Online Dating and the Function of Anticipating Comparisons between Self-Presentation
Report Veridicality and Potential Face-to-Face Interaction on Impression Management

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This thesis titled
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ABSTRACT

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Online Dating and the Function of Anticipating Comparisons between Self-Presentation Report Veridicality and Potential Face-to-Face Interaction on Impression Management

Director of Thesis: Carson B Wagner

In this thesis, impression management is investigated in the context of a mixed model dating or an online matchmaking followed by face-to-face interactions. Employing the bogus pipeline technique, in a controlled laboratory experiment designed to compare reports about oneself, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: either believing that one’s information will later be verified by a second party (bogus pipeline condition) or not being made to believe that (control condition). All participants were asked to complete an online dating profile questionnaire where their personal information, such as height and weight was required. Comparing data between the two conditions, a statistically significant difference in reported Body Mass Index (BMI) was found between the groups. That finding suggests that the bogus pipeline procedure employed evoked comparatively significantly more veridical information from participants in that condition, with respect to the control condition. Such results illustrate the potential effects of online daters’ anticipation of meeting offline in providing more empirically validated information to online dating websites. A hypothesis of perceived future expectancy disconfirmation, which would lead others to be dissatisfied if one creates expectations that will not be met, together with the desire to be honest as well as to be accepted in a romantic relationship predicts and explains the findings.
DEDICATION

To my maternal grandmother (1943 - 2015), 何秋花 (Mrs. Qiuhua He),

who loves and supports me unconditionally,

even in Heaven.
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I would like to sincerely acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Carson B Wagner, for the continuous support of my study and research, with his great patience and immense knowledge. He not only provided me with an opportunity to join his ViDS Effects Lab as a Co-coordinator that gave me the access to the experimental resources to develop this research, but also offered enormous valuable suggestions to design this study. Without his support, it would be impossible to complete this experiment. I would also like to thank the rest of my thesis committee members–Drs. Michael Sweeney and Tom Daniels–for their incredibly insightful comments and encouragements, as well as their suggestions to widen and deepen the thesis from various perspectives.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Professional mediated matchmaking has a long, consistent history at least since late-twentieth century (Schaefer, 2003) when newspaper and radio dating were popular (Woll & Cosby, 1987), while generally such a practice has been practiced within various subcultures around the world for hundreds of years (Dasgupta, 2008). In modern society, technological advances and greater social distance have reinvigorated our tendencies to distort facts about ourselves to enhance attraction and improve impressions upon others, when searching for a date (Zytko, Grandhi, & Jones, 2014). Those phenomena, in turn, have renewed a call for exploring impression management strategies.

Impression management theory (see, e.g., Tedeschi, 1981; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) systematically predicts and explains our attempts to control interpretations of ourselves, although perhaps the earliest pontification of such a phenomenon, as used within the field of communication, was provided by Goffman (1959) who believed that we see ourselves as actors or actresses playing on the stage of life, with an aim to convey various versions of ourselves, in order to evoke desired responses from others.

Using online dating sites, our tendencies to engage in impression management (Schlenker, 1980)—which perhaps are most often represented by attempts to influence others’ perceptions of us in favorable ways—can affect our self-presentations, in ways that make us look more socially desirable, in comparison to our empirical selves. Particularly, given the technological features of social dating websites, the medium between us and others in online dating, allow us to present ourselves in a variety of ways that might stretch the truth—whether we do so knowingly or unknowingly (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992)—when participating in computer-mediated matchmaking. Such a process is both similar to
and different from what we have been imagined to do in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Given both the possible technological enhancements of ourselves and the social distance that are present in computer mediation, but not in interpersonal communication, allow for greater manipulation of our self-presentation in ways that aren’t possible, interpersonally, although, at the heart of the process, we are still performing as actors, in ways such as those that Goffman (1959) had described.

However, when we recognize that we might likely continue developing a virtual relationship, through interpersonal, face-to-face romance, it would follow that our such tendencies will be tempered, if not almost completely negated, because we would not like to disappoint another – at least to the extent that they difference between the expectations we created, online, and those we continue, offline, do not cause the other to be so dissatisfied as to reject us (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). So, as online daters, we would very likely be more honest in managing our impressions through online dating profile creation, when anticipating that our virtual self-presentation will be compared to our actual selves at some future point, in order to avoid others’ dissatisfaction and maintain a relationship. That is, we sometimes foresee the possibility of creating expectations that will be disconfirmed when someone meets us in day-to-day life, if we present ourselves too ideally in our online dating profiles.

Date seekers can take advantage of profile-based online dating sites to interact with those we may like, while hopefully reducing possibilities of mismatching (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012), because such sites offer electronic venues for us to connect with others based on personal profiles. The general background of online dating involves in computer-mediated communication (CMC; Romiszowski & Mason,
1996), wherein our computers are used as tools for us to get on the Internet, where the communication occurs. CMC can reduce communication cues in physically separating communicators (Jones, 1995). The social identity explanation of de-individual effects (SIDE) model predicts that one behaves in the way that he or she perceives as mainstream and socially desirable (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Particularly, as compared to in person meetings, CMC reduces the constriction of social norms due to the limited communication cues and the possibility of anonymity (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). Recent studies show that participants report tendencies to lie – at least within a small magnitude – given we may eventually meet another offline (Rosenbloom, 2011). Rosenbloom (2011) explains such phenomenon with the idea of expectancy disconfirmation (Burgoon & Poire, 1993). That is, we will do poorly to oversell ourselves if we are found to deceive because others may feel dissatisfied when meeting in person, if expectations are noticeably inconsistent with what used to be promised.

Perhaps the described attributes of CMC may affect individuals’ impression management strategies in a mixed online/offline communication, especially in online dating, “wherein people first meet online and then move offline” (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 415). As such, it is valuable to question whether we may aim to stretch the truth about our attractiveness, by presenting our ideal selves (see, Dovidio & Fazio, 1992) while listing physical characteristics; especially when romantic attraction, which is partly determined by physical attractiveness (Pierce, 1996), is reported as one of the main influential factors on dating decisions (Fiore, 2004).

Examining the psychological mechanisms of impression management and expectancy disconfirmation in the context of online dating, this thesis explores online
daters’ impression management practices with using the bogus pipeline (BPL) procedure to improve understandings of how individuals present themselves in the online communication. Specifically, this thesis compares impression management between responses when participants are thinking about the possibility of expectancy disconfirmation upon meeting someone and responses when participants are not thinking ahead in such a manner. BPL often employs the specter of participants being tested with a polygraph machine, as they provide their responses, so that participants believe that their answers are being monitored. However, the machine is not actually being used, to do so – it is simply there as a manipulation to (hopefully) evoke more veridical–or accurate–responses from study participants.

To examine the effects of a BPL manipulation designed to generate more empirically valid responses, a two-condition, controlled laboratory experiment was conducted, wherein experimental group responses–in the form of calculating BMIs, as a function of reported height and weight–are compared to those of a control group, who are not told that their responses will be verified – meaning that no BPL is performed, with that group. Within the study, BPL presence (see, Quigley-Fernandez & Tedeschi, 1978) is the independent variable (IV), with values of present and not present, and height/weight responses allow for the calculation of BMI as the dependent variable (DV), which is compared between two conditions, in order to examine response veridicality.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines prior research on CMC (Romiszowski & Mason, 1996), impression management (Schlenker, 1980), and expectancy disconfirmation (Burgoon & Poire, 1993), in the context of online dating, along with an examination of BPL (Jones & Sigall, 1971), as is used to elicit more veridical information from participants in an experimental group. That will be done in attempt to explain our everyday practices of impression management. Such practices, it will be hypothesized herein, can be significantly altered, if one is or becomes aware of the idea that, in the future, people with whom they may want to have a lasting relationship will compare them to the way in which they had presented themselves, online – and if they are too different from what they had reported, online, their potential mate may become dissatisfied, when their expectations are dashed.

