A research project exploring:

Online dating habits of third level students on mobile applications

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Declaration

I declare that this project titled: ‘Online dating habits of students in Athlone Institute of Technology’ is entirely the work of the author and it has not been submitted to another university or higher education institute or for any other academic award in this institution. Where work of other people has been used it has been fully referenced.

Signature of author: __________________________ Date: _________________

Kathryn Gannon 30th November 2017
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Abstract

The internet has become a core tenet of society, being used regularly by the vast majority of individuals. Online dating has recently increased its popularity and is becoming more accepted in today’s society. To have an accurate understanding of societal institutions, it seems inevitable that the usage of online dating must be measured due to its heightening prevalence.

This study’s aim is to explore the online dating habits on mobile applications among third level students in Athlone Institute of Technology (A.I.T.). This will give insight to the experiences college students have encountered whilst using dating applications. It will also reveal feelings experienced.

This study comprises of twenty questionnaires distributed randomly among A.I.T. students. The main findings of this study suggested that the use of mobile dating applications is likely to increase despite any potential risks. This may be due to ease of accessibility, increased awareness at a younger age and the addictive nature of the applications. The study also finds that online dating is becoming a mainstay in society and could potentially have negative long-term effects.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Technology has become core to western society. Smartphones and internet engines have given easy access to the average person with the push of a button. This straightforward and undemanding mechanic has since spread to dating. Online dating seems simpler than socialising with friends. This gives an ease in finding others with similar interests (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

According to Smith et al, one in ten American’s have used online dating applications. A significant number revealed they know someone who has found a spouse/long-term partner via online dating (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

The overall aim of this research project is to explore the online dating habits of students on mobile applications in (A.I.T). This is divided into two objectives. Firstly, this research aims to identify the knowledge and experiences of online dating applications among students in A.I.T. Secondly, it examines the students’ attitudes towards the applications.

The research project will continue under the following headings:

- Chapter 2: The literature review of this study.
- Chapter 3: The methodology of this study.
- Chapter 4: Examination of Results for this study.
- Chapter 5: Discussion regarding the findings and Literature reviewed.
- Chapter 6: An overall conclusion and the author’s recommendations.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this section the author provides a brief history and background of online dating on mobile applications. The literature review will discuss both the prevalence of online dating and the frequency. Attitudes and reasoning for using online dating will be discussed, followed by self-image and discrimination. Finally, the author will discuss the dangers and risks associated with online dating.

2.2 History and Background of online dating

The internet was invented in 1991, originated for organisations and business companies. The internet has since become one of the most important inventions of our time, connecting us to the entire world, with the click of a button. Specifically, social networking allows communication with strangers and brings together various groups of people. This has connected people whose paths may never have crossed otherwise (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). It allows users to create profiles that holds large amounts of personal information facilitating communication (Van Dijck, 2013).

Technology is continuously advancing mobile phone devices. In the past, popular functions of mobile phones were calling and sending texts. Today smart phones are multifunctional, they can increase learning, earning, communication and socialising (Clark, 2012).

Years ago, it was unheard of to meet a partner online. In 1995, came the first online dating website ‘Match.com’. In the early 2000’s more began to emerge (Ortega & Hergovich, 2017). In 2012, Tinder changed the online dating scene even further, with a location based mobile dating application. Users sign up through Facebook, with Tinder profiles limited to the individual’s age/first name/photos and optional biography. Tinder identifies the user’s current location which offers the individual potential ‘matches’ with similar geographical locations. To match with someone, swipe right (to ‘like’) or left (to say, ‘no thanks’). When two users mutually ‘like’ each other, they become connected in a chat room (Schacter, 2015).
2.3 Prevalence of online dating

Flug (2016), conducted a study named: Online dating in the digital age. It consisted of 60 young people aged between 18-24 years old. Participants were volunteers, recruited through social media. 65% indicated they had used some form of online dating. She found that 58% of participants went on dates with people they met online. 42% developed short-term romantic relationships, while 34% had engaged in long-term romantic relationships with the same amount experiencing a hook up or sex. Tinder was by far the most popular site with 77% having reported using it (Flug, 2016). The simplicity of tinder could be a reason for its prevalence, as it is easier to access than traditional sites with more complicated profiles.

Mickleson (2017), proposes that the use of applications such as Tinder are common amongst young people. Casual sex encounters, tended to be more frequent than serious relationships. This may reflect the rising prevalence of one-night-stands among college students. Mickleson states, long-term relationships take more time to develop than short-term relationships, meaning short-term relationships occur more frequently as they are less time consuming (Mickleson, 2017). It could be argued, one of the reasons for this, is user’s seeing Tinder as a casual sex platform as opposed to relationship platforms.

Valkenburg et al (2007), conducted a study ‘Who Visits Online Dating Sites?’. This explored various characteristics of online daters. The survey was conducted in 2005, on 367 Dutch adults aged between 18-60-years (mean age=38 years). Nearly half (43%) of single internet users reported having visited a dating site find a romantic partner. Although males visited online dating sites more than females, there was little difference between the genders frequency of posting on the site. The study indicated that the most active users were 40 years of age (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). This study is limited by the age bracket, as it was conducted prior to the advent of tinder, which appears immensely popular with younger age bracket.

