athletic body, and to desire an athletic body on an ideal date compared to heterosexual white men.

4b. Because of intersectional influences on heterosexual men (e.g., Jackson II 2006), Black gay men will display this hypermasculine effect more powerfully than White gay men; resulting in an even greater number of athletic and toned body types for Black gay men.

4c. Unique gender identities such as the butch lesbian female will express themselves as an increase in lesbian women who state their bodies as athletic and toned compared to heterosexual women.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Table 1 details the demographic information about the sample of online daters as a whole: the stated age, height, education level, religious views, and political leanings taken from the online daters' profiles. In addition, for comparison to the major variables under examination in this analysis, the percentages of those who state their own body type is also listed. Of the variables listed, age and height are required upon account creation, while the poster's self-reported body type, education, religion, and political affinity are optional, and thus not required to create the account.

Overall, the sample averages age 37 regardless of gender, with a gendered height difference of 5' 11" for the male portion of the sample, and 5' 5.5" for the female sample. The sample is intentionally overrepresented in regards to gays and lesbians, with 46% of the population being gay or lesbian, and 54% of the population as heterosexuals. Overall, people appear to be invested in their profiles to some degree, with all of the optional statements about themselves being regularly answered. The least likely attribute to be answered is religious affiliation, with only 86% of the sample giving an answer beyond the default. Political affiliation and education level are answered about 95% of the time in contrast. By far the most likely to be answered is the poster's description of their body type, with 98.5% of all respondents; this is consistent with prior research, such as Hall et al's (2010) discussion of the profile picture and the appearance of a date having a particular importance in the arena of online dating.

Table 1: Demographics of Online Daters

	Male	Female
Average Age	37	37
Average Height	180cm (5' 11")	166cm (5' 5.5")
Total Sample		
Sexuality	Totals	Percentage of Total
Gay or Lesbian (0)	407	46%
Heterosexual (1)	485	54%
Education		
No Answer (0)	53	6%
High School (1)	26	3%
Some College (2)	225	25%
College Graduate (3)	374	42%
Post College (4)	214	24%
Religious Views		
No Answer (0)	126	14%
Jude-Christian Denomination (1)	481	42%
Spiritual but Not Religious (2)	223	25%
Other (3)	62	7%
Political Ideology		
No Answer (0)	43	5%
Middle of the Road/Independent (1)	529	59%
Liberal/Very Liberal (2)	271	30%
Conservative/Ultra Conservative (3)	49	6%
Poster Body Type		
No Answer (0)	13	1.5%
Answer (1)	879	98.5%

As a whole, the sample’s description of themselves is highly educated compared to the average in the United States, which only has approximately 20% of the population holding a bachelor’s degree or greater (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010). This sample instead has a majority of people holding a bachelor’s degree or greater and only 3% having gone only as far as finishing high school. Of those that answer the religious affiliation variable, the largest group affiliates itself with Judeo-Christian denominations (42%), followed by those who state they are spiritual but not religious (25%), and a small portion that choose another option (7%). Politically, the sample appears to have an independent-liberal leaning bias, with 59% of the sample declaring non-liberal and non-conservative answers, followed by 30% who claim to be liberal or very liberal, and only 6% who claim to be conservative or ultra conservative.

Within this relatively liberal, highly educated, and sexually diverse sample, how impactful could one expect the effects of impression management to be? Table 2 presents a comparison of the number of posters who claim a standard body type (athletic, slender, or average), compared to the overweight options (any of the 3 general options, and the 3 female specific body options). All those who gave no answer were removed from this analysis of poster body types, due to inability to accurately predict a body type claim.

Table 2: Proportion of Sample Which Claims a Standard Body Type (Gender)

Variable	Standard Body (0)	Overweight Body (1)	Total	
Sample	739 (84%)	140 (16%)	879	
Gender				Odds Ratio
Male (0)	418 (95%)	24 (5%)	442	6.294**
Female (1)	321 (74%)	116 (26%)	437	

* p < .05 ** p < .01

Table 2 shows that of the 879 members of the total sample who give a body type description, only 140 (16%) are willing to choose an overweight body type as their self-description to the online dating audience. As a point of comparison, in a survey during 2012 Gallup reports that 35% of American men and 42% of women surveyed are overweight or obese (Callahan 2013). These results are consistent with the arguments in impression management about the impacts of public presentation and staging in how we present ourselves to others (Goffman 1976). Thus supporting hypothesis 1a about poster impression management, as a large majority of the sample shows a bias towards positive public presentations of self, utilizing a form of self-serving bias. In comparison to the known rates of overweight obesity in the US population, there appears to be relatively few overweight people in the online dating realm.

