THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ONLINE VERSUS OFFLINE FLIRTING ON

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology

By

Jasmine Lauren Ashley Smith

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

December 2014

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ONLINE VERSUS OFFLINE

FLIRTING ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Name: Smith, Jasmine Lauren Ashley

APPROVED BY:

_____

Dr. Lee Dixon
Faculty Advisor

_____

Dr. Melissa Layman- Guadalupe
Committee Member

_____

Dr. Erin O'Mara
Committee Member

Concurrence:

_____

Dr. Keri Kirschman
Chair, Department of Psychology

ABSTRACT

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ONLINE VERSUS

OFFLINE FLIRTING ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Name: Smith, Jasmine Lauren Ashley
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. Lee Dixon

Behaviors exhibited while online differ radically from behaviors exhibited while offline (Suler, 2004a). Research suggests that this difference in behaviors results from online disinhibition (OD) while engaging in computer-mediated communication (Suler, 2004a). An example of the effects of OD can be seen when a person flirts outside of his or her dyadic relationship while online when he or she would not normally in person. Flirting can cause harm to a romantic relationship when it is directed towards someone outside of the romantic relationship (Glass, 2003). Due to the immense use of the internet among college students, and the negative impact that extradyadic flirting can have on a romantic relationship, the first goal of this research was to provide a basis of information on the amount of online flirting, how online flirting occurs, and the impact of online flirting among college-age students. The second goal of this study is to assess participants' perception of how detrimental the impact of online flirting would be on their romantic relationship compared to offline flirting. Malt (2007) found that there is a general view in society that flirting online is less detrimental to a romantic relationship than flirting

offline. Given this finding, along with the possibility that participants are aware of OD, I predicted that online flirting would be perceived as less detrimental to a romantic relationship than offline flirting as a result of an informal understanding of OD from personal internet use. The third goal of this study was to understand the perceived impact of public versus private extradyadic online flirting on a romantic relationship. Pittman (1990) found that infidelity that occurs in private has more of a detrimental impact on a romantic relationship than infidelity that occurs in public. Therefore, I predicted that private online flirting, such as through a Facebook message, would be perceived as more detrimental to a relationship than public online flirting, such as through a Facebook wall post. My findings showed that college students are actively using the internet throughout their day in many different capacities. However, I found that perceived harm to relationships is not contingent on flirting type or situation. In addition, my hypothesis that private flirting would be perceived as more detrimental to a relationship was not supported. Despite these hypotheses not being supported, this study was able to gather valuable information about the habits of college students while using the internet.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its creation, the internet has been a growing phenomenon and is currently used daily all over the world. Over 74% of internet use is dedicated to online text communication through social networking websites, such as Facebook (Pew, 2014). Communication online through the use of text messaging and chats often influences a person to do and say things that he or she would not normally do or say in real life. This phenomenon is known as online disinhibition (OD), which is a lowered inhibition that results from people communicating through online text communication (Suler, 2004a). Due to the influence of OD, at times people may behave in a manner that is outside of their usual behavior exhibited offline. An example of this can be seen when a person flirts with someone outside of their dyadic romantic relationship while online when they would not normally in person. According to Feinberg (1996), the purpose of flirting is to portray sexual attraction, and is generally thought to have a detrimental influence on a romantic relationship when a person in the relationship is flirting with someone outside of the relationship.

With the high amount of online text communication through the use of social networking websites, billions of people all over the world are likely to experience disinhibited online behavior. Despite this increase in internet use, there is a lack of research about online

flirting and the impact and perception of online flirting versus offline flirting; this study will examine these flirting behaviors in college students. In addition, this study will assess participants' perception of how detrimental the impact of online flirting would be on their romantic relationship compared to offline flirting. This research will also look at the impact of public versus private online flirting on the perception of detriment on a dyadic romantic relationship.

The outcome of this research has clinical implications for understanding how college students are communicating with each other. With the possible negative repercussions of flirting outside of a romantic relationship, people may experience psychological distress. This research would provide clinical insight into this distress and aid in the formulation of techniques to help overcome any resulting repercussions.

Online Communication

Written communication is one the oldest forms of communication, but recently there has been a shift in the use of written communication towards more frequent use of text communication (Suler, 2004b). In many areas of the world, we are currently in the age of text relationships and communication.

Text communication refers to communication between two or more people that takes place in typewritten form through the internet, such as chat, email, messaging boards, instant messaging, blogs, or cellular devices (Suler, 2004b). Suler (2004b) argues that text communication is extremely different from face-to-face communication (FtF) in several ways. The most prominent difference between FtF communication and text communication is the absence of facial cues while communicating through text communication (Suler, 2004b). Text communication often occurs through computer-

mediated communication (CMC), such as through a website, and therefore the communicators cannot physically see or hear the person with whom they are communicating.

Prevalence of Online Communication

   Demographics of internet users. Peoples of all ages, races, and genders are using the internet at an extremely high rate. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), 81% of American men and women use the internet. Of this percentage, 95% of internet users are between the ages of 18-29 years old and use the internet for a plethora of purposes (Pew, 2012). This research will be focusing on college-age internet users. Due to the high rate of internet usage, one can make a compelling argument that online communication is transitioning towards being one of the major forms of communication in our society currently.