2.4 Frequency of internet use

Youth today, are being exposed to the internet from an early age. In a comprehensive US study of 754 teenagers aged 12-17 years, it was found that 73% used the internet, while 42% of those accessed the internet daily (Lenhart, et al., 2001).
Similarly, in a National survey conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Authority in 2000, 58% of Australian children aged 5-12 years and 86% of teens aged 13-18 years were reported to having internet access at home and in school (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2001 cited in Fleming, 2004). The prevalence of internet use at such a young age will inevitably increase the prevalence of those using dating applications at a later age. In a journal article, ‘Children teens and sex on the internet’ concerns about individuals under eighteen years of age accessing adult-orientated materials. It was noted that individuals can learn to express thoughts, feelings and interests. However, if individuals are left alone to meet anyone from online, these young people can get into trouble as well as be exposed to undesirable, language, propositions, and materials. The adolescents can lack knowledge, experience and maturity to self-assess what is okay and what is getting out of hand in regards their personal lives. The journal states that many youths are now entering therapy with problems related to online sexual activity and other problematic sexual behaviours (Freeman-longo, 2000).

2.5 Attitudes and reason for using online dating

An early study of dating and relationships in the digital era was conducted in 2005 by the Pew Research Centre. A similar study was conducted in 2013 to compare findings, among a sample of 2,252 adults aged 18+. According to this study, 11% of internet users accessed dating sites. 7% of mobile phone users said, they have used a dating application on their phone. Users stated that, familiarity with online dating was through friends and family (Smith & Duggan, 2013). For young adults, family plays a key role in the introduction to interactive technologies, with parents buying the technology devices (McMillan & Morrisson, 2006).

Attitudes towards online dating has become more positive in the last 8 years, however a small minority are sceptical about the dangers. More than half of users (59%) in the 2013 survey agreed with a statement ‘online dating is a good way to meet people’ compared to 44% who said it in 2005. Similarly, in the 2013 study, 21% of internet users agreed with the statement ‘people who use online dating sites are desperate’ compared to a 29% who said it in 2005. These finding suggest general attitudes towards online dating has become more positive over recent years (Smith & Duggan, 2013).
Familiarity with online dating through usage by friends/family members has increased dramatically since the last survey (2005). Some 42% of Americans know someone who has used online dating, up from 31% in 2005 while, 29% of Americans now know someone who met a spouse/long-term partner through online dating, up from just 15% in 2005 (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

The convenience of online dating is likely a large reason for its growing prevalence. With increased career pressure and little time to meet new people, many single individuals are turning to online dating apps to form relationships. Additionally, it provides users with new experiences as well as a greater pool of potential partners (Brym & Lenton, 2001).

2.6 Self-Image and Discrimination

Due to the nature of tinder, profiles are mostly visual (profile picture of users), it makes sense that discrimination can occur due to the ‘picky’ nature of these applications. Examples of this include weight or image. According to Flug (2016), her results suggest that discrimination is a key characteristic in online dating among young people. 33% of participants selected ‘yes’ they did believe they were being discriminated against on these dating sites while, 36% chose ‘Maybe/Unsure’. The most common responses to why they believed they were discriminated against were: general appearance-at 26%, weight- at 19%, and gender- at 15%. Less common responses were age-11%, race and income-level.

Early development of self-image can be influence by internet usage. Individuals are turning to the internet before they recognise awareness of their own uniqueness, strengths and self-worth (Lalor, et al., 2007). This can have a negative effect on people’s self-image and how people portray themselves online. If a person is overweight, there may be an uncertainty of posting a full body image, in case they don’t get enough attention thus, leading to dishonesty. Participants in the same study were asked if they believed other users of the mobile applications had been dishonest intentionally; 59% of participants indicated they had been lied to, 24% were unsure, and 16% said they had not been. Of those who responded ‘Yes/Maybe/Unsure’ the majority indicated that they had been lied to about what a match was looking for in a relationship. Other responses in relation to lies and deceit was other user’s appearance, interests and age (Flug, 2016).
2.7 Dangers and Risks of online dating

Catfishing can be defined as a phenomenon of internet predators that fabricate online identities and trick people into emotional/romantic relationships. These involve scammers who enjoy fooling others into thinking their entering a romantic relationship. Schacter states, ‘anyone who has ever sat through MTV’s Catfish series will be familiar with this catfishing’ (Schacter, 2014). It represents extreme examples of risks, and dangers of online relationships gone-wrong (Schacter, 2014).

In a study ‘Online dating: a critical analysis of from the perspective of psychological science’, the authors state that online profiles cannot capture the experiential elements of meeting a person face to face. Not only this but, the evidence indicates that having access to several potential partners through mobile dating apps can feel like playing a game (an evaluative process). Excessive profile browsing can turn into what has been termed, ‘relationship shopping’. Users may become less willing to commit to one person as there are too many potential partners (Heino, et al., 2010).