However, as discussed in the literature, there are gender biased attitudes in how people's bodies are expected to be maintained (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008), and a known tendency for women to misrepresent their appearance in online dating photos to be appear more slender and to deceive more often about their weight than men (Hall et al. 2010). This begs the question of if there is a gendered difference, with females refusing to accept statements of having overweight bodies due to gender specific social pressures. Table 2 also presents the results of a logistic regression based on gender, represented as an odds ratio because of the fact that no other variables were used. The regression shows a statistically significant difference in the likelihood to choose an overweight body compared to a standard body based on gender is found at the .01 level. However, this difference appears to vehemently disagree with the standard gendered notion of females stating only slender bodies. Females are instead about 6.3 times more likely to choose one of the overweight options compared to their male counterparts. In contrast to the

prior research and standard ideas about stereotypical ideal female body biases, women appear to embrace more diverse terms for their bodies compared to men. This does not lend support to the hypothesis that women would be more likely to embrace standard body type descriptions than men, and as such, hypothesis 2b is rejected by this finding.

Table 3: Proportion of Sample Which Claims a Standard Body Type (Race and Sexuality)

Variable	Standard Body (0)	Overweight Body (1)	Total	Odds Ratio
Race				
White (0)	386 (88%)	53 (12%)	440	1.795**
Black (1)	353 (80%)	87 (20%)	439	
Sexuality				
Gay or Lesbian (0)	337 (84%)	63 (16%)	400	1.025
Heterosexual (1)	402 (84%)	77 (16%)	479	

* p < .05 ** p < .01

Another known potential bias occurs on racial lines, as discussed in the literature; gendered norms about Blacks differ from those of Whites. The literature shows that stereotypes for Black men involve a stronger emphasis and assumption of hypermasculinity (e.g., Jackson II 2006, Helg 2000), while curvaceous bodies are expected of Black women (e.g, Collins 2000). Might race, particularly for Black women, instead be the underlying bias that explains the subset that chooses overweight bodies? Table three presents the results of a logistic regression based only on racial lines, represented as an odds ratio because of the fact that no other variables were used. The odds ratio shows statistically significant differences between blacks and whites at the .01 alpha level, with Blacks as a whole being about 1.8 times more likely to choose overweight categories than Whites. Showing that even if each of the 87 Blacks on table 3 who choose the overweight options were assumed to be female, this would not fully explain the findings about females in general as discussed in table 2.

Another possible area of difference can be in the historical perception of body norm violations and gender bending symbols in the case of gay and lesbian drag kings and queens (Blashill and Hughs 2009; Szymanski and Carr 2008). Although the literature is mixed on this question, with stereotypes of butch and feminine lesbians being ideal pairs (Moore 2011) contrasted against claims of the comparative normativity and hypermasculine sexuality of gay Whites (Oakenfull 2007), these bodily norms may be impacting impression management. Might the 'lifestyle' of gays and lesbians still show a discernible difference in how they present themselves in the realm of online dating? On only sexuality lines, this does not appear to be the case, with table 3 showing no statistically significant difference between the sample of gays and lesbians compared to their heterosexual counterparts as a whole.

Taken separately, these results lead to some level of notable differences, but not ones that explain much when restricted so far to single variables. An easy criticism for the male/female comparison in table 2 would consist of the fact that three out of six (50%) body type options are considered overweight for men, while women have six out of nine (66.6%) of their options deemed overweight. If gendered stereotypes about weight are indeed based on racial lines, to what degree does this hold true? Is sexuality skewing the results when mixed with gendered ideas, with the stereotype of the butch (masculine) lesbian and the fairy (feminine) gay male causing some sort of similarity with heterosexuals? In order to examine these ideas, a more intersectional approach that looks deeper into the specifics of the data is required, that can remove some of the inherent issues of single variable analysis.