Prior research about mediated dating, specifically online dating, has shown that individuals manage their impressions in promoting their interest, as well as in being honest (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). However, despite all good intentions, one can - and likely does – misrepresent oneself, unknowingly or unknowingly; because we want to be our ideal selves (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992). Unsurprisingly, considering the level of physical attractiveness – a major component of likability (Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975) – impression management is widely utilized in traditional dating contexts (Brown, 2007; Wallace, 2001). However, online dating is typically different, due to the goal of the communication, as well as its features.

On the one hand, CMC separates online communicators physically so people can manage impressions without constrictions; one the other hand, deception might not be
applicable owing to an awareness of potential information verification or disconfirmation (Burgoon & Poire, 1993).

Impression Management in Online Dating

Previous research shows that people can affect others by managing their impressions online in social interaction aside from merely reporting or describing facts about themselves. One of the first formal discussions about the idea of impression management – although it is not named as such – is Goffman’s (1959) work on self-presentation based on social anticipations of what to expect in some goal-oriented social behaviors (Poli, 2014). Consistent with social anticipation goals, Jones and Pittman (1982) describe five strategies in impression management 1) ingratiation, which refers to the attempt to affect others with respect to the appeal of one’s personal qualities 2) intimidation, refers to the strategy utilized to threaten the target so as to convince the goal that s/he is dangerous; 3) self-promotion, describing oneself with the goal of being competent; 4) exemplification, or individuals do more than their duties to appear being dedicated; 5) supplication, wherever people show their weakness to others to hunt for help.

Among of those five strategies, ingratiation and self-promotion are the tactics on which scholars frequently focus. Specifically, people often distort facts about themselves to make their impressions on another (Fisher, 1993) in a socially favorable manner (Holtgraves, 2004). The occurrence of that impression management strategy is and has been widely documented in job interviewing (Stevens & Kristof, 1995), political images (Bolino, 1999), and its influences on performance ratings (Wayne & Liden, 1995), based on the assumption that people deceive on purpose to improve impression and increase
their chances to be considered more highly in a competitive manner. Such planned behavior can be predicted by *descriptive norms*, such as, if a majority is doing something, then there is a sensible reason to do it (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991).

Descriptive norms are useful to predict intentional behaviors (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). However, impression management cannot be considered planned behavior in all situations and dispositional antecedents (Tedeschi, 1981). Specifically, even if people consistently (and perhaps subconsciously) get feedback concerning their impressions formation from other people, they manipulate the impression only if they desire to control the way in which they are judged by others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Impression construction, noted by Leary and Kowalski (1990), is not restricted to the intentional behavior to create a personal characteristic, but also to shape physical appearance, interests, belief, and so on both consciously or subconsciously.

Fabricating stories to potential partners in order to bolster perceived compatibility can be an intentional or unintentional behavior (Li, Srinivasan, & Sun, 2009; Zytko, Freeman, Gandhi, Herring, & Jones, 2015). Nevertheless, studies only demonstrate the phenomenon that Internet users consciously portray idealized selves in their online profiles even when asserting that they are honest in presenting themselves (Ellison et al., 2006; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006). However, the practice has shown unintentional impression management happens more frequently, as compared to intentional management, considering restricted communication cues such as the lack of face-to-face interaction (Krisanic, 2008).

In addition, research on such knowing or unknowing online impression management is limited to online interaction, whereas empirical predictions on this issue
are principally determined by the context and communication goals. Studies regarding impression management specialize in investigating the phenomenon on social networking sites (e.g., Lo & McKercher, 2015) that are used to develop and maintain relationships (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), due to the fact that online interaction has become a method of building relationships, often in addition to face-to-face communication (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). Noting that impression management occurs both online and offline in the current context calls for an exploration of the ways people present themselves in online dating profiles, based on the motivation of initiating and potentially developing a romantic relationship.

Computer-Mediated Communication and Online Dating

Together with limited verbal information and the frequent absence of non-verbal interactions, CMC prevents communicators from receiving personal information such as emotional, social content (Rice & Love, 1987) and synchronous interaction, in the ways that it could occur during face-to-face communication. By reducing influences of a physical environment that could limit social impressions (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986), CMC provides Internet users with possibilities to plan disclosure (Ochs, 1979) and focus more on constructing information (McGrath, 1991; Walther, 1995), perhaps based on needs.

For example, the increased likelihood of managing online daters’ impressions invisibly may lead online daters to possibly present an ideal self (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Kalinowski & Matei, 2011) – perhaps despite that they might, at least eventually, meet another and be compared to that person’s expectations. In other words, online daters have reported to have more positively misrepresented themselves (Smith & Duggan, 2013) and that activity may be exaggerated, when those
daters are not considering the future, within which they would meet prospective partners who have been given only the description/information and a positively exaggerated profile on a website.

Given that CMC supports task-oriented forms of communication, such as online dating (e.g., match.com) or career networking (e.g., linkedin.com) better than face-to-face interaction, studies have documented that personal descriptions in CMC differ by the media, aspects, and targets. For example, Warkentin, Woodworth, Hancock, and Cormier (2010) find that people say they tend to lie more in ephemeral media in which meetings begin and end quickly (e.g., chat rooms such as chat-avenue.com, where people go to pass the time) and less in persistent media, in which conversations continue, over time (e.g., Internet forums such as special interest websites). That is posited to be most likely because it is easy to detect lies when users’ information and personalities are re-presented in an ongoing conversation, which is essentially a recording, over time.

Similar results have illustrated that an individual may be more likely to lie when the mediated communication is synchronous, or happens shortly, and unrecorded (Zimbler & Feldman, 2011). Moreover, users are more likely to deceive about factors that they consider to be unimportant, in online communication (Donath, 1999), such as lying about their interests in online résumés, because it is perceived that such factors will not hurt the possibility of pursuing offline communication (Guillory & Hancock, 2009). Individuals prefer to tell more self-serving lies than other-oriented lies to people they are close while they tell more other-oriented lies to those with whom they are not familiar with, in order to gain friendship (Whitty & Joinson, 2009; Whitty & Carville, 2008).
The anonymity of online dating is reported to contribute to a high level of truthfulness about oneself (Rheingold, 1993), by removing the perceived need to conform to social norms. The SIDE model (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995) predicts that anonymity can have profound effects on human behavior by altering salient personal/social identity. SIDE is based on the assumption that irrational group behaviors result from the social impact of people de-individualizing themselves in line with social norms in order to enhance salience of social identity (Reicher et al., 1995). Given the possibility of unidentifiable online dating profiles, users can feel free to disclose a true self unfettered by the impact of social norms.

Wallace (1999) notes that information on the Internet can be more truthful than more traditional media, resulting in the comfort users may get in an online environment (McKenna & Bargh, 1998) as well as the intention of forming relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996). Given that online dating sites support task-oriented forms of communication better than face-to-face interaction, “the very format of the profile” (Toma, 2006, p. 5) which only permits users to upload limited information, may force online daters to maximize their attractiveness in order to positively influence their potential mates (D’Costa, 2014) when seeking a serious relationship. According to a Pew Research Center (Smith & Duggan, 2013) report, 66 percent of online daters have met someone they knew from online dating sites, which indicates that two-thirds of online daters developed relationships offline. In a profile-based dating site, daters’ profiles are the primary tool to support the creation, accrual, and conversion (Ellison & Boyd, 2013) of romantic interaction. Therefore, online daters may pay close attention to editing their profiles. For example, 30 percent of female online daters ask their friends’ suggestions to
make their profiles more attractive, but only 16 percent of males use that method (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

Social desirability is a factor that makes individuals feel pleasant, and therefore, considerable research has explored the personality aspects for which online daters pay additional attention to improve their impressions (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Nederhof, 1985; Wagner & Sundar, 2009). For example, 61 percent of online users say they lie about their age (Whitty, 2002). Also, given that members of online dating sites whose physical attributes (height, weight, body type) meet the ideal body mass index (BMI), which is a form of height to weight ratio, Internet users tend to misrepresent their body attraction in general (See, Appendix D for the BMI Formula), according to a countrywide survey in the U.S. (Hitch, Hortacsu, & Ariely, 2004).

