Looking for Love in so many Places:
Characteristics of Online Daters and Speed Daters

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Abstract

This study examined the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to engage in speed dating and online dating, and the types of people who are more likely to prefer these forms of dating. Older individuals and those who scored high on shyness were more likely to have tried online dating. Older individuals, those who scored high on shyness, and those who had tried online dating were more likely to consider using it in the future. Younger individuals were more likely to have tried speed dating. Those who had already tried speed dating were more likely to consider using it in the future. We argue here that online dating offers some advantages for shy individuals.

Keywords: Romantic relationships, online dating, speed dating, personality, shyness.

In the 'noughties', individuals are eagerly trying out new matchmaking methods in which singles are introduced both online and face-to-face. Online, people are meetings in spaces such as newsgroups, gaming sites, blogging networks, and social networking services like Friendster, MySpace, and Bebo. Madden and Lenhart (2006) have reported that 74% of single Americans searching for partners have used the internet to facilitate their romantic pursuits. Currently, the most popular way to meet romantic partners online is through online dating sites. Yahoo.com claims almost 380 million visitors per month to their online dating site (Pasha, 2005), and FriendFinder.com say they have over 2.6 million active members (Dating Sites Reviews.com, n.d.). Offline, speed dating has become a popular means of meeting potential dates (Marcario, 2006), and of course there are still all the traditional ways to meet singles, such as social events, through friends, work, and through the bars and clubs scene.

Given the range of choices available to singles, we were interested in finding out what types of individuals are drawn to specific forms of dating. Rather than focus on all forms of dating we elected to focus on two popular and fairly new forms of dating:

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online dating and speed dating. These two forms of dating are of interest to compare, not only because they have become popular in recent years, but also because singles are introduced formally via different modes of communication. Speed daters first meet face-to-face and online daters first meet on the internet.

In the past, researchers have commented that despite the range of matchmaking services available, nonetheless "an aura of frustration and disappointment hangs over the singles scene" (Telser, 1990, p. 69). More recent researchers report a similar sentiment in relation to online dating (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Given this, an understanding of what types of people are drawn to and prefer certain forms of dating can help speed up the process of directing singles to more appropriate matchmaking services. Such information would also be of use to psychologists and therapists who counsel the growing number of lonely singles (Lee & Bulanda, 2005; Pinquant, 2003).

Defining online dating and speed dating

Although there are numerous companies worldwide that run online dating sites and hold speed dating events, they do so using fairly similar formulae. Online dating sites are:

> Similar to newspaper personals (but with much more information) individuals construct a profile, describing themselves and often providing photographs of themselves and sometimes sound bites and video. Users typically have to pay to use this service and once they identify a person whose profile they like, online contact is made through the system to gauge whether the other individual might also be interested. From there, individuals typically organise to meet face-to-face. (Whitty & Carr, 2006, p.4)

McCann (2005) writes that speed dating is an event that can attract as many as 20 to 100 individuals. The speed dater is typically given a name badge, a pen, and a scorecard, which has space to note other speed daters' names and badge numbers and boxes to tick off any other speed daters they might be interested in. There is time prior to the event for individuals to mingle and have a sneak preview before the dating commences. When the event commences the speed daters are directed to the table number that matches the number on their badge and meet their first date. Each dater has about three to eight minutes to chat to their date and make some notes on their scorecard. At the end of the allocated time the host will ring a bell and the men then

move to the next place. Once the dating is finished the speed dater typically hands in their scorecard to the host where mutual matches are determined. Contact details are then provided by the host for any mutual matches.

These two forms of matchmaking services are similar and different in a number of ways. Both are formal services designed to matchmaker and singles are typically expected to pay for these services. Hence, singles act more as consumers and conceivably have higher expectations that they will find a partner than more informal ways of meeting potential romantic partners (e.g., through friendship networks). An obvious difference between the two methods is that speed dating allows individuals to first encounter the other potential match face-to-face, where ' physical chemistry' can be established and singles are required to self-disclose information about themselves immediately (in a synchronous mode) in a very short amount of time. Online dating, in contrast, allows individuals to take their time deciding what information they wish to self-disclose. Interaction takes place and physical chemistry is determined only if two people that on the site decide to communicate and then meet each other face-to-face (Whitty, 2007; Whitty & Carr, 2006). In this way individuals can be more strategic in their presentations of self (Whitty, 2004a, 2007; Whitty & Carr, 2006). Moreover, individuals have the social distance online that makes it easier to deal with rejection (Whitty, 2003). Another obvious difference between online dating and speed dating is that the number of potential matches that online daters have available (or at least perceive to be available) is greater than the number of potentials perceived by speed daters.

Theoretically, it is also of interest to consider how online and speed dating align with other forms of matchmaking. Previous theorists have devised the SMI model (Searching, Matching, Interacting model) to characterise formal matchmaking services, such as personal ads, video dating, and computer matchmaking (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992). They parallel matchmaking services with basic market functions. For instance, in the market place initially 'searching' is required; that is, gaining information essential for exchange (in regards to matchmaking this means searching for information about a potential other). 'Matching' is required to bring together compatible exchange partners (in regards to matchmaking this would mean bringing together two singles that seem well matched). Transactions take place in the third phase in the market place. This phase requires an exchange of goods. Ahuvia and Adelman (1992), however, prefer the term 'interacting' to described the third phase of matchmaking, given that the goods

exchanged when it comes to relationship development are the self-disclosures revealed in conversations by both individuals.