Drawing upon the criticism about differences in gendered body type options, and the questions raised by the prior table, breaking down groups based on gendered lines and

incorporating the possible influences of race and sexuality allows a deeper examination of what underlying roles these characteristics may be performing. In order to do so, the standard bodies are once again split, so that athletic bodies = 1, and slender or average bodies = 2. Overweight categories are split into general overweight = 3 (those three categories both men and women can choose), and female only overweight = 4 (female specific overweight categories). Beginning with females, Table 4 presents a chi-squared analysis of the female sub-sample's body type selections, broken down on both racial and sexuality based lines.

Table 4: Chi Squared Analysis: Intersectional Breakdown of Poster Body Type [Female Sub-Sample]

	Athletic and Toned (1)	Slender/Average (2)	General Overweight (3)	Female Only Overweight (4)	Total
White Heterosexual	32 (2.3)	67 (8.5)	1 (-9.7)	20 (-1.1)	120
White Lesbian	33 (8.3)	48 (-.7)	12 (3.1)	7 (-10.6)	100
Black Heterosexual	22 (-7.2)	45 (-12.5)	9 (-1.5)	42 (21.2)	118
Black Lesbian	21 (-3.5)	53 (4.7)	25 (8.2)	8 (-9.4)	99
Total (Percentage)	108 (24%)	213 (48%)	39 (9%)	77 (17%)	437**

Note: Results are given as frequencies, with unstandardized residuals (observed minus expected) given underneath in parenthesis.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Overall, the chi-squared analysis presented in table 4 shows statistically significant differences between the four female groups at an alpha level of .01. The most popular choice for females were average/slender body types, consisting of 48% of the female sub-sample. This is consistent with the literature that argues about the norms of female bodies being slender, and thus partially supports hypothesis 2c about female body norms. When compared to men in table

5 though, the support only stays partial, with 48% of women compared to 43% of men choosing this category. This is followed by women who describe their bodies as athletic and toned, at 24%, the three female-only options at 17%, and, lastly, the non-gender-specific overweight category with 9% of the total.

Upon observing residuals in table 4, notable race and sexuality based differences begin to appear. The choice of athletic bodies appears to be racially biased, with positive residuals on both White groups, and negative residuals on both Black groups. The particularly strong positive residual on white lesbian women (8.3), lends partial support to hypothesis 4c about the athletic 'butch lesbian' stereotype. However, when taken into account with the negative residual for black lesbian women, an overall failure to find support for hypothesis 4c's notion about 'butch' lesbian women is observed. In contrast to the race difference of athleticism, the choice of an overweight subtype appears to be biased based on mostly sexuality lines. Heterosexuals, both Black and White, choose from the female specific overweight options, such as curvy and big and beautiful, with a particular racial bias in regards to Black women. The residual shows particularly strongly that Black heterosexual women (21.1) choose the female only overweight options nearly twice as much as the mean of all women. Lesbians, on the other hand, have positive residuals for the general overweight choices, heavysset and full figured, contrasted to the heterosexual's negative residuals. Black heterosexual woman's large positive residual in female only overweight categories and a correspondingly large negative residual in the slender/average choices are consistent with the expectations of hypothesis 3b predicting more use of overweight bodies compared to their white counterparts due to social norms of curvaceous black women.

However, when combined with sexuality, a different form of observation is made. Table 4 shows that Black heterosexual women choose to express overweight body type with different terms than their lesbian counterparts, with heterosexuals choosing terms such as curvy/big and beautiful, while lesbians prefer full figured/heavysset. Similarly, although not in as extreme a manner, Whites perform the exact same difference when choosing these overweight categories. This suggests that the terminology that is considered self-serving/proper impression management about overweight bodies has a sexuality based difference, combined with the additional intersectional racial elements for women as a whole.

With these sorts of mixed race and sexuality differences found in women, how do men compare? Table 5 presents a similar chi-squared analysis of the 442 male sub-sample's body type selections. Differences between the four groups as a whole were found to be statistically significant at a .01 alpha level.