   Types of internet usage. Out of the numerous possibilities for its use, there are certain uses that have emerged as the most popular uses of the internet, such as checking emails, using search engines to look up information, and using social networking websites (Pew, 2012). With regard to the latter, the Pew Research Center (2012) completed a national survey and found that 69% of internet users are online for the sole purpose of using an online social networking website, such as Facebook. Also, while on the internet people are posting a comment using a website or blog approximately 32% of the time (Pew, 2012). These rates of internet usage are extremely high and compelling, and show the large impact that social networking websites have on the lives of well over half of internet users today. Text communication has become an extremely prevalent way

of communication and should the currents trends continue, global internet use may quadruple by the year 2015 (The Network, 2011).

Social Networking Websites

Social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are the third most popular use for the internet, surpassing checking news sites, and online shopping (Pew, 2012). Boyd (2010) defines social networking websites as the following:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p.1)

For the purposes of this research, and because of its current popularity, the social networking website of focus will be Facebook.

Facebook. Facebook is a social networking website that was founded in 2004 and now has over 1 billion active users (Carlson, 2010). This website has both a mobile version for use via cellular phones along with a platform for computer use. Facebook users register to join this online community and gain access to billions of people's information. Each Facebook user has their own web profile that contains information such as their birthdate, gender, location, and hobbies. Friend requests are sent to add other users as "friends" with one click of a button. Facebook has provided several ways for people to communicate with each other on the website.

Facebook communication. Facebook has provided communication tools, such as an instant messaging system and a comment box on each profile page and each post or picture that is uploaded to the website (Carlson, 2010). The instant messaging system

provides an unrestricted way for people to communicate online, even with people that are not on their friends list. This instant messaging tool is private and only between the two people involved in the conversation. The conversations that take place on profile pages and through posts and picture comments are open to those who are one's Facebook friends. Privacy settings allow for further restrictions to access, such as preventing anyone from seeing any profile page conversations. Privacy settings can also be less stringent; allowing anyone, regardless of friendship status, to see any conversations that take place on his or her page.

How Online Behaviors Differ From Offline Behaviors

People say and do things online that they would not normally say or do and these behaviors manifest in different ways (Suler, 2004a). From saying rude and harsh things online to presenting secrets about oneself that would not be revealed otherwise, people say and do things differently online.

Online Disinhibition Effect

The absence of facial cues that come from offline communication along with a host of factors, such as time differences and ambiguity, can lead to differences in behaviors online versus offline (Suler, 1997). People tend to express themselves differently online than in face-to-face communication as well. This phenomenon has become so prevalent that a term has surfaced in order to operationalize it: the online disinhibition effect. The behaviors that tend to result from the influence of OD have been categorized into two types: benign and toxic disinhibition. These categories are based upon whether the OD causes positive or negative behaviors to occur.

Benign disinhibition. Differences in behavior can be seen through altered communication styles, interests, and hobbies that people have online that are not always present offline. When people share personal information about themselves, such as emotional feelings, fears, and wishes that they would not readily share in FtF communication, they are expressing benign disinhibition (Suler, 2004a). This type of disinhibition may lead to higher levels of kindness, generosity, and going out of one's way to help others when engaged in online communication (Suler, 2004a).

Toxic disinhibition. Not all behavior that occurs online is considered to be positive. People who experience toxic inhibition engage in harsh, rude behaviors when communicating with others online. Suler (2004a) notes that it is because of toxic inhibition that people visit the "underworld of the internet-places of pornography, crime, and violence-territory they would never explore in the real world" (p. 321). The relationship between benign and toxic online disinhibition is very complex and wavers depending on the person experiencing the disinhibition. These differences are shown in the ways that people communicate; from harsh exchanges in chat rooms, to engaging in romantic relationships online that otherwise would not occur, lowered inhibition is the cause.

Evidence of lowered inhibition online. Much research has been devoted to understanding the scope of lowered inhibition online and has found that this phenomenon has widespread effects. Research by Dong (2012) looked at impulse control behaviors of internet addicts compared to a normal population of people. Dong (2012) had those with internet addiction complete several tasks and found that those with internet addiction showed lowered impulse control than their normal peers. Similar findings by Ferriter

(1993) found that respondents participating in preclinical psychiatric interviews using CMC provided more honest and candid answers compared to FtF interviews in the presence of the researcher. As a result, the use of FtF methodology led to a reduced willingness to answer sensitive questions and offered less honest and candid answers (Tourangeau et al., 2003). To summarize, research strongly suggests that people are more likely to self-disclose and be less inhibited while communicating online.

Factors leading to online disinhibition. With evidence of the widespread sense of lowered inhibition while online, theories have emerged to explain the causes and mechanisms. According to online disinhibition theory, there are several factors that influence disinhibited behaviors in online communication; they are outlined below.