Internet dating does follow the model proposed by these theorists. Clearly this is because individuals search through the site (or the site is designed to do this for them) for an appropriate match. Contact is made on the site initially to indicate interest in another and the other has to reciprocate mutual interest. From there the two potentials begin to interact and decide whether they wish to progress the relationship further. We propose here that another model is needed to explain speed dating, given that it does not follow the same pattern. Instead, with speed dating, interaction and searching happen simultaneously, followed by matching, and then further interaction (IS-M-I). Searching takes place during an interaction where speed daters are presented with potential matches – here they need to make a quick assessment as to whether they believe the person they are interacting with is a good match. After the interaction they have time to reflect and consider if the two are well suited. If both parties decide they are well matched then they will be given each others details so they can interact again. Hence the theory proposed by Ahuvia and Adelman (1992) does not neatly apply to speed dating. Given this, together with the other differences elucidated earlier in this paper between online dating and speed dating, it is important to not treat all matchmaking services in the same light.

Personality characteristics and cyberspace

It has been suggested, especially by the media, that cyberspace is largely inhabited by the shy, socially inept, socially isolated, and depressed (Whitty & Carr, 2006). In investigating this assertion, researchers have arrived at mixed results.

Some studies have found that the socially skilled are more likely to inhabit cyberspace (Birnie & Horvath, 2001; McCown, Fischer, Page, & Homant, 2001). McCown et al. (2001), for example, used a 'Personality Mosaic Inventory' to ascertain whether certain personality characteristics were more highly represented amongst internet users. They found that online friends tended to be socially skilled, possess strong verbal skills, and were able to empathise with others. Birnie and Horvath (2002) surveyed 115 Canadian undergraduate students and found that "online social communication appeared to complement or be an extension of traditional social behavior rather than being a compensatory medium for shy and socially anxious individuals" (Birnie & Horvath, 2002, p. 1).

Others have found no differences between internet users and non-internet users. For example, Peris et al. (2002) employed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire to examine whether there was a common personality or common social profile among 'online chatters.' They found no distinctive personality characteristics of chat room users and argued that shyness or emotional instability was not a feature of chat users as a group.

In contrast to the above views, it has been argued that some individuals feel more liberated in cyberspace (Whitty, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Whitty & Carr, 2003, 2006). In particular Whitty (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2007) has theorised, drawing from object relations theory, that some individuals (especially shy individuals) are drawn to the internet to cyberflirt and form relationships given that it provides a safer space for them to try out new skills to initiate relationships. Moreover, she believes that it is easier to deal with rejection within this space. Joinson (2004) has presented a similar argument. In experimental research he found that individuals with low self-esteem showed a greater preference for email over face-to-face communication compared to individuals with high self esteem. Although he was not specifically studying shyness, Joinson comments that this finding "experimentally replicates the observation that shy people tend to benefit from computer-based dating systems, and anecdotal evidence that socially anxious people may be more likely to be 'pathological' Internet users than the more socially confident" (pp. 483-484).

Shyness has been defined as "discomfort and/or inhibition in interpersonal situations that interferes with pursuing one's interpersonal or professional goals" (Henderson, Zimbardo, & Carducci, 2001). Research does support the notion that shy individuals are drawn to the internet and prefer it as a space to meet people. For example, McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002) found that individuals who were socially anxious and lonely were more likely to believe they could express their true selves with others online than they could with others offline. Stritzke, Nguyen, and Durkin (2004) found, from surveying 134 university students, that shy individuals reported substantially lower levels of shyness, lower levels of rejection sensitivity, and higher levels of interpersonal competence with respect to initiating relationships in cyberspace compared to offline. In light of these results they contend that the absence of "visual and auditory cues online diminishes or prevents shy individuals from detecting negative or inhibitory cues" (Strizke et al., p.14-15). Importantly, Strizke et al. highlight that while the online environment may be advantageous for shy people, it does not eliminate the experience of shyness for them. Ward and Tracey (2004) surveyed 414

university students and asked whether they were involved or not in an online relationship. Interestingly, they found that shyness may influence one's desire to explore online relationships, but that "online relationships do not appear to be a panacea for greater relationship satisfaction, support, or engagement in relationships" (p. 622).

Of course, as previous researchers have claimed, not all places online are alike nor are the personality characteristics of the users of different internet sites (McKenna 2007; Whitty, 2003, 2007; Whitty & Carr, 2006). Therefore the reason for the discrepancy in results for shyness and internet use could be the motivations for using a particular site as well as how the site is set up. Although the research is sparse, when it comes to the initiation of relationships online, as illustrated above, research has consistently found that the socially anxious and shy are more likely to use the internet to initiate relationships than non-shy individuals and are more likely to prefer to use the internet to develop relationships than non-shy individuals.