Table 5: Chi Squared Analysis: Intersectional Breakdown of Poster Body Type [Male Sub-Sample]

	Athletic and Toned (1)	Average /Slender (2)	General Overweight (3)	Total
White Heterosexual	62 (1.1)	53 (3.2)	3 (-3.4)	118
White Gay	44 (-8.1)	47 (3.6)	10 (4.5)	101
Black Heterosexual	80 (16.6)	41 (-11.9)	2 (-4.7)	123
Black Gay	42 (-9.6)	49 (6.0)	9 (3.6)	100
Total	228 (51%)	190 (43%)	24 (5%)	442**

Note: Results are given as frequencies, with unstandardized residuals (observed minus expected) given underneath in parenthesis.

* p < .05 ** p < .01

As expected from the prior results of table 2, the overweight category for men is the smallest of the three groups, consisting of only 5% of the total sample. Consistent with literature on masculinity, the athletic and toned category was the most popular with men, with over twice as many men choosing it (51%) compared to women (24%). As such, table 5 supports hypothesis 2a which predicted a greater number of men compared to women utilizing athletic categories due to masculine gender norms. With slightly less popularity is the remaining average/slender option, with 43% of all male answers. Overall, directly race based differences appear to be minimal in this comparison. However, among the most notable residuals includes a race and sexuality intersection, with Black heterosexual men having the highest positive residual on athletic and toned bodies (16.6). This supports hypothesis 3a, suggesting that black males would bias towards claims of athletic bodies compared to whites; however, in contrast, the gay Black counterparts have the largest negative residual (-9.6), showcasing that the hypermasculine 'brute' of the race literature (e.g., Helg 2000) is connected in the pressures of impression management to a particular sexuality. This is consistent if taken into account with prior criticism of heterosexual focus in race and gender research (Brown 2012). The athleticism/hypermasculine bias appears as such to only show in heterosexual black men, lending in total partial support for 3a. Other notable differences found in table 5 fall on sexuality based lines, with gay Blacks and Whites having positive residuals on the overweight category compared to their heterosexual counterparts. This, combined with the largest negative residuals on the athletic category for gay men, suggests a willingness to break from the athletic only norm of masculinity, undermining the hypothesis of universal hypermasculinity for gay men compared to heterosexuals proposed by hypothesis 4a.

Having looked in depth at the manners in which race, gender, and sexuality all play a combination of intersecting and separate roles, the general proposition still remains. Impression management strategies appear to have impacts on the way that people present themselves online, creating a sample of people who claim unusually high numbers of non-overweight bodies. In this environment of positive self-selection bias for posters, what impact is there upon the types of bodies that these highly educated, attractive posters state they are willing to accept in an ideal date? Particularly because conjuring the ideal date's body draws upon these same stereotypical assumptions of what is idealized in the culture. Furthermore, similar to posters self-body type descriptions, are there notable differences in what ways different races, non-normative sexualities, and their intersections might be reflected in the idealized date's body?

In order to answer these questions, table 6 presents the result of a chi squared analysis of the most popular stated ideal date body types that had over 5% of the sample. This caused the elimination of two groups, which both had under 2% of the total sample, online daters who selected only overweight categories for their ideal date, and those who selected from one of the two standard categories, and the overweight category.

Table 6: Results of Chi-Squared Analysis on Body Type of Preferred Date

	Default/"No preference" (0)	Athletic and Toned Only (1)	Average/Slender Only (2)	Standard Bodies [Both1&2]	Athletic, Slender/Average, and Overweight	Total
White Heterosexual Male	18 (-6.8)	1 (-8)	3 (-5.3)	84 (22.9)	13 (-2.9)	119
White Gay Male	31 (10.1)	7 (-.5)	6 (-1)	52 (7)	3 (-9.3)	100
White Heterosexual Female	19 (-5)	10 (1.3)	9 (1)	59 (0)	18 (2.7)	115
White Lesbian Female	20 (-.9)	3 (-4.5)	2 (-5)	57 (5.7)	18 (4.7)	100
Black Heterosexual Male	19 (-6)	1 (-8)	10 (1.7)	68 (6.4)	22 (6.0)	120
Black Gay Male	22 (1.6)	23 (15.6)	10 (3.2)	37 (-13.3)	6 (-7.1)	98
Black Heterosexual Female	19 (-5)	19 (10.3)	8 (0)	51 (-8)	18 (2.7)	115
Black Lesbian Female	32 (12)	1 (-6.2)	12 (5.3)	35 (-14.3)	16 (3.2)	96
Total (Percentage of Total)	180 21%	65 8%	60 7%	443 51%	115 13%	863**