Dissociative Anonymity. Anonymity is one of the leadings factors that influence different behavior online. The use of a username on social networking websites provides a sense of anonymity (Suler, 2004a). Dissociative anonymity alongside other aspects of online text communication influences a lowered sense of inhibition while online. For example, research by Joinson (2001) suggests that due to anonymity from CMC, people are more likely to self-disclose information. However, more recent research by Hollenbaugh (2013) suggests that people are less likely to disclose personal information through a personal blog when their visual image online and their real name are kept anonymous. These contradicting research findings requires further research in this area to fully understand the impact of anonymity on internet behaviors.

Asynchrony. Text communication does not take place in real time. With the absence of FtF communication, a person can take as much time as they desire to respond to a message sent to them. This asynchrony allows people to have a delayed response to

the repercussions of their behaviors online, which influences lowered inhibition (Suler, 2004a). Suler (2004a) notes that in real life, this behavior would be akin to saying something to someone and suspending time until you are emotionally and mentally ready to hear the response. This asynchrony in online text communication is relevant to this research because while messaging on Facebook, communication is not in real time and therefore inhibitions are lowered.

Invisibility. In most online situations, those interacting online cannot be seen. Although people may know with whom they are interacting, neither parties can be seen because the communication is taking place online through a messaging system or a profile post. Even with everyone's identity visible, being physically invisible exacerbates the OD (Suler, 2004a). As such, an online conversation with someone does not include the facial expressions and non-verbal cues that are seen offline. According to Suler (2004a), this amplifies OD because it is easier for one to express themselves freely without experiencing the facial repercussions of the other person. There has been some progress in the technology used to mimic facial expressions through online text communication. Whitty (2003) explains that the use of punctuation marks for the purpose of expressing emotion such as smiling or frowning, known as "emoticons", is becoming more widely used. Although the use of emoticons is a modest step towards the portrayal of facial expressions online, it is apparent that they are limited, and at present are inadequate to counteract the influence of invisibility in exacerbating OD.

Reduced Social Cues. According to the reduced social cues model (RSC) (Spears & Lea, 1991), the lowered social and facial cues in CMC lead to disinhibited online behavior. The RSC model argues that this disinhibition takes form in an attention

shift to the task online and not the recipient (Spears & Lea, 1991). This attention shift is also seen as a result of dissociative anonymity as mentioned previously. Another aspect of the RSC model is that people online experience a reduced awareness of accepted societal hierarchies, such as those attributed to class and leadership (Spears & Lea, 1991). Suler (2004a) refers to this phenomenon as minimizing authority, and describes it as a feeling of having a peer relationship with everyone online, despite any authority they may have in real life.

Cost-benefit assessment of online behaviors. According to Joinson, et al. (2010) cost-benefit assessments contribute to certain disinhibited online behaviors. The premise of this argument is that the behaviors in which people engage in online are not behaviors that they would otherwise engage in offline, and to do so they access online environments, such as Facebook, where they can gain pseudoanonymity and have less inhibition (Joinson, et al., 2010). Many disinhibited behaviors online, such as cybersex or online flirting, would result in negative repercussions were they to be enacted offline. Before engaging in such behaviors, people assess the benefits and costs of their behaviors online with their offline repercussions. The internet acts as a buffer for this cost-benefit assessment because of its lowered inhibition effects and leads to less inhibited decisions regarding their behaviors (Joinson, et al., 2010).

Flirting

While the concept of flirting has several definitions, one aspect remains clear: the goal of flirting is to express sexual interest in another person (Feinberg, 1996). According to Downey and Vutilli (1987), flirting can be defined in two ways: either to maintain or increase the level of an existing intimate relationship or to convey a message of interest

or attraction. An alternate definition explains flirting as involving teasing and communication, where the underlying purpose is to determine how intimate a person wants to become, if at all (Fienberg, 1996). Despite these numerous definitions, three main aspects of flirting have emerged and have been supported: to signal sexual interest, to test the ground to see if others are attracted, or to simply pass the time of day (Feinberg, 1996). Flirting is thought of as a universal basic instinct that is needed for the procreation of the species (Whitty, 2003). Although flirting is generally thought of as occurring in FtF communication, online flirting is a growing phenomenon. Online flirting takes place through CMC and disinhibited behaviors occur while flirting online as well.

   Flirting offline versus online. Flirting offline and online, though through different mediums, seeks to achieve the same goal of displaying romantic interest in another person through non-verbal cues. Non-verbal cues are a crucial aspect of flirtation and are displayed in offline flirting through behaviors such as pouting of the lips, smiling, displaying laughing or giggling, and being extremely animated (Whitty, 2003). Online flirting seeks to mimic these offline flirting behaviors in order to achieve flirtation through online communication. Whitty (2003) explains that a method of online flirting involves the use of emoticons, which are drawings made from grammatical symbols, to emulate the facial expressions that are used to portray offline flirting. Offline flirting also occurs with the use of facial expressions and gestures and other uses of the body (Whitty, 2003). Special importance is put on physical appearance, smell, and proximity while attempting to flirt with another person (Whitty, 2003). Online flirting through text communication also replicates the use of physical appearance in flirting through a description of physical attributes and attractiveness (Whitty, 2003). Although different

methods are used, both offline and online flirting emphasize the use of non-verbal cues, such as physical attributes and facial expression, to display flirtation.