(Mis)representation in Online Dating

Prior research has explored factors online daters pay additional attention to improving their impressions. Prior research has found that people could positively (mis)represent themselves—such as physical appearance (Berscheid, Dion, Walter, & Walter, 1971) – to be as socially desirable as possible, so that they could entice others for a date (Brown, 2007; Rosenbloom, 2011). For example, the increased likelihood to manage online daters’ impressions invisibly may lead online daters to present an ideal self (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Dovidio & Fazio, 1992) – especially when they are not considering eventually meeting each other and must be compared with that person’s expectations. As a result, online daters have been shown to enhance their physical appearance and such activity may be exaggerated when such daters are not considering the future, within which they would meet prospective partners who have been given only
the description/information and literally a hot shot profile image that has been posted on the website (Ellison et al. 2006).

However, as Goffman (1971) summarizes, a relationship initiates when people interact via face-to-face or by other-mediated communication, and it develops when people interact over a period of time. The online romantic relationship involves initiation as well as development, during which commitment is typically required. So the question is posed that if people initiate online dating on the condition that they recognize they may be able to meet face-to-face, will those same people (mis)represent themselves because others consciously or subconsciously prefer to date according to superficial social desirability (Berscheid et al., 1971)?

In order to better understand the phenomenon of virtual (mis)representation, various studies have either explored self-reported reasons for online dating deception, or tested self-presentation theory through CMC (Ellison et al., 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2012; García, 2014; Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008), including online daters’ judgments on their attractiveness (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Fewer studies have investigated methods in which impression management can influence others and are influenced by the content in new technological communication platforms such as CMC (Ellison et al., 2006). For instance, mixed mode communication shapes impression management strategies that online daters use to frame the description of physical appearances and practice impression management (Goffman, 1959) on others. Traditionally, physical attractiveness is among the foci reported when individuals clarify their reasons for selecting a possible match (Cornwell et al., 2001; Dion, Berscheid, &
Walter, 1972; White, 1980). In turn, physical attractiveness is often defined by social desirability (Leary et al., 1990; Nezlek & Leary, 2002); or rather, it refers to physical attributes that are culturally coveted.

A romantic relationship goal among online daters is a mediator between a desire to optimize one’s physical attractiveness in online dating and a desire to be honest (Ellison et al., 2006) and accepted unconditionally (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Knowing that information presented on profiles may affect others’ decisions to pursue a relationship, those who seek offline communication or a long-term relationship may be unwilling to deceive. This is especially true because a potential partner is likely to feel unsatisfied if one has not been honest in presenting herself or himself (Ellison et al., 2006).

Such an argument is explained and predicted by expectancy disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1977; Elkhani & Bakri, 2012), which, in this instance, will assume that there is a noticeably large discrepancy between the imagination of an object before choosing and the experience during (and after) meeting a dater. Individuals may be disappointed in their decisions if the ensuing experience is worse than the expectancy (Elkhani, et. al., 2012), and that will make it less likely that one will date that person a second time.

Warranting, which refers to the connection between one’s actual condition and one’s self-description, is developed to fit in such context where communication migrates from online to offline (Walther & Parks, 2002). Toma’ (2006) specifically defines warranting as “the process of triangulating information contained in the disembodied online world with information from the offline world and, by its very nature, reduces opportunities for deception” (p. 12). Therefore, when facing a dilemma of whether to
either present their positive attributes to be most attractive or to present themselves more naturally, to be accepted by others – even with their shortcomings – the desire to be understood by one’s partner (Reis et al., 1988) and to build up a firm intimacy relationship may lead online daters to disclose their true selves.

By balancing accuracy and desirability in impression management (Ellison et al. 2006), online daters’ desire of developing and maintaining an intimate relationship leads them to avoid consciously misrepresentation and to be honest toward their (potential) partner(s). Rosenbloom (2011) documents research on online dating to clarify that (mis)representation has less to do with deceitful presentation on social networking sites when people are considering making friends or searching for mates offline.

Overall, one’s online dating profile constitutes a connection between one’s online and authentic personas (Toma, 2006). It is expected that participants who are in a BPL experimental condition – or rather, those who are aware that information verification will occur after completing the online profile questionnaires – will present more truthful in their profiles compared with the control condition participants who do not receive the BPL manipulation. According to the literature reviewed above, that is, because those who are told that their information will be verified recognize that when meeting offline or when constant communication, their true selves will be revealed. Moreover, if the expectancies they create are not met, then they will perceive themselves to be less likely to develop a romantic relationship, the larger goal of online dating, in most instances.

Bogus Pipeline Procedure

Jones and Sigall (1971) first proposed the *bogus pipeline procedure* (BPL) in order to evoke more veridical, or accurate, responses to their questions. The bogus
pipeline, as those researchers first employed (1971), is an experimental manipulation designed to elicit one’s truthful responses about topics (e.g., height and weight) that, as a function of social desirability, may lead individuals to mask their veridical responses, in order to create a better impression on others – potential dates, in this study. As a metaphor, the pipeline refers to a process along which the fake information is passed to the participants to convince them believing the information verification procedure, thereby report more veridical thoughts. This thesis study tests the hypothesis that individuals are more honest when they believe their information is to be verified.

The Bogus Pipeline Procedure manipulation (BPL; Aronson, Carlsmit, & Brewer, 1985) employed in the present experiment is different from prior studies, insofar as it does not use a polygraph–as was originally used–but rather, the presence of height and weight measurement scales (a tape measure and a weighing scale) that participants are told will be used to measure their height and weight after they respond, whereas the control condition simply includes participants’ unmanipulated self-reports (Hancock, Curry, Goorha, & Woodworth, 2004). That is, the purported future use of height and weight measures form a functional procedure to collect individuals’ veridical, self-reported responses, particularly attitudes towards sensitive issues (Quigley-Fernandez, et. al., 1978; Sabini, Siepmann & Stein, 2001). As a practical procedure, Jones and Sigall (1971) first proposed BPL to eliminate influences beyond independent variable(s), the suspected causal variables of interest, or rather, other potential variables that may also affect the results, such as implicit attitudes (social desirability bias, or personal stereotyping), and explicit factors (the experimenters’ expectations, or the context).
Since the original bogus pipeline study (Jones & Sigall, 1971), BPL has been increasingly popular among social psychological studies to reduce influences of social desirability bias. Specifically, among other threats to internal validity, the BPL condition is useful to collect more veridical introspective reports than in control condition in various areas of experiments, such as stereotyping and prejudice (Sigall & Page, 1971), sexism (Alexander & Fisher, 2003), self-serving attribution bias (Roese & Jamieson, 1993), intrinsic versus extrinsic moral motivation (Kunda & Schwartz, 1983), and any other sensitive behaviors. As one of the crucial methods to impression management theory, BPL is also used to explore how social desirability could influence people’s impression on another (Gaes, Kalle, & Tedeschi, 1978). Given an extensive search of the literature, no presented or published study that accesses the measures of self-reported responses toward their impression management on physical attractiveness using the BPL, such as participants’ BMIs, has been undertaken.

Employing BPL in the Context of Creating Online Dating Profiles

Together, then, it is expected that, by employing a BPL wherein experimental group participants are told that, after filling out a questionnaire that asks for personal information, including height and weight, to produce an online dating profile, their height and weight will be measured, as an alternate BPL (Jones & Sigall, 1971)–whereas, in the control group, no such manipulation is used–those in the experimental group will be alerted to the fact that their actual selves will be compared to their reported selves–specifically by measuring their height and weight. In turn, considering that such comparisons will be made–much as they are, when we go on dates that we have arranged via online dating sites–should lead participants to imagine the potential consequences of
expectancy disconfirmation (Burgoon & Poire, 1993) and manage their impressions (Tedeschi, 1981) with more veridical data. That is, they will imagine the effects of potential date comparing the way they had represented themselves, online, to their actual selves, upon meeting, and imagining that reports create impressions largely enough different from their actual selves (see, e.g., Goffman, 1959), so as to cause dissatisfaction (as a function of expectancy disconfirmation), could lead people to reject them and refuse to pursue a romantic relationship (see, e.g., Goffman, 1971).