Online dating

In relation to the matter of shyness and the use of online dating sites, Scharlott and Christ (1995) surveyed 102 registered subscribers to the online dating site Matchmaker. Shyness was assessed using a scale comprising statements such as: "I don't find it hard to talk to strangers" and "It is hard for me to act natural when I meet new people" (p. 197) that participants responded to using a 5-point scale (strongly agree – disagree) The significant findings were that "shier users were more likely to agree that Matchmaker allows them to explore new aspects of their personality" and that "seventy-four percent of the high-shyness users indicated that their main purpose in using Matchmaker was to find a romantic or sexual relationship, while only 46% of the low-shyness users answered that way" (Scharlott & Christ, 1995, p. 199).

The structure of online dating sites has changed since Scharlott and Christ (1995) collected their data in 1990. An important difference is the use of photos and videos on these sites. Having a photo obviously makes one less anonymous and could potentially put off shy individuals. Those theories (outlined earlier in this paper) that predict that shy people will prefer the internet as a place to meet potential mates, typically argue that this space is appealing for the shy because online individuals are often anonymous, the spaces seem less 'real', and there is obvious social distance between themselves and their potential mates. The anonymity that the internet often affords allows one to feel more comfortable to self-disclose (Joinson, 2001; Stritzke et

al., 2004; McKenna et al., 2002), and social distance provides a buffering effect, especially when it comes to dealing with rejection online (McKenna et al., 2002; Whitty, 2003). Online dating sites these days do not provide complete anonymity - as daters typically do and expect others to present to provide a photograph, and their identity can be partly leaked in other ways (e.g., daters often detail where they work, live, and socialise). In this study we were interested in finding out if the change to the structure of online dating sites, as well as the increased popularity of online dating, has brought about a different population of online daters. Qualitative research suggests that shy people might still inhabit this space. Whitty (2004a, Whitty & Carr, 2006) for instance found that 10% of the 60 individuals she interviewed claimed to be using online dating because they were shy and reserved. Obviously, more systematic empirical research is required to confidently argue that shy individuals are still more drawn to online dating. This is what the current study sets out to achieve.

It is also important to consider the extent to which preferences for online dating may be mediated by individuals' competence in initiating relationships. Given that online dating allows individuals to take their time at presenting themselves and approaching others it is plausible that people who prefer online dating enjoy this form of matchmaking because they are less competent than others in initiating relationships. Research to date has not considered this variable when it comes to online dating.

Speed dating

Very little research has been conducted on speed dating. While no studies to our knowledge have examined the personality characteristics of individuals who participate in such events, work has been done on the demographic characteristics of speed daters and their preferred matches. Kurzban and Weeden (2005) surveyed 10,526 speed daters about their mate preferences. The average age of men in their sample was 33.8 years and the average age of women was 31.4 years. These researchers found, in line with previous research on traditional face-to-face dating, that male speed daters tended to look for women who were thin, young, attractive, and of similar race. Female speed daters, in contrast, preferred men who were physically attractive, tall, young, medium build, and of similar race. Additionally, they found that heavier women said yes to a relatively high proportion of dates, while thin or heavy men were more likely to say yes to a greater portion of dates.

There is a dearth of research on personality characteristics and speed dating. Earlier in this paper we argued that speed dating involves simultaneously interacting and searching, followed by matching and further interacting. In addition, speed dating is a highly social and communicative event. Given this we might expect those who are outgoing and comfortable in social interactions, and who have preferences for activities involving other people (that it, those high in extraversion) to find this form of dating more appealing.

In addition to extraversion we believed that with regards to speed dating it was important to also consider sensation seeking (e.g., Zuckerman, 1994). Those who score high on this construct have a need for new and varied experiences, are risk takers who enjoy being disinhibited and engaging in a non-conventional lifestyle. Speed daters are expected to lose their inhibitions fairly quickly and it is still considered as a fairly non-traditional form of matchmaking. Therefore, we expected that those who score high on sensation seeking are more likely to try out and enjoy speed dating to find a potential match.

Hypotheses

In this paper we intend to extend upon the available literature on online dating and speed dating by examining the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to engage in these forms of dating. Although online dating initiates on the internet and speed dating initiates face-to-face this is not simply a study comparing CMC (computer mediated communication) dating methods and face-to-face dating. Rather, one needs to consider all of the distinctive characteristics of speed dating and online dating

In relation to online dating, we predict that individuals drawn to this form of dating will include those who are shy, socially anxious, and/or are lower in competence at initiating relationships. In relation to speed dating, we predict that the people drawn to this form of dating will be younger individuals who are relatively high in initiating relationships competence, extraversion, and/or sensation seeking.

Methods

Materials

A set of WWW pages and Perl CGI scripts were created for the purposes of data acquisition, hosted on the University of Westminster web server, and accessible via a

number of different addresses (a different web address was used for each of the recruitment conditions outlined below).