Note: Results are given as frequencies, with unstandardized residuals (observed minus expected) given underneath in parenthesis.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Overall, the chi-squared analysis finds a statistically significant difference between the eight intersectional groups at an alpha level of .01. Consistent with the expectations of hypothesis 1b regarding bodily norms of attraction, standard bodies (those who choose athletic and toned, and average/slender) make up the most popular category, with 51% of the total sample. The next most popular group were those who selected the default option of not choosing any of the selections for a date body, listed on the profile as no preference, with 21% of the total sample. The third most popular category for an ideal date is for a poster to choose selections from both the standard bodies categorization, and the overweight bodies categorization, at 13%. These two categories potentially represent a greater diversity of bodily selections for idealized dates compared to poster bodies, as 34% of posters are willing to accept a date with more body types than the standard type (contrasted to 16% of posters who are willing to state it about themselves). The next two groups consist of daters who only accept either athletic and toned bodies (8%), or only accept average/slender bodies (7%), and represent small but significant number who only accept a more restricted type of body than the slight broadening offered by the standard body ideal.

Starting with the most popular category, acceptance of ideal dates with standard bodies, the residuals tell of an interesting difference based on racial and sexuality based lines. White heterosexual men are by far the most likely to choose the standard body type, consisting of about 70% of the group, and with a residual of 22.9. In contrast, Black gays and lesbians are the least likely to have selections from this category for an ideal date, consisting of about a third of their total selections, and the largest negative residuals of -14.3 for lesbians, and -13.3 for gay men. With only Black heterosexual males being the only Black subgroup with a positive residual, and

much lower positive residuals on the other White subgroups, this suggests that standard body types in an ideal body type are tied to standards of privilege in society. The most socially privileged hegemonic group, White heterosexual males, desire the idealized standard body more in a potential date, while the lower the level of privilege appears to predict a some level of shunning these stereotyped body type ideals.

Moving to the second most popular group, those who chose 'no preference' (the default option), the analysis shows residuals that point towards a sexuality based bias in the selection for an ideal date. With the exception of White lesbians (-.9 residual), all of the residuals break down on lines where heterosexuals have negative residuals, and gays and lesbians have positive residuals. The largest group differences are found in the lower likelihood of selection for White heterosexual men (-6.8), and the higher likelihood for Black lesbians (12) and White gay men (10.1). Two possible suggestions from these observations are that either gays and lesbians are more accepting of diverse body types, thus using the no preference as a form of active acknowledgement of diversity, or that gays and lesbians are less willing to state any form of preference overall for some reason.

One way to attempt to test this moves to the next least popular category, those who select from both standard and overweight categories. Drawing upon the previous results from no preference, do the same differences on sexuality lines appear to hold? The answer appears to be no, until examined based on the intersectional lines of gender and sexuality. Black and White gay men both have the lowest likelihood of selecting from all the categories, with the strongest negative residuals of -7.3 and -9.3 respectively. In contrast, lesbian women of both races have positive residuals on this variable. This shows that at least for lesbian women, there is a

combination of lower acceptance of standard bodies with greater acceptance of more inclusive categories. This allows acceptance of the broader proposition that lesbian females find more diverse body types acceptable, compared to the uncertain showings of their gay male counterparts. These analyses as a result suggest intersectional differences in ideal date bodies that are explained only when each of the three of gender, race, and sexuality are taken into account.