As such, those who are told that their height and weight will be measured, to remind them that people will make comparisons between their reported selves and their actual selves, should provide more accurate data—as compared to those who are not reminded that they will be compared to dating site their profiles—so as to avoid such dissatisfaction, among potential dates. As a function of current social norms that favor lower BMIs, that would mean that those in the experimental group will provide more accurate height and weight responses responses—which will convert to higher BMIs—than those in the control group. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

**H1: As compared with those who are not told that their height and weight will be measured—or those who are not manipulated with a BPL procedure—those who are told that their height and weight will be measured by the researcher—after they fill out an online dating questionnaire—will provide height and weight responses that will convert to higher body mass indices (BMIs).**
CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Bogus Pipeline Design

As others have followed the traditional BPL procedure (see. e.g., Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Kunda & Schwartz, 1983; Roese & Jamieson, 1993; Sigall & Page, 1971) that employs a polygraph machine to collect veridical self-reported information, the present experiment adjusted and employed the BPL procedure. Via BPL, the researcher collected participants’ information during and after completion of the questionnaires. The participants assigned to BPL condition were given an oral notification, and they were shown a measuring tape and an electronic scale, in order to make them believe that their information would be verified, as they were told. It was predicted that those participants would provide significantly different answers that are more veridical than those in the control condition who were not told that they would be tested (Patzer, 2006).

Given that physical attractiveness has shown to currently be a major socially desirable attribute and that online daters may want to avoid give disinformation in order to develop and maintain a serious relationship, in the future, those who were in the BPL condition would theoretically be more truthful in presenting themselves. In this study, those who were told about others meeting them in person were expected to show higher BMIs, as opposed to those who are in control condition, because U.S. cultural norms currently reveal a preference for those with lower BMIs (Kronenfeld et al., 2010). Therefore, those who were manipulated by being told that they would be weighed and measured were expected to respond more naturally, or less in line with social desirability norms, simply because of social desirability. Conversely, those who were not told that their information would be verified would not be reminded of being seen and would be
significantly more likely to misrepresent themselves, either knowingly or unknowingly (Dovidio et al., 1992; Wagner et al., 2009).

Using a BPL procedure could help examine whether the participants were more likely to tell the truth in an online dating context. The first and the most straightforward step was to compare the differences in BMIs between the control condition and the bogus pipeline condition because it was easier to make participants believe that their information would be verified since height and weight were easy to measure.

Online Dating Site

The study used a mock-up profile-based online dating site as the context. The researcher designed the dating sites on WIX.com, a site that offers web-design services. The mock-up dating site was similar to traditional profile-based dating sites such as eHarmony.com, where individuals need to create their personal profiles and search potential mates by browsing others profiles. The only difference was that the mock-up dating site did not have a photo section, where online dating users can see each other in the picture. This was done to further limit the cues that were able to be presented, in order to avoid confounding the BPL procedure (Aronson, et. al., 1985).

Participants

Seventy-four undergraduate students (male and female, age range: 18-24) attending Ohio University participated in the study and were randomly assigned into one of the two conditions. Forty-one participants were assigned to the BPL condition, and thirty-seven participants were assigned to the control condition. All participants were enrolled in strategic communication theory class and their participation offered them experiences of participating in an experiment exploring media psychology.
As IRB-approved, all participants completed Informed Consent Forms, expressing their willingness to participate in an experiment testing various functions of a new type of online dating site that attempted to use fewer pieces of data in its algorithms. The description was part of a cover story developed to guide participants away from guessing the purpose of the study, which, of course, was to explore individuals’ tendency to present themselves truthfully in an online dating site (see Appendix C for IRB approval).

**Procedure**

After obtaining the permission from the professor teaching the class, the researcher briefly introduced the experiment as a human/computer interaction study to the class and invited participants to take part in the experiment. The researcher distributed sign-up sheets to the students in class, asking them to choose a time to participate. Participants were tested in the Veridical Information Detection Systems (ViDS) Effects Lab in the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. The researcher administered the procedures of each condition to all participants, who were randomly assigned to a condition.

When a participant arrived at the ViDS effects lab, s/he was asked to pick up an identification code from a bag. The identification code consists of a letter (A/B), and a number within a range from 1-80 (e.g., A/1), which was the basis of random assignment. Then, the researcher handed out the consent form to the participants and collected the consent form after the participant read and signed it. Next, the researcher explained the experimental procedure to the participant (see, Appendix D for the experimental
protocol). Later, she presented the mock-up dating site to participants for browsing on an iMac computer in the ViDS Lab.

Only for the experimental group, the researcher also presented an electronic scale and a measuring tape to the participants besides the dating site, while informing the participants that their height and weight would be measured, and they would also be asked other questions after they finished filling out their information in the questionnaire. Three minutes later, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to subjects, explaining that participant needs to fill out their information by hand to avoid adding new data to the website because the tech team was currently studying varying datasets to test algorithms input prediction relationships while any new data added would change their datasets.

After participants complete the questionnaire, the researcher collected them and read the debriefing text (see, Appendix F for debriefing text) for the participants explaining the purpose of the study. Afterward, participants were thanked for their participation and asked not to discuss the content of the experiment after they were told in class that the study had been completed (see, Appendix D for the experiment protocol).

Measures

A questionnaire was used to collect participants’ information concerning online dating. The questionnaire contained eight assessment items including height and weight, which are two of the socially desirable attributes, and could be measured by the formula of BMI (see, Appendix E for example of BMI formula). Items were used to assess participants’ willingness to give their information in context of online dating and whether their personal information was given according to socially desirable standards. The independent variable was the bogus pipeline informing that participants’ that their
personal information would be verified after they complete the questionnaire. Height and weight were used as dependent variables. By calculating BMIs, the researcher could estimate the causal relationship between online daters’ tendency to disclose themselves and the consciousness of information verification (see, Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire and Appendix E for BMI formula).

Analysis

Participants' height and weight were used to form BMI, and these three assessment measures were analyzed by one-tail \( t \)-tests. The \( p \) values obtained in this manner were used to summarize statistical significance between the controlled and BPL conditions. Cohen's \( d \) was used to calculate the effect size of the result. Together with \( p \) values, the hypothesis was tested.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

After collecting participants’ responses to eight measurements, the researcher assessed deception by running a $t$-test to see if there was a statistical significance between the bogus pipeline condition and the control condition. BMIs were calculated according to the formula (see Appendix E for the example of BMI formula). Height, weight, and BMIs were analyzed by $t$-test. All of three factors were entered separately as a dependent variable in a two-tailed $t$-test with the condition as the independent variable to test H1 (see, Table 1). The results revealed main effects associated with the participants’ weight.

According to the score variables, the F values for Levene’s test are: $0.147$ (height), $0.836$ (weight) and $0.008$ (BMIs) separately with a $p$(height) = 0.702 > 0.05, $p$(weight) = 0.363 > 0.05, $p$(BMIs) = 0.928 > 0.05, respectively. Therefore, the findings support that there are not statistically significant differences between the two group’s variances. That is, the $t$-test assumption of homogeneity of variance is met.

For the Body Mass index (BMI), a significant effect for the condition was found $t(76) = 2.73$, $p = 0.007 < 0.05$, Cohen’s $d = 0.62$, such that bogus pipeline participants reported higher BMIs ($M = 24.50$, $SD = 3.32$) as compared with control participants ($M = 22.44$, $SD = 3.32$). Therefore, H1 was supported. More specifically, there is a statistically significant difference on weight in pounds $t(76) = 2.38$, $p = 0.019 < 0.05$, Cohen’s $d = 0.54$, between the bogus pipeline condition ($M = 153.92$, $SD = 30.82$) and control condition ($M = 139.75$, $SD = 19.91$); while interestingly, there is not a significant effect $t(76)=0.049$, $p = 0.96 > 0.05$, Cohen’s $d = 0.01$ for condition in height compared to bogus pipeline condition ($M = 66.27$, $SD = 3.52$) with control condition ($M = 66.31$, $SD = 3.60$).
In sum, H1 received support, showing that those in the BPL condition reported significantly higher BMIs than those in the control condition. In addition, by random assignment, actual BMIs of participants between the groups would be equivalent on average.