Participants initially provided information on their gender, age, country of residence, educational level, occupation, current relationship status, and sexual orientation. All apart from age (where they typed in a number) were answered by picking an option from a drop-down menu of choices. Individuals were then asked about dating activities: whether they were currently looking for a partner, and if so what type (long-term, short-term, or either). Three forms of dating (speed, online, and conventional) were then described, and participants asked whether they had tried each type. For speed dating, individuals were asked if they are tried it 'never', 'once' or 'more than once' and for online dating they were asked whether they had never used it, used it less than six months, or more than six months. Participants were also asked whether they would consider using these two matchmaking methods it in the future. They were presented with three options: 'would never consider using it in the future', 'might consider using it in the future', and definitely consider using it in the future'. All items were answered using drop-down menus. They were also asked to indicate, by typing in a text box, any other ways they were currently trying to find a partner. Unlike the other items, this was an open-ended question.

Following these questions, participants completed a series of short psychometric scales. Shyness was measured with 4 items, such as "I feel tense when I am with a group of people I don't know very well", responded to on a 5 point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree", giving a possible score range of 4 to 20 (Scharlott & Christ's 1995 adaptation of Bruch, Gorsky, Collins, & Berger, 1989). Social anxiety was measured with 15 items, such as "I often feel nervous even in casual get-togethers", responded to on a 5 point scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely characteristic", giving a possible score range of 15 to 75 (Leary, 1983). Sensation seeking was measured with 40 items using a forced choice format such as "I like 'wild' uninhibited parties" versus "I prefer quiet parties with good conversation", giving a possible score range of 0 to 40 (Sensation Seeking Scale form V, Zuckerman, 1994). Extraversion was measured by 9 items, such as "Am the life of the party" responded to on a 5 point scale ranging from "Very inaccurate" to "Very accurate", giving a possible score range of 5 to 45 (Buchanan, Johnson, & Goldberg, 2005). Initiating relationships was measured with 8 items, such as "Asking or suggesting to someone new that you get together and do something e.g. go out together", responded to on a 5 point scale ranging from "I'm poor at this, I'd feel so uncomfortable and unable to handle this

situation, I'd avoid it if possible" to "I'm EXTREMELY good at this, I'd feel very comfortable and could handle this situation very well", giving a possible score range of 8 to 40 (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988). Each of the instruments has previously been successfully used in internet-mediated research and found to be reliable when used in that format.

All of these instruments were presented as forms on a single web page. The psychometric scales, all of which were responded to by clicking on radio buttons, were presented in a manner that replicated the original paper-and-pencil versions of the questionnaires as closely as possible. Finally, participants were asked to indicate (by choosing from a menu) whether we could use their data for analysis or if there was some reason it should be discarded (e.g., if they had not answered the questions seriously).

Procedure

Participants were recruited using three methods. In the first phase of recruitment, the manager of an international online dating site was contacted to seek permission to contact individuals using their dating site to participate in the study. The manager of the site randomly selected 2,000 users who identified themselves as residents of the UK or USA and emailed them to participate in the study. The email sent to the participants provided details of the study and a link to the survey. In the second phase of recruitment, the manager of a speed dating company that holds events in the UK was contacted to seek permission to contact individuals who had participated in any of the company's events. The manager then emailed all individuals (4,700 people) who had participated in at least one of their speed dating events. The email sent to the participants was worded in exactly the same way as the email sent to online daters, with a separate link to the survey (so that we could distinguish between where our participants had been recruited from). The remainder of the participants were recruited through a personality testing website maintained by the second author. Users of that site locate it through web searches for personality tests or by following links from other pages, complete a Five-Factor personality inventory and are given feedback on their scores. Following debriefing, they are presented with the option to take part in various research projects. Those who clicked on a link to the current study form the remainder of our participants.

On arriving at the website for the current study, participants first saw an informed consent page describing the study and the kind of questions that would be

asked. They were told they would not receive feedback on the scales they completed, and were assured of anonymity. Those who wished to continue clicked on a link that took them to the next page. On the next page participants saw brief instructions and the items outlined above. Having completed the items, they then clicked on a button labeled 'Send' at the bottom of the page. They then saw a debriefing page, informing them about the purpose of the study and thanking them for their help. A link was provided to a page where a summary of the results was later made available. An email contact address was also provided on every page for respondents who wished to give us feedback or ask questions. No incentives or rewards for participation were offered or given.

Data screening and processing

The first step in data processing was to delete all 21 records from people indicating their data should not be used. Five incomplete records were also deleted at this point (one that was incomplete due to data transmission or storage problems, and four cases where none of the items had been answered). To control for possible multiple submissions from the same people (e.g., Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Schmidt, 1997), we assigned each participant a unique ID code at the first web page they went to. For any instances of duplicate ID codes in the datafile (which could be due to people clicking the submit button twice, or deliberately participating twice), all but the first instance was deleted. This led to the exclusion of three cases. Participants who gave their location as other than the United Kingdom or the United States of America were also excluded. This was decided for two reasons. First, we had set out in the online dating condition to only recruit individuals from the UK and USA. Second, we might expect a difference between individualistic and collectivist cultures (see Triandis, 1993). Therefore, to eliminate any potential biases due to cross-cultural differences we limited our sample to UK and US participants, which excluded an additional 40 participants from the final sample. Examination of the resulting data set indicated there were a number of cases where a high proportion of the items had not been answered. We decided to drop participants who had 10% or more of the items unanswered, which excluded a further seven participants. Data from the remaining participants were retained, with unanswered items coded as missing data where necessary. Finally, it was noted that the majority of the sample were heterosexuals with only eight individuals who identified as homosexual, nine who identified as bisexual, and six who preferred

not to say. Given that the online dating site and the speed dating company provided a service exclusively to heterosexuals it was decided to only retain those who identified themselves as heterosexual in the final sample.