Impact of flirting on a relationship. Flirting is used as a way to express sexual interest in another person (Feinberg, 1996). Flirting can become problematic when it occurs while in a committed romantic relationship with a person outside of this relationship. According to Glass (2003), flirting with another person crossing the line while in a mutually committed romantic relationship because it is an invitation that indicates receptivity of sexual attraction. It is to be expected that flirting outside of one's relationship would have a detrimental impact on the relationship (Kalbfleisch, 1993). This detriment to a relationship may occur if the other person in the relationship were to become aware of the flirting that his or her partner was engaging in with another person. According to Kalbfleisch (1993), jealousy is one of the leading reasons why flirting may have a negative impact on a relationship.

Despite the lack of research regarding perceptions of online flirting, there is hypothesized to be a general view of society that flirting online has less detriment to romantic relationships that flirting offline (Malt, 2007). A study by Malt (2007) yielded results that somewhat addressed this question. She asked adults ages 60 and up to explain their thoughts about online flirting and although many thought of online flirting as an unacceptable behavior, some described online flirting as "less a threat to a marriage than [flirting] in person" (p.95). However, it is important to note that this study assessed a group of adults who were in a different cohort than those being looked at in this study. As a result of the cohort effects that are present in the group of elderly adults, the

11

information provided may be different from information gathered from young adults via the current study.

A study by Whitty (2005) used participants in the younger age group of early to mid-twenties to address this question. Whitty had 234 participants complete a story relating to online infidelity and analyzed the responses as a way to understand their thoughts towards online infidelity. Results showed that the majority of participants viewed online infidelity as a real infidelity and as having a serious impact on a romantic relationship.

A study by Yarab, Allgeier, and Sensibaugh (1999) on the impact of extradyadic relationship behaviors found that college students consider behaviors such as flirtation to be a source of infidelity and to have a negative impact on a committed romantic relationship. Malt (2007) is clear in explaining that although there is no current research to support this assertion, this thought may be a reflection of societal views. Thus, one goal of the current study is to understand the difference between perceived detriment of online versus offline flirting on a romantic relationship and provide information regarding the impact of online versus offline flirting on romantic relationships.

The Current Study

Given the negative impact that flirting outside of a romantic relationship can have on a romantic relationship, and the vast amount of people who engage in online communication, it is important to understand the use of the internet for flirting and the associations between CMC and flirting among college students. Due to the lack of research in this area, a goal of this study is to provide a basis of information on the amount of online flirting, how online flirting occurs, and the impact of online flirting

among college-age students. This study gathered information such as internet usage amounts, past online flirting experiences, and the personal impact of online flirting, that is pertinent to understanding the role of online flirting in the lives of students.

The current study also examined participants' perception of how detrimental the impact of online flirting would be on their romantic relationship compared to offline flirting. Based upon the previously mentioned research by Malt (2007) and Whitty (2005), my main prediction was that online flirting would be perceived to have a lower level of detriment to a romantic relationship (Hypothesis 1). This perception may be due to an informal understanding of disinhibited online behavior that results from personal internet use. It is reasonable to believe that as people use CMC they gain an understanding that people say and do things differently online then they would say or do in person.

It has been hypothesized that infidelity that occurs in public has less of a detrimental impact on a romantic relationship than infidelity that occurs in private. According to Pittman (1990), some infidelity behaviors are accepted when taking place in public and yet the same behaviors lead to those in the romantic relationship being "outraged over private intimacies" (p. 20). This hypothesis has never been tested before; therefore, one of the goals of this study was to understand the impact of public versus private flirting in online situations. Therefore, my prediction was that public online flirting, such as flirting through a Facebook wall post, would lead to a lower perception of detriment on a romantic relationship than private flirting, through a private message (Hypothesis 2).

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

This study recruited 104 undergraduate students, however 23 students mistakenly

completed packets and did not meet the requirements. As a result, 81 undergraduate

students (31 men, 50 women) were used for the study. This college is located in a mid-

western state with a predominantly white population. The sample used for this study

consisted of mostly Caucasian students, who represented 81% of the sample. The rest of

the sample consisted of 10% Asian students, 6% African American students, 1% Latina

student, and 1% listed as a race that was not listed. The age of the participants was

between 18 and 25 years. Participants were currently in a romantic relationship or have

been in a romantic relationship in the past. Seventy-seven percent of the sample identified

their relationship as being exclusive with their significant other. However, 11% of the

sample identified their relationship as "Friends with Benefits", which is defined as having

a friend with whom one has occasional sexual relations, without a commitment or dating

arrangement (Friend with benefits, n.d.). Another 11% of the sample described their

relationship as being in an "Open Relationship", which is defined as a domestic

partnership or marriage in which each partner is allowed by the other to engage in sexual

activity with persons outside of the relationship (Open relationships, n.d.). One

participant reported being engaged and living with the partner. Participants were compensated for their time through research credit.