*Table 1 Test of Homogeneity of Variances*

<table>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>.702</td>
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<tr>
<td>weigh</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>.363</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>.928</td>
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</table>

*Table 2 Weight Height BMI * Condition*

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<th>Condition</th>
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<th>Weight</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>BMI</th>
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<td>Control condition</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>66.27</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
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<td>3.32069</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogus pipeline</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>30.8248</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.32867</td>
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</table>
CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Using a controlled, laboratory experiment, to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship, this thesis examines the effects of anticipating information verification on impression management practices, when creating online dating profiles, using a variation of the original Bogus Pipeline procedure (BPL; Jones & Sigall, 1971), wherein an experimental group was told that their height and weight would be measured and were shown an electronic weighing scale and traditional height measuring tape, prior to creating their profiles – as compared to a control group who did not receive the BPL. The particular BPL used herein was developed much as others have been, in order to match the context of the experiments in which they were used (see, e.g., Quigley-Fernandez & Tedeschi, 1978; Sabini et al., 2001), so that the manipulation would make sense in the study and (hypothetically) lead to a significant difference in height and weight reporting.

As proposed by Hypothesis 1 (H1), a significant effect for the presence of BPL was obtained when statistically comparing reported Body Mass Indices (BMIs; see Appendix D for the BMI Formula) – which are forms of height to weight ratios – of the BPL experimental group to the non-BPL control group. As compared to the control condition, participants in the BPL condition reported a significantly higher BMI. In other words, participants who believed that their information would be verified, once they completed the online questionnaire, reported what can be assumed to be more veridical and less socially desirable information, given the current social context, in the U.S., wherein lower BMIs are generally thought to indicate greater physical attractiveness (Kronenfeld et al., 2010). The difference found in the thesis supports the given explanation that anticipating that one’s virtual dating profile will be compared to one’s
true self, at a future time, can cause potential daters to anticipate the possibility of expectancy disconfirmation (Burgoon & Poire, 1993). In this case, reporting veridical information – at least in terms of height and weight – may not create undue expectations, and thereby lower the likelihood of dissatisfaction of potential dates. As such, the bases of H1 seem to have received the support represented by the findings.

Theoretical Considerations

Concerning the difference found between conditions, similar to the findings of Ellison and her colleagues’ (2006) study, this thesis finds that, due to the anticipation of information verification, participants report lower BMIs in the experimental BPL condition. Along with the anticipation of potential dissatisfaction, as a function of expectancy disconfirmation, a further explanation of this result is Aristotle’s *Golden Mean* (Regnerus & Uecker, 2006), where a balance is needed between social desirability bias and honesty.

On the one hand, social desirability bias predicts that physical attractiveness can enhance social attractiveness, so that individuals can be more competitive, in an online dating environment (Cann, 1991). As a major component in social settings (Wallace, 2001, p. 20), physical attractiveness “serves as an informational cue from which people infer extensive information, and/or misinformation,” and, in turn, it triggers other people’s “assumptions, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors” (Smith, 2012, p.64) toward a given individual, perhaps unfortunately. Individuals endow higher evaluations to people whose physical attractiveness is perceived to be greater (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991) in the contexts of time, geography, and the cultures that represent them (Patzer, 2006). As a result, people who possess a higher level of physical
attractiveness obtain more positive treatment than their counterparts whom are associated with the negative or undesirable appearances. Research has examined such consequences in various social settings. For instance, taller people are more likely to be served first compared to shorter ones (Patzer, 2006), and more good-looking people can even be more likely to be hired more often than less attractive people (Chiu & Babcock, 2002; Mariowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996).

In prior research, fewer studies exploring how body attraction can be perceived to affect interpersonal interactions, as compared with the increasing research on individuals’ perceptions of facial attractiveness. In exploring the effects of potential physical attraction on interpersonal interactions, this study collected and analyzed two personal factors—height and weight—in the form of BMI ratio. That participants in the BPL condition reported lower BMIs than those in the control condition, it can be assumed that participants were as aware of the potential influence of BMI in perceptions of physical attractiveness. A more desirable BMI (e.g., in the present context, lower BMIs are desirable) was imagined to improve one’s level of physical attractiveness in managing one’s impression on others (Conley & McCabe, 2011).

Study data were further analyzed, beyond the hypothesized relationship, in order to offer potential more specific contextual explanations for the findings, as well as to note further limitations and contributions of the study, toward offering insights into potentially fruitful future research. To begin, perhaps surprisingly, this study found no significant difference in reported height between the two conditions. However, perhaps less surprisingly, in this context, a statistical difference is present on the variable of weight, between the two groups. The former is more surprising, given that greater height and
lower weight results in a lower, and in this context more socially desirable, BMI. As such, the lack of difference found, when comparing reported heights, between the groups, seems inconsistent with social desirability bias prediction. To support that notion, prior research has shown that taller individuals (males of 5’9”-5’11”) are considered more socially attractive than shorter ones (males under 5’7”) unless the person is unusually lofty (males who are taller than 6’2”) (Graziano, Brothen, & Berscheid, 1978). Keyes (1980, cited in Patzer, 2006) adds that both taller males and females are linked with positive judgments. Keyes (1980, as cited in Patzer, 2006) notes that taller men are perceived as more handsome and athletic, while shorter men are seen as pallid and bland. Similarly, taller women have shown to be described with words such as lithe and supple, while shorter females are depicted as frenetic.

However, shorter females are more likely to be described as cute or perky, which often have positive connotations. As such, female participants in this study, who reported their average heights as 65.00 inches in the BPL group, and 65.09 inches in the control group, likely accounts for the lack of difference, because females likely identify with the normative descriptions, which could be said to be not too different, in terms of height.

Again, though, an analysis of weight between the groups shows a statistically significant difference between two conditions, wherein the mean of weight in the bogus pipeline condition is larger in comparison to the control condition. Such a result may reflect that participants perceived it to be socially normative, that is, heavier people are generally considered less attractive, particularly when they are shorter. As well interestingly, the difference found in the mean weights between the groups was 14 pounds, which is very similar to the difference between Americans’ average self-reported
weight (176 lbs) and their ideal weight (161 lbs), which is approximately 15 pounds (Brown, 2013). Such findings would seem to speak to the external validity and generalizability of the results, although experimenters are mainly concerned with internal validity, or making sure that the manipulations devised reflect the theories being examined (Sundar, 1999).

Different levels of stigma attached to height and weight may explain the discrepancy between findings for each attribute. That is, heavier or shorter individuals can carry social stigmas that regard matchmaking, because they can be perceived to play an important role in social statuses such as men’s “financial capacity, ambition, industriousness, cues to resource acquisition” (Buss, 1989, p.12), and, as such, those attributes can be seen as opposing reproductive goals of males and females (Gangestad & Buss, 1993). Compared to discrimination against shorter individuals, heavier people may lead to a more disadvantage social position.

Moreover, extremely overweight individuals are not only recognized for a potential health risk but also receive negative stigmatizing perspectives (Rodriguez, Tomiyama, & Ward, 2015). As Schafer and Ferraro (2011) find in their longitude national survey, among all social discriminations, many people regard weight as the last acceptable stigma, because higher weight may indicate difficulties such as personal health issues, lower educational status, and lower opportunities to be employed. Height is comparatively less stigmatizing, perhaps because there is less important correlation between height and productive goals in general compared to weight that can indicate unhealthy, while individuals are generally not labeled unhealthy, unless they are extremely short.
Further, such speculation may add that bodily attraction may not necessarily be related to relationship initiation and development. Being in line with social norms in physical appearance may not enhance the chances to the success in online dating. Yet, Buss (1989) proposes that one of the frequently used methods to attract others is to describe oneself as more appealing than others. Deception may not be adopted as a strategy to initiate or maintain a relationship, due to individuals’ desires to be accepted as who they really are (Ellison et al., 2006). In a non-intimate relationship, people would like to be with those who are similar to themselves, in order to promote positive feelings about themselves (Berkowitz, 1969; Hartnett, Bailey, & Hartley, 1974; Portnoy, 1973).

Similarly, generally in romantic relationships, perhaps despite that taller people receive higher attractiveness evaluations (Feingold, 1982; Judge & Cable, 2004), people often like to date those who are of the same level of physical appearance as themselves (Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966). That is especially the case, regarding aspects that are unlikely to change, such as height. As a result, the question may be posed as to whether the relationships found in further examining the study results may signify that weight is considered more important in matchmaking.