Application of these criteria led to the exclusion of 101 of the initial 372 submissions. To detect instances of fraudulent or mischievous data entry among the remaining data, one technique often employed is to use demographic information to screen out implausible responses (e.g., very young respondents claiming to have doctoral degrees). No such instances were found, so all remaining submissions were retained.

Participants

Two hundred and seventy one responses met our inclusion criteria: 125 recruited via the online dating site, 64 recruited via the speed dating company, and 82 recruited via the personality test website. Of these, 157 (58%) were women and 111 (41%) were men (three people did not give their sex). Participants ranged between 17 and 65 years of age (M=33.3, SD=12.29). The majority of respondents came from the USA (65%) with the remainder (35%) being from the UK. Many were well educated, with the majority having at least degree level education (55%). The majority were employed, with the modal occupation being 'professional' (40%). Only 18% were in full time education.

The majority of participants (69%, 188 people) were looking for a long-term romantic partner, while only 2% (6 people) were looking specifically for a short-term encounter. Twenty-three percent (63) had no clear goal as to what they were looking for, and the remainder either said they were not looking for a partner (12 people) or did not answer the question (2 people). The majority were either single (63%, 170 people) or divorced (21%, 57 people). A total of 21 said they were married, cohabiting, or in a girlfriend/boyfriend type relationship. Of these 21, 6 fell into the group saying they were not looking for a partner, and 10 indicated they were looking for a relationship of some sort.

Results

Of the 271 respondents, the great majority had tried using other ways than speed or online dating to find partners in the past (212, 78%) but a surprising number (56,

21%) claimed never to have used other methods. Just over half (153, 57%) said they were currently using methods other than online or speed dating to find partners. The other methods they claimed to be using included, meeting people through the clubs and pubs scene, social activities, the gym, friends, blind dates, church, work, school, university, social activities, newspaper personals, other places online, and telephone services.

In the analysis that follows the online/speed dating status of each individual is based wholly on their self-reported experience, not the method used to recruit them. Around 60% of the sample had tried online dating (87, 32% for more than 6 months and 79, 29% for less than 6 months). Only a quarter had tried speed dating (42, 16% had done it once and 26, 10% had done it more than once). Chi square analysis indicated there was no association between having tried the two forms of dating (chi-square (4, N=269)=6.90, p=.14, two-tailed). However, they were not mutually incompatible: participants' ratings of the attractiveness of each type of dating for use in the future were correlated positively (r=.28, n= 258, p<.0005, two-tailed) indicating that people would consider multiple ways of finding partners. Among the 38 individuals who had tried both forms of dating, there were no differences in their rated attractiveness of each type for use in the future ($t_{(37)}$=.17, p=.86, two-tailed). The breakdown of the sample by experience of dating methods is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Experience of online and speed dating

| | | Tried Speed Dating? | | | |
		Never	Once	More than once	Total
Tried online dating?	Never	73	22	8	103
	Less than 6 months	57	13	9	79
	More than 6 months	72	7	9	87
	Total	201	42	26	269

For each of the scales completed by participants, reliability analyses were performed. Values of Cronbach's alpha, all in the acceptable range, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for scales completed

Variables	α	M	SD	N
Shyness	.89	10.66	4.26	268
Social Anxiety	.91	39.34	11.68	261
Sensation Seeking	.84	19.45	6.99	221
Extraversion	.88	30.28	7.05	268
Initiating Relationships	.88	25.68	6.33	265

Preliminary analyses indicated that respondents' scores on a number of these scales were intercorrelated. Given that regression analyses were planned, the existence of multicollinearity in the dataset was problematic. Tabachnick and Fidell (2000) recommend that one should consider excluding predictor variables that correlate greater than .7 with other predictors. Social Anxiety fell foul of this criterion, having correlations of .83 with Shyness, and -.74 with extraversion. Social Anxiety was thus excluded from analyses. While there were other intercorrelations among the predictors (indicating that these constructs share a high level of variance, unsurprising given their conceptual relatedness) all the remainder were within the range considered acceptable.

The extent to which Shyness, Sensation Seeking, Extraversion, and Initiating Relationships predicted participants' ratings of the extent to which they would consider using the different forms of dating (online and speed) were examined using separate multiple regressions (as participants were not asked to rate their likelihood of using other means in the same way, it is not included in this analysis). Given that demographic variables are known to influence dating preferences, Age and Sex were included as predictors. Whether or not participants had previously experienced that form of dating was also included as a predictor, as their experiences (whether good or bad) might strongly influence their likelihood of doing it again. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 3. In all cases, the analysis was performed with simultaneous entry of all predictor variables.