Measures

Participants were asked to complete multiple self-report measures to assess the role of online flirting in their lives and their perception of the detriment of online flirting versus offline flirting in romantic relationships. An initial questionnaire was given to assess internet usage rates, relationship commitment, past online flirting experiences, and the impact of online flirting in their lives. Participants read and rated the level of perceived detriment to a relationship of various flirting behaviors described in 4 vignettes. Each measure is described below.

Demographics survey. A demographics questionnaire was given to the participants. The survey items related to information such as race, year in college, gender, relationship status, and length of relationship (see Appendix C).

Internet usage questionnaire. Participants completed a survey pertaining to their use of online communication. This includes, but is not limited to, their use of social networking websites and online messaging applications. This portion of the study also included questions to determine which websites are used, as well the frequency of their use. Information regarding their personal experiences with personal online flirting and online flirting of their romantic partner will be gathered. Participants were asked to describe any experiences they have with online flirting causing a negative impact on their romantic relationship (see Appendix B).

Vignettes. Participants were given 4 vignettes to read that describe a flirting behavior that takes place either offline or online in order to measure the perceived

detriment of the flirting to a relationship. There were 4 types of flirting behaviors described through the vignettes: an offline public flirting situation, offline private flirting situation, online public flirting situation, and online private flirting situation. The participants were asked to rate how hurt they would be if each behavior described in the scenarios occurred between them and their committed romantic partners. Detriment to the relationship was measured through participants ranking each situation from "Not Hurt" to "Extremely Hurt" (see Appendix A).

Procedure

All measures described above were administered to participants in groups of approximately 5-10 students. Participants were instructed to complete each survey individually and to remain silent throughout the process. Prior to completing the surveys, participants were given an informed consent form (see Appendix D) to review and sign. This consent form outlined the nature of the study, the right to discontinue the study at any time should the participant choose to, and the confidentiality and anonymity regarding their responses. The three surveys were given to each participant in the same order: the vignettes, the internet usage survey, the commitment scale, and the demographics survey. The orders of the flirting scenarios in the vignettes were organized in multiple orders and each participant received a specific ordering at random. After the participants completed the 3 questionnaires, the administrator distributed a debriefing form (see Appendix E). All procedures were approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

I analyzed the results from the internet usage questionnaire, and expected to find

that online flirting is actively occurring on this college campus and is having an impact

on the relationships of students. The means and standard deviations were computed using

statistical software in order to describe the central tendency and variability of the items.

Students indicated the average number of times they are flirted with by others they know

solely through the internet or offline. In addition, students reported how often they flirt

with other people they know solely through the internet or offline (see Table 1). The

results show that students have a mean score of comfort with flirting online of 3.59 (SD=

1.67) times per week.

Table 1

Mean Internet Flirting Times per Week

	Flirted With		Students Flirting	
	M	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*
Known Offline	2.17	2.88	2.33	6.88
Known Online	1.16	2.23	0.38	1.18

Note. Known Offline – A person that one has met offline previously. Known Online – A person that one only knows through the internet. Flirted With – Students being flirted with by another person. Students Flirting – Students initiating flirting with another person.

A descriptive analysis of the hours per day spent on the internet doing various activities indicated that students are spending an average of 4.70 *(SD* = 2.43) hours per day on the internet completing various activities (see Table 2). Of these hours spent on the internet, students reported using Social Networking websites at a rate of 1.98 *(SD* = 2.06) hours per day. The social networking websites that students reported being members of included Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, as well as others. Results show that the highest used social media network is Facebook, with 93% of students reporting being a member (see Table 3). LinkedIn was reported the least amount of times with 1.2% of students reporting being members. In addition, findings showed that most college students (98%) have never joined an online dating website, such as eHarmony (see Table 4). However, 15% of students reported having met a romantic partner online

previously, suggesting that students are actively meeting partners online even if not through online dating websites.

Table 2

Hours per Day Engaging in Various Online Activities

	M	(SD)
Gaming	0.36	0.95
Instant Messaging	0.26	0.88
Emailing	0.86	0.84
Social Networks	1.98	2.06
TV/Movies	1.16	1.27
Job/School	1.85	1.64

Note. TV/Movies – hours spent watching television or movies through an internet device. Job/School – completing activities relating to job and/or school.

In addition to the quantitative information about online flirting habits that was gathered, information regarding qualitative aspects of internet usage and online flirting was obtained. Approximately 40% of students reported that they have posted, said, or done something online that they later regretted. Further narrative explanations revealed that students often acted with lowered inhibition towards others, in the form of lashing out or flirting, and later regretted these actions due to repercussions. Other responses explained that students regretted putting up "embarrassing" pictures and "rude" Twitter tweets and messages to others.