When we move to the more restrictive, less popular, single body choice categories, the residuals once again tell a story of difference about the ideas of ideal bodies in the minds of online daters, but this time along racialized and gender lines. In the case of athletic and toned, the highest positive residuals are found in the groups of Black gay men (15.6) and Black heterosexual women (10.3). This similarity would inherently seem strange, until one recalls hypothesis 3a, and the notion of hypermasculine Black bodies being idealized/stereotyped. These two groups are both most likely envisioning an ideal date that is a Black male, and their high residuals in this category suggest two things: First, that if one is going to accept one and only one body type for an ideal Black male date, it is going to be one that is considered athletic and toned. Second, that the reductions in accepting a standard body on racialized lines are in fact because slender or average bodies are a less acceptable substitute, thus driving ideal Black male dates into a smaller set of acceptable options.

This similar narrowing of acceptable date bodies can be found in the same category when one compares the residuals of White heterosexual men (-8) and White lesbian women (-4.5), who have high negative residuals and this lowered likelihoods of accepting athletic only bodies. Instead of the case of Black males, these two groups are envisioning White females as their

normative ideal date, and rejecting that this athletic and thus 'masculine' body is ideal for a female date. The same can be found with Black heterosexual men (-8) and Black lesbian women (-6.2), who are envisioning female bodies as their ideal date also.

In contrast to these larger residuals based more extreme results in the athletic and toned only selection for an ideal date, the residuals for those that only selected average or slender are generally smaller. The exceptions are found with increased likelihood of selection by Black lesbian females (5.3), and decreased likelihood for White heterosexual men (-5.3), and lesbian women (-5).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Overall, these results show that as a whole, this sample is fairly consistent with many of the general findings one would expect of previous online dating research, taking into account impression management incentives, and gender/race bodily norm research. Although consisting of half or more of all possible body type descriptions, athletic, standard, and slender bodies are by far more popular than those that even slightly hint at the risk of being overweight, even when framed in positive or neutral terms (such as stocky, or big and beautiful/curvy). As such, these general showings of attractiveness are consistent with the incentives noted when compared to the types of control in bodily presentation found in advertising (Goffman 1976), the restrictive ways in which bodies are controlled in gendering (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008), and known tendencies to lie in the realm of online dating (Hall et al 2010; Hancock and Toma 2009). Even in the bodies of ideal dates, the results show that just over half of online daters similarly only chose standard body types as their ideal potential date.

However, to stop at this level of analysis would be to continue to exhibit biases that reproduce assumptions based on heterosexual white gender differences alone. As outlined previously, prior online research has a tendency to examine gender based differences, on presumed or explicitly heterosexual groups, with the concept or possibility of more complex intersectional differences either unexamined, or unexplained as a possibility in the results. This leads to a series of papers that, to give an example, treat as universal within their samples that female online daters are more deceptive about their appearance and weight (Hall et al 2010; Hancock and Toma 2009), with more focus on such controls as education and income level, while nearly ignoring issues such as race or sexuality. Instead, this sample comes to the

conclusion that females are about six times more likely than their male counterparts to be willing to state that their body exists in a category that would be potentially perceived as overweight. Even when race and sexuality are accounted for, females are more likely overall to choose from the overweight categories. When even further restricted to only the general overweight category, only White heterosexual females choose overweight options at a lower rate than any of the male groups, regardless of race or sexuality. These results stand in stark contrast to both general gendered assumptions, and previous online dating research on gender based differences in impression management.

These sort of findings opens up to other findings within this paper that showcase that although the sample as a whole does subscribe to very normal, attractive biases, there are many interesting details, differences, and possible influences to be found when bodily notions are examined on gender, sexuality, and race based lines. For example, as mentioned before, most prior online dating literature suggests that all females deceive about their bodies to appear more slender (e.g., Hall et al 2010; Hancock and Toma 2009). However, consistent with intersectional research scholars who examine differing norms and pressures on Black women (e.g., Collins 2000; Jackson II 2006), this sample finds that Black heterosexual women are more likely to choose terms about themselves that imply the Hotentot Venus ideal for Black women, such as curvy. Interestingly though, when the differences in category selection are made even more explicit, there is a notable difference based on sexuality lines in what terms are being used within these overweight subcategories. Lesbian women of both races were more likely to choose the non-gender-specific overweight categories, despite their more direct or negative weight connotations. In contrast, heterosexual women of both races were more likely to choose the

female-specific overweight categories. This suggests that based on sexuality lines, the language of impression management in regards to ideal bodies may be different for women based on norms more powerfully selected by sexuality based experiences or norms.