In the study of ‘Real and Perceived risks, dangers of online dating; Online dating perspective’, A total of 29 in dept interviews took place over one year, providing accounts of dangerous and risky situations occurring. The main risks identified were: experiencing lies and deceit, where people had inaccurate photos, incorrect details about their relationship status and the possibility that some users were presenting themselves as other people but were in fact ‘catfishing’ (Couch, et al., 2012).

Another risk identified was worrying about their emotional vulnerability- risk of getting hurt from dangerous and untrustworthy people online. However, from the findings, participants continue to use these sites to seek potential sexual and romantic partners, which means they are managing the risks while also partaking in online dating (Couch, et al., 2012). This could also lead to user’s refusing to ‘leave the game’ so to speak. Although they may have a bad experience, users may still weigh out the possibility of a future positive outcome over a negative one.
2.8 Summary

A review of literature suggests that individual’s experiences and attitudes towards online dating has changed in recent years and is now more accepted. This acceptance is likely related to the overall acceptance of the internet and how it plays a huge role in society. Although there are many positive attitudes towards online dating, dangers and risks can still be identified. From reviewing studies conducted around the world relating to online dating, Ireland appears to lack research around the use of dating apps amongst third level students. The aim of this research project is to explore the online dating habits of students on mobile applications in A.I.T. This is a gap in research which the author hopes to fill.
Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the research is to gather primary data. The methodology section includes; the different methods of research, the author will state the main method chosen for this study followed by the actual process, sample group, limitations and ethical considerations.

3.2 Method

Quantitative methods of research place an emphasis on quantity of the target information. In other words, it attempts to gather relatively large amounts of information. The basic research tool should be well-structured, carefully thought out questionnaires (O'Connor, 2017). Quantitative research collects numerical data and it aims to gather measurable data to form facts and attempt to uncover patterns in the data (Punch, 2014).

Qualitative research methods focus on quality in attempting to gather information from respondents rather than large amounts. It consists of text based transcriptions of interviews, discussions or field notes (Bryman & Burgess, 2002). According to Punch, qualitative methods attempt to understand individuals’ perceptions of the world (Punch, 2014).

The author chose to use a quantitative method for conducting the research. A questionnaire was considered the best instrument to gather the required data.

3.3 Sample Group

To meet the aim of this research project, the participants chosen for the questionnaire were randomly selected in A.I.T. canteen on Monday 23rd October.

As far as the method of choosing the participants is concerned, probability sampling was used, i.e. the selection of the sample was random. The researcher felt that twenty questionnaires randomly distributed would give a good representation of the attitudes and knowledge students have towards online dating on mobile applications.
Alignment of instrument: Questions 1-4 gathered demographic information on the respondents. Questions 5-13 gather information needed to satisfy objective 1: To identify Athlone Institute of Technology students’ knowledge and experiences of online dating on mobile applications. Questions 14-24 gather information needed to satisfy objective 2: To examine students’ attitudes to online dating mobile applications.

3.4 Procedure

Limiting bias: The researcher was aware of the need to formulate neutral questions when the questionnaire was designed. Administering a pilot questionnaire to critics helped eliminate any bias that were present.

Pilot Study: To make any necessary changes, a pilot questionnaire was administered, they respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire and give constructive criticism. As a result of this procedure, the wording and layout of the questionnaire was further enhanced and the suggested improvements were made. After receiving feedback and reflecting upon it, the researcher was satisfied that the questionnaire would be accessible and easy to complete. Twenty questionnaires were distributed to students randomly in A.I.T. canteen.

3.5 Ethical Issues

As the researcher was aware of the sensitive nature of topic, an information letter was distributed with all questionnaires. This outlined to participants that their contribution to the research is voluntary with full anonymity and participants could withdraw if they wanted to.

In accordance with the Irish Data Protection Act, the information letter outlined the date the data would be destroyed which is the 30th September 2018.

3.6 Limitations

Certain limitations existed in carrying out this research study. Only students of Athlone Institute of Technology could partake in the study as it is forbidden to survey individuals or organisations outside the institute. The chosen sample for the quantitative research was limited
to twenty third level students. There was no guarantee that participants would fill out all the questions accurately, however it was assumed that students would cooperate as they could be in the same position in the future. Nevertheless, the information gathered was valid.

3.7 Proposed method of data analysis

The results section of this research will show a visual representation of the analysis of the statistical data amassed adopting a quantitative research method. The use of graphs and charts generated by excel will illustrate and enhance understanding and help the reader infer the correlation between variables. Not all questions will be represented graphically.
Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

This section illustrates the finding derived from twenty questionnaires which were distributed to students within A.I.T. in accordance with course guidelines. These findings are presented in narrative and graphical form and will be presented under two main objectives of the study.

Objective 1 is to identify A.I.T. students’ knowledge and experiences of online dating on mobile applications. Objective 2 is to examine students’ attitudes towards online dating on mobile applications.

4.2 Demographic Profile

The sample group consisted of fifty percent females and fifty percent males. One third of the sample were aged between sixteen to twenty years of age. Forty Five percent were aged between twenty-one and twenty-six whilst the remaining twenty percent was thirty-one and older age bracket. The range of courses studied were as follows; Early Years Education, Sports Science, Sport and Recreation, Nursing, Veterinary Nursing, Hospitality, Engineering, Restaurant Management, Social Care Practice and Business.
4.3 The Results from Objective 1

Students' knowledge and experiences of online dating on mobile applications.