Table 3

Reported Joined Social Media Networks

	%	*Frequency (N=81)*
Facebook	93.8	76
Instagram	75.30	61
Pinterest	45.00	36
LinkedIn	1.30	1
Blogging Sites	2.50	2
Four Square	2.50	2
Google +	2.50	2
Myspace	2.50	2
Twitter	76.50	61

The students reported several negative repercussions from flirting on the internet through social media websites, such as Facebook. Students reported psychological distress, such as embarrassment, anger, and social distress. Approximately 50% of the students reported having these negative repercussions. Several responses explained situations where the writer lost a friendship or had troubles in the writer's romantic relationship as a result of the writer's actions on the internet. These relational problems

were often reported as resulting from flirting outside of a romantic dyadic relationship. Others reported feeling uncomfortable because persons they were once willing to communicate with online began to contact them and to make undesired romantic advances towards. This situation was described by one student as having a "creepy stalker" through the internet, which was described as someone who continued to message without responses until they have to be blocked from messaging. In addition to negative repercussions, there were several positive effects from flirting with people on the internet. Approximately 90% of students reported having positive outcomes, such as using the internet to begin and further a romantic relationship. Several responses described situations where both parties were able to communicate with each other more openly and "get to know people better."

In order to assess student's informal understanding of OD, students were asked to report how differently they believe people behave while using the internet compared to offline when they are not using the internet. Students responded with an average of 5.65 *(SD* = 1.17). This statistic indicates that students do believe that others are behaving differently online. When asked to describe how this difference in behavior looks, narrative responses had a theme of raised confidence while online or the lack of face-to-face interaction causing different behaviors while on the internet. Other responses described the lack of face-to-face interaction as a way to not be as conscious of actions, which leads to inhibited behaviors.

Table 4

Reported Online Dating Network Membership

	%	*Frequency (N=81)*
Never joined ODN	97.50	79
Joined ODN	1.20	1
Met RP OL before	14.8	12
Never met RP OL	83.70	67
Met current RP OL	3.70	3
Met current RM OF	95.10	77

Note. ODN – Online dating network. RP – Romantic partner. OL – Online. OF- Offline.

Analyses of Major Study Questions

Hypothesis 1. I examined the main effects of flirting type and situation using a 2 (Flirting Type: Offline vs. Online) X 2 (Flirting Situation: Public vs. Private) ANOVA. I anticipated that online flirting would be perceived as significantly less harmful to a committed romantic relationship than offline flirting, based on past research outlined above, and as a result of an informal understanding of disinhibited online behavior. Online flirting ($M = 5.55$) was rated as more harmful than offline flirting ($M = 4.95$); however, this finding was not significant, $F (1, 76) = 3.15$, $p = .08$ (see table 5). This finding suggests a trend of online flirting being viewed as less harmful to a committed romantic relationship compared to offline flirting.

Table 5

Perceived Detriment to Relationship Based on Flirting Type and Situation

	M	*SD*
Online Flirting	5.55	-
Offline Flirting	4.95	-
Public Online Flirting	5.30	1.66
Private Online Flirting	5.80	1.24

Hypothesis 2. In addition, using the results of the ANOVA outlined above, I predicted that public online flirting would lead to a lower perception of harm on a romantic relationship than private online flirting. Public online flirting situations ($M =$ 5.30) were rated as less harmful than private online flirting situations (M= 5.80); however, this finding was not significant, $F(1, 60) = 1.30, p = .26$. This finding suggests a trend towards students viewing public online flirting situation as less harmful than similar flirting situations that occur offline.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

One major purpose of this research was to gain knowledge about the online flirting habits of college students. The numerous questions that were given to college students gathered information about perceptions of online and offline flirting and internet usage rates and types. This survey showed that college students are actively using the internet for various social and professional reasons. In addition, students have an informal understanding of OD and have a general understanding of possible reasons why people are behaving differently online. Further research would be needed to understand how this understanding may be influencing their perceptions of others' behaviors. These findings can be used as a starting point for further research in this area, about which so little is known.

Students reported spending, on average, approximately two hours each day on social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, with Facebook being the most commonly used. Other social networking websites, such as LinkedIn, Google+, and Myspace are not being used as frequently. In addition to social media, students reported spending approximately one hour per day watching television and movies, and less than one hour per day gaming and instant messaging. Aside from recreational internet usage, students reported using their time spent on the internet for school and job related activities for nearly two hours per day. Academic institutions may find this

information useful in order to help students better capitalize on this time spent devoted to school activities.

This research also had a goal of gaining more understanding about the flirting patterns of college students while on the internet. Results showed that students are flirting and being flirted with at an average of approximately twice per week with people that they have met in offline situations, such as school and work. This finding suggests that students are choosing to use internet as a method to flirt with others whom they could interact with in person. The idea that students, who may have a choice to flirt with others face to face, are choosing to flirt via the internet is an extremely interesting idea that would require more research to fully understand. Furthermore, students reported flirting and being flirted with an average of one time per week with someone they know solely through the internet. These findings reinforce my prediction that college students are actively using the internet to flirt with others. However, the findings that 97% of students reported never joining an online dating website was surprising, considering the amount of internet usage and flirting that occurs among college students. These findings suggest that although students are actively flirting through the internet they are not using online dating websites as a platform for flirting.