Table 3
Predictors of rated likelihood of using online and speed dating in future

Variables	Online dating[1]		Speed dating[2]	
	β	t	β	t
Age	0.24	3.80**	0.08	1.11
Sex	-0.05	-.85	-0.01	-0.10
Shyness	0.15	1.88†	0.08	0.75
Sensation Seeking	0.00	0.00	0.13	1.61
Extraversion	-0.01	-0.18	-0.19	-1.90
Initiating Relationships	0.05	0.65	0.11	1.12
Done Online	0.50	8.36**	-	-
Done Speed	-	-	0.18	2.51*

$p<.05$, two-tailed. ** $p<.01$, two-tailed. $^{\dagger}p<.05$, one-tailed.
[1]$F_{(7,196)}=21.06$, $p <.0005$, two-tailed; $R^2=.43$
[2]$F_{(7,196)}=1.88$, $p =.074$, two-tailed; $R^2=.063$
Note. One-tailed p values are used where a directional hypothesis was advanced, two-tailed for tests where we had no specific hypothesis.

For both types of dating, having done it in the past leads people to rate the likelihood of them using it in the future as significantly higher. Few other variables have any influence. As predicted, more shy people like online dating significantly more

(p=.031, one-tailed). It was also found that age was positively associated with attraction to online dating.

As well as factors influencing people's preferences, we were interested in whether these preferences translated into actual behavior: did people who had actually engaged in these types of dating differ in their demographic and personality characteristics? The extent to which Shyness, Sensation Seeking, Extraversion, and Initiating Relationships predicted participants' ratings of the extent to which they actually used these forms of dating (online and speed) were examined using separate multiple regressions. (Again, participants were not asked to rate their likelihood of using other means in the same way, so it is not included in this analysis.) Given that demographic variables are known to influence dating preferences, Age and Sex were again included as predictors. The results of these analyses are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

Predictors of the actual use of online and speed dating

Variables	Online dating[1]		Speed dating[2]	
	β	t	β	t
Age	.35	5.14**	-.12	-1.68[†]
Sex	.03	.51	-.03	-.42
Shyness	.20	2.13[†]	-.09	-.90
Sensation Seeking	-.11	-1.54	-.01	-.18
Extraversion	-.05	-.52	.12	1.25
Initiating Relationships	.17	1.87	-.10	-.98

p<.05, two-tailed. ** p<.01, two-tailed. [†]p<.05, one-tailed.
[1]$F_{(6,201)}$=7.61, p <.0005, two-tailed; R^2=.19
[2]$F_{(6,203)}$=1.22, p =.30, two-tailed; R^2=.04
Note. One-tailed p values are used where a directional hypothesis was advanced, two-tailed for tests where we had no specific hypothesis.

As predicted, more shy people had used online dating significantly more (p<.05, one-tailed). It was also found that age was positively associated with using online dating (p<.0005, two-tailed). As predicted, age was negatively associated with using speed dating (p<.05, one-tailed).

The analyses thus far have suggested that both age and shyness are linked to participation in, and liking for, speed and online dating activities. Accordingly, further analyses were performed to clarify how speed and online daters might differ in these key characteristics.

A two-way ANOVA was performed to test for differences in shyness among those who had or had not participated in online and speed dating. Given the small numbers in some of the cells of the design (see Table 1) they were collapsed so that each variable had two levels: those who had done it, and those who had not. There were

no significant main effects of online ($F_{(1,262)=}.13$, $p=.72$, two-tailed) or speed ($F_{(1,262)}=.90$, $p=.34$, two-tailed) dating and no interaction ($F_{(1,262)=}1.22$, $p=.27$, two-tailed).

The same analysis was then performed using age as the dependent variable. There were significant main effects of both online ($F_{(1,263)=}27.85$, $p<.0005$, two-tailed) and speed ($F_{(1,263)}=.4.88$, $p=.028$, two-tailed) dating, and a significant interaction ($F_{(1,263)=}.5.05$, $p=.025$, two-tailed) between the two. Those who had done speed dating were younger than those who had not (estimated marginal means of 29.92 ($SE=1.38$) and 33.45 ($SE=.81$) years old respectively). Conversely, people who had tried online dating were older than those who had not (estimated marginal means of 35.90 ($SE=1.02$) and 27.47 ($SE=1.23$) years old respectively). Among those who had not done online dating, the estimated marginal mean ages of those who had and had not done speed dating were very similar (27.44 and 27.50 years respectively). However, among those who had done online dating, those who had also done speed dating were considerably younger (32.34 years) than those who had not (39.46 years).

Discussion

This study set out to find out what types of people engage in online dating and speed dating and what types of people prefer these relatively new forms of dating methods. We hypothesised that individuals who are shy, socially anxious, and/or lower in competence at initiating relationships would be drawn to online dating. In addition, we hypothesised that younger people who are relatively high in initiating relationships competence, extraversion, and/or sensation seeking would be drawn to speed dating. Few of our hypotheses, however, were supported.