The age at which participants became aware of online dating on mobile applications

More than half 65% (n=13) of participants became aware of online dating between the ages of 14-18 years old. With twenty Five percent (n=5) of participants only became aware between 19-23 years old. The remaining 10% (n=2) became aware at 24-28 years of age.

How participants became aware of online dating mobile applications

Overwhelming, the vast majority 95% found out about online dating on mobile applications from their peers and 50% found out through social media. 25% of respondents indicated advertising, while college and family played a smaller role when it came to how people became aware of online dating.

Mobile applications used by participants

Tinder was by far the most popular application with ninety five percent (n=19) admitting they had used the online dating application. Grinder was least popular with only five percent (n=1) stating they used this application. Ten percent (n=2) had used Happn, Forty percent (n=8) had used Plenty of Fish, and Ten percent (n=2) used Bumble. A mobile application named 'Momo' which was specified in other was used only by one participant.
The age in which participants began to use online dating on mobile apps

The results indicate that half of respondents began to use online dating when aged between 14-18 years old. While 30% of respondents were aged between 19-23 years old. The remaining 20% began using online dating between 24-28 years old.

Frequency of using online dating mobile applications:

As can be seen from the graph, 70% (n=14) of respondents used online dating on mobile applications on a daily and weekly basis of that 40% (n=8) used it weekly and 30% (n=6) used it daily. A further 15% (n=3) use the mobile applications monthly. The remaining 15% (n=3) reported never using online dating mobile applications.
Motivations for using online dating

When it came to explain why they used online dating on mobile applications, the vast majority 95% stated they use it just for fun. While 30% say they prefer online dating on mobile applications to meeting someone through traditional methods. 20% of respondents use online dating on mobile application to find someone for one-night stand. A small number of respondents 10% stated they use it for finding casual relationships while only 5% use it to secure a serious relationship.

Preferred method of meeting the women/man of your dreams

Figure 3: Motivations for using online dating

Figure 4: Preferred method of meeting the women/man of your dreams
This chart shows the most popular method of meeting the women/man of your dreams is through social outings with 80% stating this, one quarter of respondents stated they prefer meeting someone special through friends and family. 20% stated they preferred meeting someone through online dating and again twenty percent through social activities. It also demonstrates that participants 10% would like to meet people through work and 5% on a blind date.

**Frequency of going on dates with someone through online dating mobile applications.**

![Chart showing frequency of going on dates with someone through online dating mobile applications.](image)

*Figure 5.4.3 Frequency of going on dates with someone through online dating mobile applications*

The chart above shows how often they go on a date with someone they met from online dating applications. Less than half of participants 45% (n=9) stated that they do not go on any dates from the mobile dating applications. While a further 15% (n=3) stated they go on dates monthly and another 15% (n=3) also stated that they go on dates every six months. This is followed by 10% (n=2) indicating they go on dates every week, and another 10% (n=2) who go on dates yearly from the mobile applications.
4.4 The results from Objective 2:  

**Students’ attitudes towards online dating on mobile applications.**

**Experience participants had while using online dating mobile applications**

The results were as follows: 35% (n=7) of respondents had a positive experience from using online dating on mobile applications, while 25% (n=5) of respondents stated they had a negative experience. The remainder of respondents had neutral experience using online dating on mobile applications.

**The respondents’ experiences since having used online dating mobile applications**

![Diagram showing the distribution of experiences]

*Figure 6: 4.4 The respondents’ experiences since having used online dating mobile applications*

Since commencing third level education in A.I.T. the participants were asked to describe their experiences having used online dating on mobile applications. The majority 45% had increased the amount of time they spent on the applications. While 40% of respondents stated they had messaged two or more people at the same time when using the application. Twenty five percent had stated they experienced confidence change, at the same time another 25% had used the app to find a one-night stand. Ten percent of those who participated in the study said they had engaged in behaviour they later regretted.
The chart demonstrates the frequency of a situation occurring.

Participants state that replies from anyone on the online dating mobile applications occurred 55% rarely and very rarely, and for some 30% they never got a reply while 15% of respondents experienced getting a reply often and very often.

The majority 65% of respondents had never experienced being stood up while 25% had rarely and very rarely experienced it. Only 10% experienced this often and very often.

More than half 60% never experienced false identity. It was 30% rarely and very rarely experienced. Only 10% experienced it often and very often.

Half of respondents 50% experienced a friend having contact with the same person often and very often. 30% never experienced a friend having contact with the same person and it rarely happened to 20% of respondents.

More than half 55% of participants rarely and very rarely experienced a relationship forming from using the online dating mobile applications. 30% never experienced a relationship forming, while 15% have experienced this often and very often.
In a question in which participants were asked to what extent they agree with the following statement, ‘*There is a stigma about meeting someone through online dating apps*’. 70% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. Twenty percent were neutral regarding the statement. The remaining 10% disagreed that there is a stigma about meeting someone through online dating applications.