Further analysis showed that 83% of students reported that they have never met a romantic partner online previously. In addition, 95% did not meet their current romantic partner online.These findings corroborate the idea that students are meeting romantic partners in offline situations and using different internet mediums to flirt with them. It was found that approximately 68% of students reported using a cell phone as the primary form of communication to stay in contact with their romantic partner. This finding is

particularly interesting because it shows that students are using cell phone communication, such as text messaging, more than face-to-face communication. The implications of this finding could be used to better understand not just flirting habits, but the communication habits of this generation. In addition, the results showed that students are using online communication as their primary form of communication with their romantic partner an average of 10% of the time. It is apparent that online communication is an active part of the lives of students and is used for various reasons.

Another major purpose of this research was to understand how apparent informal understanding of OD influences perceptions about online flirting. The results showed that there is, in fact, awareness that people say and do things online that they would not normally do in person. There were an overwhelming number of responses that described online behaviors as people behaving differently in a more outspoken, uninhibited manner. These behaviors included making statements online that are out of character, aggressively flirtatious, and/or excessively harsh. Responses included the lack of face-to-face contact being an influencing factor and not having any repercussions from behaviors that take place while on the internet. Overall, responses indicated an informal understanding that people are actively doing and saying things online that they would not say or do in person.

My major hypotheses were based on this informal understanding of OD that is apparent in the numerous responses pertaining to different online behaviors. My first hypothesis was that an informal understanding of OD would lead to the perception that online flirting is less detrimental to a relationship that offline flirting. The results of the ANOVA analysis showed that flirting type and situation do not significantly influence

ratings of harm. Although the findings were not significant, it is apparent through responses that flirting type and situation do have some influence on how people are viewing harm to relationships. Further research would need to be completed to better understand this relationship.

My next hypothesis was that public flirting would lead to a lower perception of harm on a romantic relationship than private flirting. The results of the ANOVA analysis also showed that this hypothesis was not statistically supported. Despite the lack of statistical significance, my results showed that there are differences in how people view online flirting compared to offline flirting.

There were several limitations to this study that may have interfered with the findings. One limitation is that the study was conducted at a predominantly white institution and as a result, the subject pool was not racially diverse. I believe a more diverse population would have provided a higher level of generalizability of the information that was discovered through this study. Another limitation was the low number of overall participants in the study ($N = 81$). This low number of participants may have caused the statistical analyses to not be as sensitive as they would have been with a larger participant pool. In other words, non-significant results may have been significant if the number of participants was larger.

Further research in this area would need to be completed to address these limitations, as well as related research topics. One example of research that could expand on the current research would be to assess how online flirting differs depending on gender. Males and females are both actively flirting on the internet but further research would allow us to understand any differences in flirting behaviors. Another area that

requires further research is the flirting habits of people in homosexual relationships. This study was not able to assess flirting behaviors outside of heterosexual relationships; as a result there is a lack of information in this area. Further research would need to be completed to understand the differences, if any, in online flirting habits of those in homosexual relationships. In addition, this study did not assess the influence of current relationship commitment on the perceptions of flirting on the internet. Further research would need to be completed to understand how relationship commitment influences this perception.

Firsthand information about internet usage and online flirting among college students has been gathered throughout this study in order to inform others of the growth of internet usage. In addition, this research has provided insight into understanding the OD effect and how it influences college students. The current study is especially informative because it addresses issues with online behaviors, such as flirting, that other research has not. With the growing amount of internet usage among college students and the lack of research in this area, this study was able to add much needed information about this topic.

REFERENCES

Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2010). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, *38*(3), 16.

Carlson, N. (2010). At Last–The Full Story Of How Facebook Was Founded. *Business Insider*, *5*.

Dong, G., DeVito, E. E., Du, X., & Cui, Z. (2012). Impaired inhibitory control in 'internet addiction disorder': A functional magnetic resonance imaging study. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, 203*(2-3), 153-158. doi:10.1016/j.pscychresns.2012.02.001

Downey, J. L., & Vitulli, W.F. (1987). Self-report measures of behavioral attributions related to interpersonal flirtation situations. *Psychological Reports, 61*(3), 899-904.

Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer‑Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 210-230.

Feinberg, L. S. (1996). *Teasing: Innocent fun or sadistic malice?*. Far Hills, NJ, US: New Horizon Press.

Ferriter, M. (1993). Computer aided interviewing and the psychiatric social history. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review, 4,* p.255-263.

friend with benefits. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon*. Retrieved September

    03, 2014, from Dictionary.com website:

    http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/friend with benefits

Gackenbach, J. (2007). *Psychology and the internet [electronic resource] :*

    Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal implications Amsterdam ; Boston

    : Elsevier/Academic Press, c2007; 2nd ed.

Glass, S. P., & Coppock, J. (2003). *Not" just Friends"*. New York: Free Press.

Gross, R., & Acquisti, A. (2005). Information revelation and privacy in online social

    networks. *Workshop on Privacy in the Electronic Society, ,* 71.