For men, the online dating research tends to focus less on bodily deception, then on deception in such manners as perceived income level (e.g., Hall et al 2010). This combined with only one real choice that fell under conventional norms of athletic masculinity (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008), limits the examination of differences grants less to compare to prior literature. However, differences were found once again consistent with the predictions of race and gender literature about racialized differences about bodies for Black men (e.g., Helg 2000). Consistent with the hypermasculine stereotype for Black men, Black heterosexual men were the most likely to state they had an athletic and toned body. Further confirming this, the groups most likely to be drawing upon an ideal date that is conceived of as a Black male (gay Black men and heterosexual Black women) were notable in being the most likely to choose only the athletic and toned category as an acceptable ideal date body type. This leads to a strange contrast though on sexuality based lines, while heterosexual Black men were the most likely to state an athletic body type for themselves, gay Black men were the least likely to state such. However, as noted before, gay Black men were the most likely to only accept athletic and toned bodies for an ideal date. Considering the pressures of impression management and the desire to find a date are consistent between both groups, this leads to the greatest mismatch between the bodily ideology and the biased reality that people are claiming about their own body types in the entire sample. Whereas most of the sample overall claims to be standard bodies seeking others with such standard bodies, both Black and White gay men instead end up with more average and overweight bodies

of the male groups, with lower desire for these types of bodies. This is particularly confusing because of a slight expectation for gay men of both races overall to showcase more hypermasculinity, as Oakenfull (2007) notes about the hypersexualized norms surrounding gay men. However, without further immediate avenues of examination, it is impossible to say what causes this particularly large disconnect.

As a whole, these results about the online daters' self-stated body types show interesting intersectional differences based on sexuality and gender, and confirm suspicions about race based gender differences being a possible issue that previous research has been overlooking. However, this does little to answer the bigger question of why these differences, particularly the gender and sexuality based differences are in fact occurring. In a single word, the concept that results seem to indicate would be: power, or hegemony. As intersectional race scholars like Collins (2000) and Jackman (1994) argue, there is an incentive for those at the center of power in society to hold onto their power in how they construct and accept certain norms. If the examination begins with White heterosexual men, those who hold the greatest social power in the United States, we find that this group has among the least selections of overweight bodies of all eight groups, and the highest positive residual in accepting standard body types as their ideal date. Using this group as a baseline, what the results show is that those groups who have the closest ties to ideal social power based upon race and sexuality, are the groups most likely to be consistent with the standard model of impression management and gender norms research that were conducted of the prior literature. Indeed, Black heterosexual males (the closest to the social center of the racial minority groups) are more like their White counterparts than any of the other Black racial groups in their low selections of overweight bodies as descriptions of self, and their

high selection of their ideal date having a standard body type. White heterosexual women are the female group with the highest frequency and positive residual for the slender and average body type. Of the gay and lesbian groups, only whites showcase positive residuals in regards to the standard body type for an ideal date.

All of these observations point in a direction that leads to social attributes such as heteronormative power, sexuality, gender, and race as variables that influence norms of impression management, and even how people appear to use different words to define their norm of attractiveness. This at least in part could explain how this particular sample is so out of line with the generalized online presentation findings that women have more incentive to deceive about weight than men (e.g., Hall et al 2010; Hancock and Toma 2009; Haferkamp et al. 2012). If the samples in previous research consist of mostly heterosexual white women, then this appears to be the portion of the sample that cares the most about using this particular bodily idea for itself. In contrast, these intersectional analyses allows a degree of separation from the broad variables of gender, and instead finds that race, sexuality, and gender all play roles in the self-presentation.