**How respondents would disclose to others meeting someone through online dating applications.**

![Figure 8: 4.4 How respondents would disclose to others meeting someone through online dating applications](image)

The majority 60% (n=12) stated they would be honest how they met their partner, a quarter of respondents (n=5) would adjust the story leaving out online dating apps and twenty percent (n=4) would be selective in who they told. From the study it shows 5% (n=1) would make up a random story to explain how they met their partner.
Discrepancies between an online profile and meeting in person.

![Bar chart showing responses to discrepancies between online profile and meeting in person.]

Thirty percent of respondents stated that this had happened to a friend and another 30% stated they had read about this happening. One quarter of respondents stated that it can happen while fifteen percent had experienced it personally. The remaining 10% of participants stated that incorrect details between an online profile and meeting in person never happens.

Description of how respondents felt about a date with someone from an online dating mobile application.

![Bar chart showing responses to feelings about dating someone from an online dating mobile application.]

Less than half of the respondents 45% (n=9) were nervous in case they did not click with partner they meet from online. One third 35% (n=7) were nervous in case the other person was not who they said they were. Thirty percent were happy to go on a date, 5% (n=1) are confident a date would go well and another 5% (n=1) are nervous in case the person dislikes them.
Respondents were asked to rate the possibility of a dangerous situation occurring on a ‘meet up’ date. Fifteen percent thought it was quite possible and half of respondents 50% stated that it was possible that a dangerous situation may occur, while thirty percent were unsure of the situation. None of the respondents rated it impossible or no danger.

**Fears associated with online dating on mobile applications.**

![Fig 4.4.6](image)

45% of Participants were most fearful of being ‘cat-fished’, followed by 40% of respondents stating that they were afraid of a potential sexual assault. One third were fearful of a stalker, while 15% feared an attachment/bond with a stranger. 5% chose ‘other’ specifying that the possibility of rape was a serious concern.

Participants were asked whether *third level students should be educated on the impact of online dating*. The majority of the sample agreed with the statement, 85% agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. 5% was neutral on the topic, and 10% disagreed and strongly disagreed that student should be educated on the impact of online dating.

Lastly participants were asked question asked did they feel their attitude had changed towards online dating on mobile applications. One third of respondents agreed stating that their attitude had changed, while the majority 50% had remained neutral on the topic. 15% disagreed and strongly disagreed that their attitude had not changed.
Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance of the findings. The objectives form the relevant headings. The results related to the research of others discussed in the literature review. An evaluation of the data gathering method, conclusion and recommendations are included in the chapter.

5.2 Students’ knowledge and experiences of online dating on mobile applications.

Children are exposed to the internet at an early stage in life. The results of this study indicated that more than half of the respondents were aware of online dating between the ages of 14-18 years. Of those, exactly half of them were actually using online dating mobile applications. These findings are similar to findings from a comprehensive US study of teenagers aged 12-17 years. It found that the majority of them use the internet in general and just under half accessed the internet daily. (Lenhart, et al., 2001). This research reflects the situation in other countries such as Australia. In a National survey conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, more than half of Australian children aged 5-12 years, and the vast majority of teens aged 13-18 years reported to having internet access at home and in school (Australian Broadcasting Authority 2001, cited in Fleming, 2004).

Jones (2002), found that college students in the US, are early adopters and heavy users of the internet. They are more likely than the general population to use the internet for various tasks. It was also reported that the internet changed the social life on campus. Although the internet is quite convenient and can be used as a place to learn, grow and connect, it is still worrying that respondents in this study were as young as fourteen, having accessed online dating sites. There are many positives to accessing the internet for academic reasons however, children and young people who are accessing these online dating applications should be made aware about the negative aspects to them. In a journal ‘Children, Teens and sex on the Internet’, it was noted that many young people are now entering therapy with problems from online dating regarding sexual activity and other problematic sexual behaviours (Freeman-longo, 2000). There is limited researched regarding children and online dating, there is an opportunity for future research that needs to be explored.
The vast majority of respondents in this study of online dating habits in A.I.T. stated they use online dating just for fun. These figures are similar to results from a study named ‘Online dating in New Zealand’, carried out by Mickleson (2017). According to this study, casual sex encounters tended to be more frequent outcomes than serious relationships. In another study comparable to A.I.T. was conducted by Flug (2016), it was reported that half of the respondents developed short term relationships and one third had experienced a hook up or sex. Although one third of respondents had engaged in a long-term relationship it appears these take a considerate amount of time. From the results of Mickleson (2017), Flug (2016) and this study, it can be said that online dating on mobile applications appear extremely popular. It currently is not being taken seriously in terms of securing long term relationships. This again indicates that, it is quite time consuming. It is however, more popular for people using it for short term flings and one-night stands, which in turn suggests these relationships are less time consuming compared to long term relationships. In this study it seems that respondents are using it for fun and pleasure which is similar to Mickleson (2017) and Flug (2016) study. This gives the impression that it is now easier than ever to get into a relationship because of these online platforms however, people are starting to de-prioritise love and intimacy. In the distant future, there may be many implications, people may have trouble forming intimate relationships. Many young people may find it difficult to ‘commit’ to relationships as they are growing up in a world that is transient.