Alternatively, individuals are more inclined to misrepresent changeable factors, like weight, in online dating profiles, because they can explain such differences as having changed, since their profile information was entered, and so that might also explain the results. Theoretically, combined online/offline communication, as well as the goal of seeking a romantic relationship may reduce the possibility of deception on dating profiles, whereas social desirability bias may have less influence, in such situations.
On the other hand, even though such questions remain unanswered, the differences in BMIs reveal that online daters are less likely to be deceptive when considering future interactions wherein they cannot selectively present themselves (Walther, 1996). Theoretical support for such a conclusion is the *warranting principle* (Walther et al., 2002), which proposes that, in the migration of online/offline communication, people place greater credence in offline behaviors when information cannot be manipulated in the way that the senders desire. In other words, online daters place greater warranting values on offline interaction. That is because online dating users primarily worry about receiving misrepresentation from other online daters, due to the suspicion of deceptive impression management in CMC when physical interaction is absent (Walther et al., 2002). Online daters seem to know such a principle implicitly (Walther et al., 2002). People who are aware of their motivation to use online dating service are less likely to distort their physical attributes online (Toma et al., 2008). More specifically, when offline interaction occurs, there is no room for controlled interaction and enhanced impression. That is, senders are no longer able to maintain their impression in a socially desirable way.

By experimentally manipulating the awareness of information verification, the function of which is similar to offline communication/long-term interaction in everyday online dating contexts, this thesis supports the warranting principle, based on the finding that online daters do not always optimize their height and weight to present an ideal perception in online dating contexts. This finding is consistent with Henderson and Gilding’s (2004) study that impression management online is similar to that offline, insofar as it addresses that people do not always lie to build up and maintain online
relationships or take the advantage of anonymity to lie, particularly if there is an anticipation of interacting offline, in the future. Furthermore, participants seemed to have avoided lying about things that can be verified and unchangeable. For instance, in Walther and Parks’ (2002) study, the majority of their participants either concealed their offline identities or separated online/offline worlds, psychologically, to maintain perceived honesty.

Moreover, even though online interaction can be anonymous, the reduced communication cues and potentially asynchronous communication offer new opportunities for higher levels of self-disclosure as well as manage one’s impression (Walther, 1996). In other words, individuals do not lie because they cannot – instead, they choose not to lie, due to perceived expectancies.

Users may build up an idealized self in online dating profiles because their self-presentation is manageable through CMC (Walther et al., 2002), but they may be less willing to do so because their descriptions are recordable as well. The motivation to initiate and perhaps maintain a romantic relationship can alter peoples’ desires to deceive, because online daters can keep track of information presented in the dating profiles, based on recordable CMC. Therefore, a relationship may be terminated once deception is detected. The CMC still leaves individuals more time to carefully describe themselves, which does not necessarily link to (mis)representation, perhaps so much as positively well-articulated representation.

In addition, people in such a dynamic communication context may not be motivated to lie by nature. Specifically, online daters who are typically seeking to initiate and maintain relationships have been shown to have lower motivation for
misrepresentation, as compared to other types of online relationships. For other CMC, Utz (2005) demonstrates that online users, with the motivation to protect their privacy, tend to switch gender, lie about their age, and/or unrealistically present themselves in appearance, height, income, and health condition, among other attributes (Whitty, 2002; Stieger, Eichinger, & Honeder, 2009). However, online dating is different than those scenarios, because it can involve the anticipation of meeting offline (Toma, 2006), which, as this study shows, can make one’s impression management style more veridical. Being motivated to seek a committed relationship, people may be more concerned about expectancy disconfirmation – the recognition of inconsistent impressions given online and offline.

Expectancies play an important role in subsequent interactions. Specifically, when the experience is better than the expectation, there are positive attitudes towards another, and vice versa (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). As expectancy is closely associated with public image in social settings, there may be an implicit pressure to keep the experience and expectancy consistent because being popular is socially desirable. Even though this study does not measure expectation and (dis)conformation, the realization of verification in the bogus pipeline condition provokes a physiological mechanism is similar to the experience, and therefore, participants in the bogus pipeline condition felt pressed to be more honest, in order to avoid expectancy disconfirmation and improve their impression on another by being honest.

This is not contradictory to the idea that online daters want to manage a favorable image. An unfavorable impression can be enhanced to be a more favorable one or compensated. Apsler (1975) demonstrates that people who gain a less favorable image
tend to put more effort to make up for it in other ways. Given that online daters often seek a commitment or unconditional love, while deception can be easily detected, at least eventually. As such, it seems wiser to present actual selves in online dating profiles to find a better match.

To explain it differently, the statistical differences found between the experimental conditions and control conditions in prior studies that compare actual conditions to self-reported information might result from mistakes. Because such discordance happens, when participants are unable to keep track of their conditions, and report they what they think is true (Swann Jr, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). To some extent, it seems that direct measurement of participants’ impression management behavior is not enough because misreporting is not always equal to knowingly or unknowingly (mis)representing oneself (Dovidio et al., 1992).

This study employs and adjusts the bogus pipeline procedure to collect self-reported information to measure an invisible psychological process (see, Jones & Sigall, 1971). The bogus pipeline procedure establishes the belief that participants’ responses can be monitored and verified by an apparatus. The experimental manipulation has received solid support in social psychology research (e.g., smoking, drug use, or racial attitudes), including impression management (see, e.g., Roese et al., 1993). However, given that prior research often relies on the existence of a lie-detector to be the stimulus at the heart of the manipulation, a critique of BPL arises that the machine is not perfect to detect lies well, especially given that participants’ needs to acclimate to the machine (Stults, Messe, & Kerr, 1984). However, because the polygraph is not used, such a
critique seems without purpose. Similarly, showing a weighing scale and measuring tape, as this thesis shows, can elicit the same types of veridical responses.

As such, instead of employing sophisticated equipment, this study merely presents participants with tools that are familiar in daily life, thus eliminating Stults and his colleagues’ (1984) concerns, despite their reliance on the lack of actual polygraph usage, with participants merely believing they are being monitored and need to acclimate. As such, the design of this study adds to the bogus pipeline procedure literature, as the bogus pipeline manipulation used herein is useful to investigate impression management behavior and a way it varies, based on familiar items, as opposed to potentially more imposing, sophisticated equipment. More importantly, the differences found between the bogus pipeline condition and the control condition, in this study, strengthen prior findings that the bogus pipeline is useful in a public context (Jones & Sigall, 1971), specifically in the online context.

Tedeschi (1981) explains the inconsistent responses between two conditions as demonstrating that individuals are inclined to deceive when they feel safe and free, or rather, when participants are not notified of the verification procedure in this study, and therefore do not need to worry about embarrassment even when they deceive. In contrast, when individuals imagine they are being monitored by the bogus pipeline procedure, in which they are instructed that their true information/attitudes/feelings will be uncovered, they are more honest when they feel unsafe, or when notified of the verification procedure in this study and therefore are concerned about potential embarrassment, if they are found to be lying. Overall, the methodology in this research has clear advantages and is recommended for the future examination of online deception.
Many readers may have questions about response differences between genders, which many studies report as a function of gender, per se. However, this thesis does not examine gender differences in self-report specifically in order to avoid creating/maintaining/strengthening stereotypes about gendered responses—if such differences among the data exist—because such differences would be a function of arbitrary socialization, as opposed to natural, genetic predispositions. In other words, among other things, height and weight (ratio) preferences tend to vary among different societies, subcultures, and generations (Thompson, 2005). For instance, in a well-developed country nowadays, people may prefer women with smaller waist, whereas, in the Renaissance Period in Europe, bigger (higher BMI) women were more adored and socially desirable, meaning that preferences and self-reporting would be culturally-shaped, historically. As such, males and females largely act differently as a function of the ways they are socialized, based on different expectations across cultures and etc. (Thompson, 2005).