It is worthy of note that the overall regression statistics indicated that the measured variables did a fair job of predicting that who will be drawn to online dating. As predicted our regressions did reveal that individuals who scored high on shyness were more likely to have tried online dating and were more likely to rate online dating as a form of dating they would like to use in the future. This is consistent with previous empirical research, which has consistently found that shy individuals are more likely than non-shy to use the internet to initiate relationships and that shy people are more likely to prefer to use the internet to develop relationships than non-shy individuals. Of particular relevance to this paper is Scharlott and Christ's study (1995), which is the only previous empirical study to specifically examine shyness in the context of online

dating. These researchers found in 1990 with a text-based online dating site that shy people are more drawn to online matchmaking than non-shy individuals.

As we noted earlier in this paper it is important to consider theoretically why shy individuals might be drawn to the internet to initiate romantic relationships. Whitty and her colleagues (2003, 2007; Whitty & Carr, 2003, 2006), for instance, drawing from object relations theory, have argued that online dating could be considered a 'safe haven' for shy individuals. Stritzke et al. (2004) have agreed with this notion. Whitty (2003, 2004b) also believes that because this space feels less real for individuals and is a seemingly more playful space, it might be perceived by shy people as an easier place to try out opening lines and to cyberflirt. Another reason offered by researchers as to why shy people might find online dating more appealing is because it provides a greater social distance between singles. For instance, Whitty (2003) has argued that the internet offers a buffer zone where individuals do not have to face the full harsh reality of the rejection of their character and/or appearance. This obviously would be appealing to shy individuals given that they feel nervous interacting face-to-face with other people. A final reason proposed by researchers as to why shy individuals might prefer the internet to initiate relationships is the anonymity it affords (Joinson, 2004; McKenna et al., 2002). For example, McKenna (2007) has stated that "those features that are most readily perceived, such as physical appearance (attractiveness), an apparent stigma (e.g., stuttering), or apparent shyness or social anxiety often serve as gates in our face-to-face interactions." She believes that the anonymity the internet affords opens these gates to shy individuals (McKenna, 2007; McKenna et al., 2002). Each of these theoretical perspectives would seem viable as an explanation of the present findings.

As previously noted, Scharlott and Christ (1995) found that shy individuals were more drawn to online dating. The online dating site examined in that study was text based, unlike modern sites that can present much richer content including photographs and video clips. Nowadays, presentation of photos in a profile is the norm: in fact, online daters typically bypass a profile that does not include a photograph (Whitty, 2004a, 2007; Whitty & Carr, 2006). The presence of a photograph means that a person is, at least, not visually anonymous. Researchers have clearly demonstrated that the use of photographs online can alter how we communicate and how drawn we are to another person (Joinson, 2003; Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001). Given this it was important to investigate whether shy individuals might still prefer online dating as a method to find a partner. The present findings suggest they do. This is possibly because online dating still provides the social distance and less real environment that others have

argued make online dating a more appealing space for shy individuals. Arguably having visual presence has not put off shy individuals. Future research needs to be conducted to establish what the attraction of online dating for the shy actually is, if not visual anonymity, and to test which of the theoretical perspectives outlined above best accounts for these findings.

Interestingly, we also found that older individuals were more likely to have tried online dating and were more likely to want to use it as a method of dating in the future. Whitty (2004a, Whitty & Carr, 2006) found that 57% of her sample of online daters had decided to use this form of dating as an alternative to the pubs and clubs scene. Many of the individuals she interviewed said they felt too old to go about dating via more traditional methods and had it not been for the internet they would not have considered even hoping to find romance again in their lives. The current study adds empirical support to the notion that older individuals are drawn to online dating.

Those who had tried online dating were more likely to rate online dating as a method of dating they would like to use in the future. This indicates that either online daters are enjoying this method of dating or that they do not perceive other alternatives. At any rate, the initial experience of online dating has not deterred many people.

Our other hypothesis in respect to online daters was not supported by our data. We did not find that those low in relationship competence were more drawn to online dating. We argued earlier in this paper that those low in relationship competence would enjoy online dating given that this form of dating allows them to take their time at presenting themselves and approaching others. Perhaps revisiting Ahuvia and Adelman's (1992) SMI theory might provide a clue as to why we did not find the results we were expecting. With online dating, individuals are typically expected to do the searching and matching themselves which Whitty and Carr (2006) have argued is no easy feat. Given the skills required in self-presentation and in seeking out appropriate matches those low in relationship competence may find this a less appealing environment than say other matchmaking methods (e.g., introduction agencies) where others do the initial work for singles.

When it comes to speed dating we found that, as predicted, a younger cohort of individuals is more likely to try out this form of dating. So why might this form of dating appeal to younger people? The answer is probably quite simple. This age group is more likely to have friends who are also single and speed dating events are set up as a social event not just for singles to enjoy, but also for their friends to enjoy a social night out together. Perhaps speed dating is a little similar to having a night out 'on the pull'

with friends, except that speed dating is more structured and directive. It is noteworthy that we did not find that younger people were more likely to say they would use speed dating in the future. So perhaps it does not live up to this cohort's expectations or maybe it is more difficult to organise a group to go along to such an event on a regular basis.