The results of this study stated that the preferred method of meeting someone special was through social outings. Second to this, was through introductions by friends and family. Only a small minority indicated they would like to meet someone special through online dating platforms. The results of this study support those of Flug (2016), who found that a small minority stated they preferred meeting online whilst the vast majority stated, they preferred a face to face setting. Although online dating on mobile applications is extremely popular, the vast majority of respondents in this study preferred the traditional method of meeting someone. Online dating opens new avenues for people to come out of their comfort zones and can offer a variety of dating perceptions. The long term societal effects are that technology is advancing and so is internet dating. It could be said that most relationships in the future could be formed through these online dating applications.
5.3 Student’ attitudes towards online dating on mobile applications.

The author found, the majority of respondents increased the amount of time spent on the applications since commencing third level education. This figure is relatively high. Flug (2016), states that these online dating applications can create intermittently reinforcing reward systems, giving it addictive qualities (Flug, 2016). The vast majority of respondents reported accessing online dating on mobile applications daily and weekly, meaning these addictive qualities can encourage young people and give them urges to continuously use these online dating mobile applications. Although respondents reported they preferred traditional methods when meeting someone, they appeared to continue using these platforms due to the addictive qualities.

Results found that, respondents had messaged two or more people at the same time and stated, they use online dating applications to find one-night stands. According to Mickleson (2017), one-night stands among college students are quite prevalent. This helps support Mickleson’s theory, that respondents are using these online dating applications for fun and pleasure. Despite the fact they prefer traditional methods, they continue to use these applications because of the addictive qualities. Also as technology continues to advance, this method of dating is becoming more accessible. This would suggest, that as society begin and continue to use these applications, eventually they may become addicted. It appears there may be an over reliance on using online dating applications and whether we like it or not, it may soon be the future of all relationships.

In 2013, a report by the Pew Research Centre, which carried out two studies, eight years apart, on comparing these two studies, it was found that attitudes towards online dating had become more positive. In the last of the two studies, one quarter reported that people who use online dating sites considered it a ‘desperate measure’ compared to a higher figure, eight years previous (Smith & Duggan, 2013). In this study, the vast majority of respondents also stated that there is a stigma about meeting someone online. Perhaps people may still perceive online dating as negative. If it is not spoke about openly, people may tend to keep quiet or lie about how they met their partner. This should not be the case.
Despite having a stigma around online dating, the majority of respondents in this study stated they would be completely honest if they met their partner from an online dating sites, while others were sceptical, stating they would adjust the story or be selective in terms of who they would tell. Going forward society needs to be made aware of benefits and drawbacks of online dating as it is becoming more available to use.

Early development of self-image can be influenced by internet usage. Individuals who use the internet from a young age are not recognising their own uniqueness, strengths and self-worth. These young people may portray themselves online differently to receive more attention from other online profiles. Smith and Duggan (2013), carried out a survey in which most of the respondents felt someone had seriously misrepresented themselves in an online profile. This could have a long-lasting effect on someone who is young and vulnerable, the fact that they have been lied to.

In a similar study conducted by Flug (2016), respondents believed, other users had been dishonest intentionally which included lies about appearance, interest and age. Negative experiences of online dating sites are relatively common. It is evident from the results of this study that discrepancies between an online profile and meeting the person offline occurs very frequently. Meeting people online has both benefits and drawbacks. Some may have great experiences with online dating, while others may have stories filled with confusion and frustration. This is similar to meeting someone offline, as it can be either a positive or negative experience.

Society believes that there are many fears associated with using online dating on mobile applications. Negative experiences derived from online dating applications are relatively common. According to Smith and Duggan (2013), more than half of respondents felt someone had seriously misrepresented themselves in their profile. This is similar to catfishing, which represents extreme cases of people exploiting online profiles (Schacter, 2014).
Half of respondents in this study stated they were fearful of being catfished. Respondents had also feared the possibility of sexual assault, being stalked by someone online and having an attachment or bond with a stranger. Addictive qualities can encourage young people to use online dating applications which can lead to meaningful attachments with strangers (Flug, 2016). Experiences with online dating tends to be mixed. It is alarming that people are fearful of using these online dating applications yet still continue to use them regularly.

5.4 Evaluation of Method

The study consisted of only twenty questionnaires distributed in Athlone Institute of Technology which limits the data which was found, however the author suggested that further research could be carried out with a larger sample. The use of questionnaires was proved successful in the authors’ opinion as it gathered the required information to satisfy both objectives. It encouraged their participation in the sensitive topic as confidentiality was guaranteed.

5.5 Summary

A key finding from this study was that children are becoming aware of online dating applications and accessing them at a young age. It appears that online dating on mobile applications is mainly used for fun and pleasure. It seems, accessing a relationship is easier as of these online dating platforms, yet many people are not using them to secure long term relationships. Continuing to use these online dating applications may pose implications for the future as intimacy and love may be lacking. Respondents stated they preferred traditional methods as opposed to online dating. The fact they continued to use them may be linked to the addictive qualities. Despite being a stigma and fears associated with online dating, respondents continue to use them regularly.
Chapter 6
Conclusion and Recommendations

A review of literature suggests, that Ireland lacks research regarding the use of online dating applications amongst third level students. This project set out to explore the online dating habits of students on mobile applications in Athlone Institute of Technology (A.I.T).