Practical Considerations

As the bogus pipeline group shows greater BMI than the control group, in this study—which, again, shows a difference between the BPL and control groups’ weights very similar to those of the larger population from which the convenience sample had been drawn (in The Bellweather State, nonetheless)–it helps us to explain that anticipated verification may be a predictor for the more honest description in online dating profiles. In other words, online dating site designers can minimize the deception by information verification that might distinguish attested users from unattested users. In such a case, online daters may not be required to present their veridical information in the
profiles, because such a requirement may create the pressure of releasing their personal information. Instead, daters can submit their information, such as their ID, to the dating site service to get the verification that can be shown on their profiles.

Prior literature has demonstrated the online deception in a dating context results from that fact that online matchmaking is competitive. Thus, individuals desire to be able to attract another dater. However, as Toma (2006) addresses, online deception is merely acceptable to a small degree, and once individuals exaggerate themselves to a large magnitude, a potential romantic relationship may not be maintained. While online daters who seek long-term or offline communication struggle to present themselves in a unique way with CMC that provides room for controlled presentation, a verification mechanism can certainly offer an alternative way to make the online daters appear special to others without deception, thereby improving the success of offline interaction. Future research might examine the potential for developing such a verification system, which is practically regarded as trustworthy by the online daters, such as a mark “V” in the profile or credibility rating.

As experiments are meant to do (Aronson et al., 1985), this study explores a universal psychological mechanism, following a tradition that argues human beings share the same basic psychological structure, although within different contexts. For instance, physiologically, individuals share common evolutionary biology, such as the heart and arm. Psychologists apply the same logic and propose that human behaviors are similar to body structures, which means that the way in which individuals process information is quite similar. Media psychologists do so, using media stimuli. As such, although this study may constrain the ability to generalize specifically, using a confidence interval, the
limitation is balanced by internal validity in demonstrating a cause-and-effect relationship regarding a universal psychological mechanism, which is equally, if not more important, in social science, when investigating human behaviors (Sundar, 1999).

The current study offers insights regarding the mixed model communication. For example, deception does not exist commonly and frequently, as it is perceived to be. Perhaps such a mixed model communication can be investigated in other areas, such as online job application when offline verification is also expected.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis contributes to understanding the function of anticipating offline interaction with online impression management in a mixed model dating context. That may be particularly helpful because online dating site represents a platform that has historically been criticized to be full of false images (Toma, 2006), wherein a growing number of people has become interested in using online dating sites to build a bridge of a romantic relationship (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

The main finding of this study to knowledge is that it describes and posits an explanation of impression management practices in creating online dating profiles regarding both online and offline interaction. Such a mixed model interaction practice goes beyond CMC or face-to-face interaction alone, as compared to prior research that has examined impression management strategies only in the context of one or the other. Specifically, the limited communication cues (Walther, 1996) lead individuals to put more importance on offline impression (Walther et al., 2002) when they are involved in the mixed model interactions. Therefore, possibilities of offline interaction may raise online daters’ concerns of the discrepancy between their virtual selves and their veridical selves if they perform a descriptive impression management online. In such a case, online dating deception may be less likely to happen regardless of social norms, that is, to be as attractive as possible in online dating. Based on the discussion, media researchers and practitioners can focus on the effects of the psychological function of expectancy disconfirmation in various aspects within a broader mixed model context. As anticipations may affect individuals’ behaviors, it is hoped that the match seeking
anticipation investigated in this thesis can help online designers to propose more
technique solutions to reduce deceptive behaviors among online and offline interaction.

While the results of this thesis show the function of anticipating comparisons
between online impression managements and offline interaction experiences by
employing a revised bogus pipeline procedure, this thesis is constrained by several
limitations. First, given that this experiment does not collect participants’ perceptions
about the importance of the examined factors, the explanations for misrepresentation on
BMIs, together with the reasons for the discrepancy between height and weight
within/across the two conditions are merely informed speculation. As such, further
research should continue exploring perceptions about factors of physical appearances on
impression management in matchmaking, as well as exploring whether social desirability
affects matchmaking decisions or impression management in the context of dating.

Second, this experiment does not examine the dynamic online dating behavior,
that is, the way that online daters manage their impressions after migrating interactions
from online to offline, and then back to online. It can be speculated that such migrations
encourage online daters to revise their controlled impressions online in order to find a
better match, while such a revision can be either a more veridical one, or a more
deceptive one. Future research should focus on whether such leaving and returning
online/offline communication model can affect participants’ impression management,
such as updating their profiles in which directions over time.

Given that limited literature has supported offline interaction in an online dating
context, future research can examine impression management on dating profiles in depth
by collecting and comparing expectations and experiences to attest the hypothesis.
Furthermore, although subjective self-reports of such anticipations of offline interaction may be measured in future studies, we simply do not have the psychological introspective access to veridical report as to why it is that we have done something, unless we have paid specific attention to that process, and doing so would change the process under investigation (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Instead, experimental manipulations are created in order to test hypotheses, and so future research would need to be very creative, in developing a stimulus that would elicit data showing that expectancy disconfirmation was not the correct interpretation, in order to improve upon the contributions this study makes to knowledge (Aronson et al., 1985; Gilbert, 1999).

In addition, the design only examines limited aspects of dating profiles in order to deepen prior studies’ findings, which are mostly on the weight/height/age/picture. Yet, based on the successful first try of employing the BPL procedure in collecting and comparing virtual and veridical impression management, future research could focus more on self-descriptive questions (i.e., open-ended questions), such as personality or hobbies. In addition, combining experiments with discourse analysis, based on qualitative and quantitative studies, future studies can explore implicit psychological behaviors among human beings on impression management in various mixed model context.

Summary

In brief, this thesis makes the following contributions to knowledge, theoretically, methodologically, and practically. First, it shows that anticipation of meeting another—most specifically in the context of mixed model online dating (Fiore, 2004) – can cause people to provide more veridical information, in descriptions of themselves, when
attempting to manage impressions of themselves to others (Schlenker, 1980). Further, it supports the theory that, if so anticipated, people will provide such information based on the idea that, if those other persons’ expectations are disconfirmed (Burgoon & Poire, 1993), in future, they will likely be dissatisfied and thereby potentially/likely terminate a possibly (romantic) relationship, perhaps even before giving it a chance.

In online dating, it was theorized, the likelihood may be much larger, due to the height of the stakes. As such, it illustrates that, when primed to anticipate such a possibility – herein as a function of a Bogus Pipeline procedure (Jones et al., 1971) variation – it can lead to truthful self-presentation, so as not to miss a potentially lifelong opportunity.

The results of combining the theoretical mechanisms outlined above can be ported, or used to explain different contexts, wherein the content may vary, while the structure stays the same, such as in managing impressions, when submitting résumés for jobs to websites that specialize in job-seeking, such as Monster.com, because people would likely not want to miss out on an ideal opportunity for employment, much in the same way that they would, for a potentially intimate, lasting relationship.

Further, the BPL procedure is employed because prior studies have not experimentally investigated the possibility of a correlation relationship as a function of social desirability (see, e.g., Furnham, 1986; Cialdini & Trost, 1998) in their collection of what may not be such veridical information. In other words, “if people will say that they lie a little, then that may be a little lie, and that could reflect a significant difference between what they say and what is the case” (Wagner, 2015).
The BPL variation developed in this study not only contributes to the literature in collecting veridical implicit responses towards certain sensitive issues including deception (see, Quigley-Fernandez, et al., 1978) by examining self-reported deceptive behaviors, but variations of it can similarly be fashioned, in order to elicit more veridical information from experimental participants, in future studies. As a methodological contribution to collect more veridical information from participants, this thesis adjusts the BPL to the context of the study, which extends prior such BPL variations that employ perceived future self-report data validation. The BPL version used herein specifically contributes to collection of veridical responses in helping to eliminate the effects of social desirability and estimating anticipated potential dissatisfaction, as a function of expectancy disconfirmation, and the results would theoretically be applicable in other, structurally similar situations. For example, by employing BPL procedure to examine rates/comments/reviews on online review sites such yelp.com, where individuals share their experiences of certain consumption behavior while others tend to base their consumption decisions on such reviews, can be helpful collect the truthful feelings of consumers instead of getting propagandas or hate speech. In other words, the BPL procedure fits well in collecting valuable, higher credible responses to the service/products instead of false reviews, which may not be based on the fact.