Limitations

Inherent to the lack of contact with the participant in secondary analysis, there is an inability to confirm various assumptions made in this paper. Although impression management is cited as the reason for the high use of standard bodies for both posters and their ideal dates, it is possible that falsification via impression management is not what is actually occurring. The sample as collected is highly educated and urban, both of which make it possible that the high

claim of standard bodies is because in fact, their bodies are not overweight compared to the overall US population. In addition, the lack of direct contact with participants leaves this research unable to examine what their perception of overweight actually is, since the use of BMI may be the technical definition of overweight, but not the social definition. Although terms such as ‘a few extra pounds’ and ‘stocky’ do leave avenues to express a smaller level of being overweight, the inability to conduct a follow-up without disrupting the anonymity and confidentiality of secondary research leaves this explanation a possibility.

Tied to this issue is a fundamental questions that plagues the realm of online dating, are the presentations that people give in online dating really accurate? Research into online dating has both noted that participants are concerned about deception, and findings that support this notion (Hall et al 2010; Hancock and Toma 2009). Indeed, drawing upon the ideas of impression management itself presupposes entering the analysis a certain level of deception is occurring in the results. However, this same focus on impression management also describes why in this study, the issue is a relatively minor one. Because these uses of impression management are a strategy, deception is indeed to be expected, and a major part of this research is to instead discern what ways race, sexuality, and gender intersections are influencing the ways that people deceive in their presentation. Certainly, it would be more powerful to establish a ‘factual’ comparison group that these claimed body types could be tested against. This falls outside the scope of this particular project, particularly as a content analysis, but leaves an interesting avenue for future investigation.

Although this paper concludes that hegemonic norms and power are likely a large factor in impression management, a fundamental issue with making these connections to power is the

restriction of the sample into two racial categories, and a lack of knowledge about the users that such secondary analysis must use to distance itself. Future analysis would benefit from examining if additional racial groups for example; continue to hold the heterosexual male biases that appear to separate heterosexual black men in date body preferences. To draw upon more variables that past online dating research has examined, income variables could be added to a future sample as a gendered variable focusing on men. In this paper, because the general education level was so consistently high, and began at the high school graduate level, education was not really controlled for. Future research could use a dataset of online daters with a more reliable education variable, or use surveys to get more accurate years of schooling from a sample.

Additionally, Match.com is but one online dating website, generalized to the selling point of having the largest online dating population. Like many things, stereotypes exist about the 'role' of online dating sites, such as eharmony.com being focused on those who want to get married. As such, drawing upon a different online dating website will likely be effectively like drawing upon a different subculture. Because of how inconsistent my gender and bodily self-description variable is with most of previous research, it would also likely be worth examining if a similar finding could be replicated elsewhere. In addition, online dating is a system that has been changing rapidly in the last few years, and most of my prior research, even if published in a year such as 2010, was actually usually collected a year or two earlier. One future examination could attempt to look at if the demographics of online daters have changed drastically, or if the culture of the past could be influencing results even as recently as 5 years ago.

APPENDIX: CODING STRUCTURE

Name	Code	Variable
Gender	0	Male
	1	Female
Sexuality	0	Gay or lesbian
	1	Heterosexual
Stated Race	0	Black/African descent
	1	White/Caucasian
Metropolitan Area	0	Los Angeles
	1	New York
	2	Chicago
	3	Atlanta
Age	int	
Poster Body Type	0	No Answer
	1	Athletic and Toned
	2	Average or Slender
	3	Heavysset, A few Extra pounds, or Stocky (General Overweight) Curvy, Full Figured, Big and Beautiful (Female Specific)
	4	Overweight)
Height	int	
Poster Education	0	No Answer
	1	High school or less
	2	Some College
	3	College Graduate
	4	Post Graduate
Poster Religion	0	No Answer
	1	Spiritual, but Not Religious
	2	Christian Denomination/Jewish
	3	Athiest/Agnostic
	4	Other

Poster Political
Views

- 0 No Answer
- 1 Middle of the road, non-conformist
- 2 Liberal or Very Liberal
- 3 Conservative or Ultra Conservative

Date Body Type

- 0 No Preference
- 1 Athletic and Toned Only
- 2 Slender, Average Only
- 3 Overweight Only
- 4 Standard Bodies
- 5 1&3 or 2&3 Only
- 6 Selections from all categories.

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