The research tool used was a questionnaire, which proved successful as it gathered the information required to satisfy both objectives. While the study was limited to only twenty participants, it is imperative that future research should be done on a wider scale within third level colleges around Ireland to get a broader sense of students’ attitudes, influences and what they deem as dangers for using online dating on mobile applications. Specifically, it would be good to measure any potential differences between 1st/2nd year college students and 3rd/4th year students to see if attitudes towards dating applications change with age and experience.

The findings of this research imply that there is a high percentage of knowledge regarding online dating on mobile applications among A.I.T students. It found that the majority of respondents are using these dating applications for fun and pleasure and are mainly committing to short term relationships. Despite there being a stigma and many fears associated with these online dating applications, respondents continue to use them regularly. This indicates that dating applications may have an addictive quality.

There were some surprising findings. In the study, half of respondents began using online dating on mobile applications as children and young adults. This is quite alarming, as there are many dangers associated with the applications. There is an issue regarding this which needs to be tackled. All third level students should be educated on the impacts of online dating, creating more awareness when using the applications. It is also worth considering that second level students should have some information on the dangers of internet use through their study of S.P.H.E and Wellbeing as part of their junior cycle programme.
Going forward, parents of primary and secondary school children would benefit if more attention went towards the dangers associated with the internet which would include online dating on mobile applications. Better safeguarding policies should be enforced, regarding the age of users to these online dating applications, ensuring the individuals are over eighteen. Clear guidelines, instructions and implications should be addressed when users are signing up for these applications.

Overall it seems inevitable that the use of dating applications will increase due to its simplicity. To this end, future research in regard to relationships formed from the use of online dating would be appropriate to better understand the potential impacts of online dating.
References


Appendices
Appendix 1: Pilot Questionnaire

Pilot Questionnaire- Online dating habits on mobile apps in Athlone Institute of Technology.

Please attempt to answer all the questions and please tick all the relevant boxes provided. All information provided by you will be treated in strictest confidence and remain entirely anonymous. You may withdraw from the process at any time.

Q1: Gender: Male> □ Female> □

Q2: Age: 16-20> □ 21-25> □ 26-30> □ 31-35> □ 36 and over> □

Q3: Course: ______________________________

Q4: Year: ______

Objective 1: To identify the students’ knowledge and experiences of online dating on mobile applications.

Q5: At what age did you become aware of online dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

13 and under: □ 24-28 years old: □
14-18 years old: □ 29 and above: □
19-23 years old: □

Q6: How did you become aware of online dating apps?

(Please tick all appropriate boxes)

□ Peers □ College □ Family
□ Social Media □ Advertising □ Other_________________________

Q7: Which of the following mobile apps have you:

(Please tick all the appropriate)

1) Used 2) Never used
Tinder □ □
Grinder □ □
Happn □ □
Plenty of Fish □ □
Bumble

Others please specify _______________________________________________________

Q8: At what age did you first begin to use online dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

13 and under: □ 24-28 years old: □
14-18 years old: □ 29 and above: □
19-23 years old: □

Q9: How often do you log on or access these dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

Hourly: □
Daily: □
Weekly: □
Monthly: □
Never: □
If other please specify: _______________________________________________________

Q10: Which of the following may have motivated you to use online dating apps?

(please tick all the appropriate boxes)

□ Just for fun
□ One Night Stand
□ For Casual Relationships
□ Prefer this to meeting someone traditionally
□ For Serious Relationship
If other please specify: _______________________________________________________

Q11: Which of the following would be your preferred method of meeting the Women / Man of your dreams?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

Online dating □ Blind date □
Social outings i.e. Night out-party/pub □ Social Activity i.e. Sport □
Work □ Friends/ Family □
Q12: How often would you go on a date with someone you have met through online dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

☐ Weekly  ☐ Yearly
☐ Monthly  ☐ Don’t go on any dates
☐ Every 6 months

Objective 2: To examine the students’ attitudes of online dating on mobile applications in Athlone Institute of Technology.

Q13: Which of the following best describes your experience of having used an online dating application (app)?

(please circle appropriate)

Very Positive  Positive  Neutral  Negative  Very Negative

Q14: Since commencing Third Level Education here at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), which of the following best describes your experience of online dating?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

Engaged in behaviour you later regretted
Your confidence decreased
Increased the amount of time spent on the app
Use online dating apps to find a partner for one-night stand
Have messaged 2 or more people at one time

Q15: How often has the following happened to you?

(Please tick all appropriate boxes)

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<th></th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Very Rarely</th>
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Q16: What do you think of the following statement?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

‘‘There is a stigma about meeting someone through online dating apps’’

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<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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Q17: If you met someone off a dating app, how would you disclose this to others?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

- Would be honest about how you met your partner
- Would adjust the story leaving out online dating apps
- Would be selective in who you tell
- Would make up a random story

Q18: Have you ever experienced any inaccuracies (incorrect details) between an online profile and when meeting the date in person?