Furthermore, the adjusted BPL procedure, which employs daily equipment (i.e., an electronic scale and a measuring tape) as a BPL, takes advantage of human’s psychological mechanisms while avoiding the disadvantages of the standard BPL procedure. Specifically, it is easier for participants believe the information verification procedure or to get used to the BPL sooner, if not immediately, because participants are
familiar with such equipment; thereby more participants will be influenced by the function of BPL. The success of collecting participants’ veridical impression management in BPL condition indicates that a cheaper, more applicable BPL procedures, compared to traditional BPL procedures that called for expensive equipment (Jones et al., 1971), can be widely and practically employed even in laboratories that are lack of budgets to purchase such equipment.

In addition, practically speaking, the findings offer online dating website designers and producers options for enhancing their reputations of attracting credible daters to their websites. This thesis provides a practical solution to avoid deceptive information for social networking sites, wherein users aim to bridge relationship online and then move offline. For example, to design an option for their users to choose to verify their information or to emphasize the possibility of meeting offline, then a verified group should report information that reflects a more authentic self, as opposed to an ideal self (Dovidio et al., 1992).
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APPENDIX A: ONLINE DATING QUESTIONNAIRE

ID #: 

Birthday: Gender: 

Where are you from: Where do you live: 

Height: Weight: 

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APPENDIX B: ADULT CONSENT FORM

Ohio University Adult Consent Form Without Signature

Title of Research: Using Bogus Pipeline to Examine Impression Management Strategies Regarding Physical Attractiveness in Online Dating Profiles

Researchers: Jiashuo Qin

Advisor: Carson B Wagner

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done to test the operation of a new dating site. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill out your own information in the dating profile. Your profile will be saved anonymously, and will only be accessible to the investigator. You should not participate in this study if you feel uncomfortable to give out your own information. Your participation in the study will last for at most 3 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

A risk or a discomfort that you might experience is to give your personal information.

No risks or discomforts are anticipated.
Benefits

This study is important to society in the way to improve the design of an online dating site. You may not benefit, personally by participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by anonymity. And only the investigator and her advisor have access to your information.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human participants in research;

* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Compensation

As compensation for your time/effort, you will receive extra credit in your class.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator Jiashuo Qin, jq737912@ohio.edu,7408188098, or the advisor Carson B Wagner, wagnerc1@ohio.edu, 7405939808.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.
By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:

• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;

• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;

• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;

• you are 18 years of age or older;

• your participation in this research is completely voluntary;

• you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Version Dater: 03/15/2015
APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL

The following research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

Project Title: Impression Management on Physical Attractiveness in Online Dating Profile

Primary Investigator: Jiashuo Qin
Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Carson Wagner

Department: Journalism

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date: 4/14/15
Expiration Date: 4/13/16

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
APPENDIX D: PROTOCOL

“Hello, my name’s Jiashuo Qin. Today I’m going to ask you to participate in a study that tests various functions of a new type of online dating site, which attempts to use fewer pieces of data in its algorithms.

> For Group B: It uses them with the help of a data analysis program that adjusts for potential daters’ truthfulness, using a formula to predict, based on the statistical likelihood of the covariance of different inputs. To see how well the site works, I’ll need to measure your height, weight, and ask you more questions about your other answers. However, before you can participate, I must ask you to please read these forms explaining your rights as a research participant. Please take a minute to look over and sign this form, and we will collect them once you are finished.

>Give Consent Form to Participants<

2) “Thank you very much. Are there any questions?”

> Wait for participant response/Answer questions <

>Collect Consent Forms<

3) “Throughout today’s session, we’ll need to read this protocol in order to maintain the study’s integrity. We ask that everyone please turn off their cell phone throughout the duration of this study, so as not to disturb the testing of the website.

> For Group A: “OK, great! Now I’d like for you to please peruse our dating site mock-up, for a couple seconds, and then I’ll ask you to please fill out a questionnaire containing potential questions for use with our algorithms. For today, I will need to have you fill out your responses by hand, because our tech team is currently studying varying datasets to
test algorithm input prediction relationships, and so any new data, right now, will change their dataset, as they work with it…

> For Group B: “OK, great! Now I’d like for you to please peruse our dating site mock-up, for a couple seconds, and then I’ll ask you to please fill out a questionnaire containing potential questions for use with our algorithms. For today, I will need to have you fill out your responses by hand, because our tech team is currently studying varying datasets to test algorithm input prediction relationships, and so any new data, right now, will change their dataset, as they work with it. So, we will start with looking over the website, then fill out a questionnaire, and finally, take your height and weight measurements, before you go. Sound good? …

> Wait for participant response/Answer questions <

4) “OK, thanks! Now please take a couple/few minutes to browse our site, and then we’ll move onto the questionnaire.”

>Allow them to peruse the site for as long as three minutes. If they are still looking, in three minutes, say “Thanks so much, but we’ll need to move to the questionnaire, now, OK?” (wait for yes) “OK, cool. Thanks.”

>Run QUESTIONNAIRE measure.

>Once QUESTIONNAIRE has been administered:

6) “Thank you for participating in this study.

This study seeks to gain a better understanding of how social desirable attributes influence individuals’ strategies in managing their impression on another in the context of online dating, when online daters are going to meet face-to-face. “Testing a new dating site” is actually a cover story for the study to make the experiment context be more alike
to daily life. Yet, a limited amount of scholarly research discusses the conditions that online daters may misrepresent their physical attractiveness. As collecting participants’ responses in the questionnaire and analyze the data, this study seeks to explore if having the consciousness of being seen offline can lead online daters to be more honest in presenting themselves in online dating profiles.

Do you have any questions?”

> Wait for participant response/Answer questions <

“Thanks again. Please to not reveal any details of this study to other members of the Ohio University community, as it may compromise data obtained throughout the collection process. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the researchers listed on your consent form.”
APPENDIX E: BMI FORMULA

\[ \text{BMI} = \frac{\text{mass}_{\text{kg}}}{\text{height}_{m}^{2}} = \frac{\text{mass}_{\text{lb}}}{\text{height}_{\text{in}}^{2}} \times 703 \]
APPENDIX F: DEBRIEFING TEXT

Thank you for participating. The goal of our study is to explore the misrepresentation on physical attractiveness in online dating context.

We are investigating how individuals will present themselves with the consciousness of being seen—in other words, we are examining whether online daters will misrepresent their images if they are told that their information will be verified later. Most recent studies on online dating deception based on the assumption that online daters deceive to be more attractive. However, these studies beg questions that what if online daters know that they will meet another potential mate face-to-face? Even online daters manage their impression on others according to social norms, their impression management does not have to equal to misrepresentation. This experiment you just conducted is investigating behaviors of online daters.

In this study, you were told to help test the operation on a new dating site (which is actually a mock dating sites only used for the experiment). Your goal was to fill out your own information in the mock dating site. Some of you were told that all of your information would be verified after you finished, and an electronic scale was shown to you. Some of you were told nothing but to simply fill out the information. We are interested to see if results on BMIs (weight/height) differ across conditions. In other words, we are looking to see if misrepresentation in online dating context will happen when online daters are conscious that their information will be verified, or if they have the desire to meet someone fact-to-face. The dependent variable was the participant’s BMIs (weight/height).

We are interested in how the different degrees of overlap across the features affect
how we perceive and remember the target. In addition, we are interested in whether or not having to learn a complex sound interferes with the ability to learn a complex visual object (in the dual task paradigm). In other words, we are looking to see if perceptual factors interact with memory performance and if this effect differs across modalities (i.e., vision and audition).

The cover story you were told before aims to prevent you from knowing the focus of the study, which would affect the results, to make them invalid. The cover story is designed to make the study seem much more like daily life, and to avoid failing to recruit potential participants who tend to deceive. However, after reading this debriefing text, you are free to remove your data or withdrawn the experiment if you feel uncomfortable. Please notice that your data is only accessible for the investigator for this study.

We would like to thank you again for participating. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Dr. Wagner or me. Our contact information is on the consent form provided to you.