Those who had tried speed dating were more likely to want to use speed dating as a method to find a mate in the future. However, the effect was not as strong as it was for online dating. Again, this might have something to do with this being a more social event that requires organizing a bunch of singles rather than going it alone online.

Our hypotheses that those relatively high in initiating relationships competence, extraversion, and/or sensation seeking would be drawn to speed dating were not supported by our data. To explain our non-significant results for initiating relationships competence it might be helpful to refer back to the speed dating relationship progression model we proposed in our introduction (IS-M-I). Although interaction and searching are required in the first instance, the decision as to whether someone is a good match is made by the individual in their own time and without having to interact. When the speed dater decides who are good matches they hand in their score card to the person running the event, who matches them up with others who indicated the interest was reciprocated. This is different to conventional methods, such as meeting someone in a bar, where the decision is typically made whilst interacting. Therefore, individuals high in initiating relationships competence might be more drawn to conventional methods where this competence is more important.

Our finding that extraverts were not significantly more likely than introverts to be drawn to speed dating might be explained by the short interactions individuals experience during speed dating. It is possible that, given the limited and structured nature of the interaction, extraversion makes less of a difference in this situation than it would in more conventional social settings.

Finally, our prediction that those high in sensation seeking would be drawn to speed dating was also not supported. Perhaps speed dating, given that it is conducted in a controlled environment, is not perceived as such an unconventional, exciting or daring activity as we initially believed it to be.

The overall regression statistics for speed dating indicated that the variables we measured accounted for little variance in preference for and actual use of speed dating. Preference for speed dating appears to be mediated by other factors not measured in our model. One such factor might be the motivation to simply enjoy a night out with friends

rather than purely being motivated to find an appropriate romantic match. Whether speed dating participants are actually attending events in order to find partners is a question that should be considered in future research.

To further add to the picture we also compared the means for the significant variables shyness and age. We employed a two-way ANOVA to compare shyness amongst those who had tried and those who had not tried online dating and those who had tried speed dating and those who had not. This analysis, however, revealed no significant effects. This implies that while our regression indicated that online dating appeals to shy people, not all all online daters are shy. We also ran a two-way ANOVA for the same independent variables, this time using age as a dependent variable. Interestingly, a significant interaction was revealed, where we found that those who had done both online and speed dating were considerably younger than those who never tried speed dating but had tried online dating. Interestingly, it is the younger cohort who is more likely to have tried both methods, with the older cohort preferring online dating as a method.

It is also worth noting that 21% of our sample claimed that speed dating and/or online dating were the only methods they had used to find partners. It seems unlikely that these people had never met potential partners in other ways: perhaps a more realistic interpretation of this finding is that they had never *actively* sought relationships by other means. Nonetheless, it would be informative to explore why individuals such as these prefer such methods over more traditional techniques, such as, the pubs and clubs scene. It could be, as previous research has found, that some individuals feel they have exhausted their options in traditional spaces, or that they do not drink, or enjoy meeting people via more traditional methods (Whitty 2004a, Whitty & Carr, 2006).

This study was limited in a number of ways. Social anxiety correlated highly with many of our predictor variables, and as a consequence was left out of the final analysis. The overall variance explained in our regression analyses for speed dating was notably low. This suggests that other variables need to be considered by future researchers to account for motivation to use speed dating as way to meet other singles. While the present study focused exclusively on personality and demographic variables, there are other factors (e.g., lifestyle, convenience, peer group activity) that may be more important. Further work to investigate such factors would be useful. This study also restricted its investigation to a heterosexual sample, given the low numbers of homosexuals and bisexuals who chose to complete the survey. Future research might find differences between each of these groups. Other variables, such as rejection

sensitivity could also be considered in future research. Furthermore, the final sample only included UK and US residents. Future research might consider whether these results hold across other cultures. While, importantly, we did use a variety of methods to recruit online daters, speed daters, and those who used neither there is still the question of generalisability. There is the possibility that there may be special characteristics of the groups we recruited from that account for our findings. Future research is needed to determine whether our sample represents the majority of online daters and speed daters. Moreover, while online dating sites and speed dating events follow similar formulae, it could well be that some have a greater appeal for some types of individuals more than others. For instance, online dating sites which do more of the matchmaking work for individuals might appeal to those who are less 'relationship competent'.

In conclusion, this study compared two distinct matchmaking methods. They are not only distinct in the spaces that the singles meet but also in their attributes. Importantly, we did find some differences in the types of people drawn to online dating and the types of people drawn to speed dating. Armed with this knowledge counselors and therapists might be able to recommend more appropriate matchmaking methods to singles. Perhaps the most important result revealed in this study was that shy individuals do tend to gravitate to cyberspace to initiate relationships. Online dating may therefore be an avenue for those with social inhibitions to overcome their fears. Moreover, although cyberspace is not a homogenous space, it would seem that when we consider the all the available research to date, shy people do tend to use a range of spaces online to initiate romantic relationships. In addition, we found that older individuals are drawn to online dating and younger people are more likely to have tried speed dating. The dating arena is a constantly changing playing-field and as this study suggests some people are more drawn to particular dating methods over others. Future research should bear this in mind and continue to examine what types of people are drawn to certain dating methods.

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