(Please tick the appropriate)

- This has happened to me □
- This has happened to a friend □
- I read about this □
- This is quite possible □
- This never happens □

Q19: Which of the following best describes how you think a date will go with someone from a dating apps?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

- Confident it will go well □
- Nervous in case we don’t click □
- Happy to go on a date □
- Nervous in case they are not who they say they are □
- Nervous in case they don’t like me □
Q20: If you were to rate the possibility of dangerous situation occurring on a ‘meet up’ date what would that be?  
(Please tick the appropriate box)

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<th></th>
<th>Quite possible</th>
<th>possible</th>
<th>unsure</th>
<th>impossible</th>
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Q21: In your opinion what are the worst fears you associate with online dating?  
(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catfish</th>
<th>Possibility of Sexual assault</th>
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<th>Attachment/Bond with Stranger</th>
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If other, please specify: ________________________________________________

Q22: Do you think third level students should be educated on the impact of online dating?  
(please circle appropriate)

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<th>Agree</th>
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Q23: After completing this survey has your attitude towards online dating changed?  
(please circle appropriate)

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Thank you 😊
Appendix 2: Final Questionnaire

Final Questionnaire: Online dating habits on mobile apps in Athlone Institute of Technology.

Please attempt to answer all the questions and please tick all the relevant boxes provided. All information provided by you will be treated in strictest confidence and remain entirely anonymous. You may withdraw from the process at any time.

Q1: Gender: Male> ☐ Female> ☐

Q2: Age: 16-20> ☐ 21-25> ☐ 26-30> ☐ 31-35> ☐ 36 and over> ☐

Q3: Course: ____________________________ Q4: Year: ______

Q5: At what age did you become aware of online dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

13 and under: ☐ 24-28 years old: ☐
14-18 years old: ☐ 29 and above: ☐
19-23 years old: ☐

Q6: How did you become aware of online dating apps?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

☐ Peers ☐ College ☐ Family
☐ Social Media ☐ Advertising ☐ Other___________

Q7: Which of the following mobile apps have you:

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

1) Used 2) Never used

Tinder ☐ ☐
Grinder ☐ ☐
Happn ☐ ☐
Plenty of Fish ☐ ☐
Bumble ☐ ☐
Others please specify ____________________________________________
Q8: At what age did you first begin to use online dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

- 13 and under: □
- 14-18 years old: □
- 19-23 years old: □
- 24-28 years old: □
- 29 and above: □

Q9: How often do you log on or access these dating apps?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

- Hourly: □
- Daily: □
- Weekly: □
- Monthly: □
- Never: □

If other please specify: __________________________________________________________

Q10: Which of the following may have motivated you to use online dating apps?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

- Just for fun
- One Night Stand
- For Casual Relationships
- Prefer this to meeting someone traditionally
- For Serious Relationship

If other please specify: __________________________________________________________

Q11: Which of the following would be your preferred method of meeting the Women / Man of your dreams?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

- Online dating
- Blind date
- Social outings i.e. Night out-party/pub
- Social Activity I.e. Sport
- Work
- Friends/ Family

If other please specify: __________________________________________________________

Q12: How often would you go on a date with someone you have met through online dating apps?
(Please tick the appropriate box)

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every 6 months
- Yearly
- Don’t go on any dates

Q13: Which of the following best describes your experience of having used an online dating app?

(Please circle appropriate)

- Very Positive
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Very Negative

Q14: Since commencing Third Level Education here at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), which of the following best describes your experience of online dating?

(Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

- Engaged in behaviour you later regretted
- Your confidence ‘decreased or increased’ changed
- Increased the amount of time spent on the app
- Use online dating app to find a partner for one-night stand
- Have messaged 2 or more people on the app at one time

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Q16: What do you think of the following statement? (Please tick the appropriate box)

“There is a stigma about meeting someone through online dating apps”

Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

Q17: If you met someone off a dating app, how would you disclose this to others?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

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☐ Would adjust the story leaving out online dating apps
☐ Would be selective in who you tell
☐ Would make up a random story

Q18: Have you ever experienced any inaccuracies (incorrect details) between an online profile and when meeting the date in person?

(Please tick the appropriate)

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☐ This is quite possible
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Q19: Which of the following best describes how you expect a date will go with someone from a dating app? (Please tick all the appropriate boxes)

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Q22: Do you think third level students should be educated on the impact of online dating?  
(Please circle appropriate)

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Q23: After completing this survey has your attitude towards online dating changed?  
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Thank you 😊
Appendix 3: Cover letter including consent form

To whom it may concern,

My name is Kathryn Gannon. I am inviting you to participate in a study that I am conducting as part of an undergraduate degree in Social Care, at Athlone Institute of Technology.

The aim of this research is to explore the online dating habits on mobile applications among third level students in Athlone Institute of Technology (A.I.T).

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve questionnaires; there will be twenty-three questions to be answered on the questionnaire. You can withdraw from this study at any time. All information you give will be completely confidential and your name will not appear on my thesis or any part of this study. All information will be destroyed on or before the 30th of September 2018.

This thesis will be read by students as well as academics; this may create more awareness around online dating on mobile applications in Athlone Institute of Technology and elsewhere.

Yours sincerely, Kathryn Gannon

Consent I have read the above and I am agreeing to participate in the study.

Signed: ________________________ Date: _________________________