Hollenbaugh, E. E., & Everett, M. K. (2013). The effects of anonymity on self-disclosure

    in blogs: An application of the online disinhibition effect. *Journal Of Computer-*

    Mediated Communication, 18(3), 283-302. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12008

Joinson, A. N. (2001). Knowing me, knowing you: Reciprocal self-disclosure in internet-

    based surveys. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 4*(5), 587-591.

    doi:10.1089/109493101753235179

Joinson, A. N., Reips, U., Buchanan, T., & Schofield, Paine, C. B. (2010). Privacy, trust,

    and self-disclosure online. *Human-Computer Interaction, 25*(1), 1-24.

    doi:10.1080/07370020903586662

Kalbfleisch, P. J. (1993). *Interpersonal communication : Evolving interpersonal*

    relationships. Hillsdale, N.J. : Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993.

Lea, M., & Spears, R. (1991). Computer-mediated communication, de-individuation and

    group decision-making. *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies, 34*(2),

    283-301.

Malt, S. (2007). Love actually! older adults and their romantic internet relationships. *Australian Journal of Emerging Technologies & Society, 5*(2), 84-102.

Nicholas, C. (2010). At last–the full story of how Facebook was founded. *Business Insider*, 1-5.

Open relationships. (n.d.) *Segen's Medical Dictionary*. (2011). Retrieved September 3, 2014 from http://medicaldictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Open+relationships

Pew Research Center. (2012a). *Pew Internet Summer Tracking Survey*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org

Pew Research Center. (2014*). Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking surveys*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org

Pittman, F. S. (1989). *Private lies: Infidelity and the betrayal of intimacy*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The investment model scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships, 5*(4), 357-387. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00177.x

Suler, J. (1997). The final showdown between in-person and cyberspace relationships. *Psychology of Cyberspace*. Internet document.

Suler, J. (2004a). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, *7*(3), 321-326.

Suler, J. (2004b). The psychology of text relationships. *Online counseling: A handbook for mental health professionals*. London: Elsevier Academic Press.

The Network. (2011). Global Internet Traffic Projected to Quadruple by 2015. *The Network*. Retrieved from http:\\newsroom.cisco.com

Tourangeau, R., Couper, M. P., & Steiger, D. M. (2003). Humanizing self-administered surveys: Experiments on social presence in Web and IVR surveys. *Computers In Human Behavior*, *19*(1), 1-24. doi:10.1016/S0747-5632(02)00032-8

Whitty, M. T. (2005). The realness of cybercheating: Men's and women `s representations of unfaithful internet relationships. *Social Science Computer Review, 23*(1), 57-67. doi:10.1177/0894439304271536

Whitty, M. T. (2003). Cyber-flirting: Playing at love on the internet. *Theory & Psychology, 13*(3), 339-357.

Yarab, P.E., Allgeier, E.R., & Sensibaugh, (1999). Looking deeper: Extradyadic behaviors, jealousy, and perceived unfaithfulness in hypothetical dating relationships. *Personal Relationships, 6*(3), 305-316. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1999.tb00194.x

APPENDIX A

VIGNETTES

Please read all 4 hypothetical scenarios completely and rate below how hurt you would be if each behavior described in the scenarios occurred between you and your committed romantic partner. If you are currently in a committed romantic relationship, think about your partner when answering these questions. If you are not currently in a committed romantic relationship, think about a previous partner when answering these questions. If you have never been in a committed romantic relationship, imagine you have a partner when answering these questions. All of your responses will remain confidential. Please do not place your name on this questionnaire.

1: You and your romantic partner are at a party with a group of friends. You, your romantic partner, and some of your friends are all together having a conversation. Your romantic partner smiles and says, "Hey, you look really hot tonight" to another person of the opposite sex from your friend group in front of you and your other friends.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not			*Moderately*			*Extremely*
Hurt			*Hurt*			*Hurt*

2: You are on the internet browsing your Facebook timeline. You come across a post where your romantic partner wrote, "Hey, you look really hot tonight ☺." on the Facebook profile wall of a person of the opposite sex.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not			*Moderately*			*Extremely*
Hurt			*Hurt*			*Hurt*

3: You and your romantic partner are at a party with a group of friends. Later you find out that your romantic partner is having a separate, private conversation with another person of the opposite sex at the party when they smile and say (to a different person), "Hey, you look really hot tonight."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not			*Moderately*			*Extremely*
Hurt			*Hurt*			*Hurt*

4: Later you find out that your romantic partner was on the internet and sent another person of the opposite sex a direct and private message on Facebook saying, "Hey, you look really hot tonight ☺."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not			*Moderately*			*Extremely*
Hurt			*Hurt*			*Hurt*

INTERNET USAGE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questionnaire by checking or circling the appropriate number or in sentence form. All of your responses will remain confidential. Please do not place your name on this questionnaire.

1. On average, how many hours per day do you spend on the internet (via cellular phone or the computer)?

    _____ Hours

2. How many text messages overall do you, on average, <u>send</u> to others each day?

    _____ Text Messages

3. How many text messages do you overall, on average, <u>receive</u> from others each day?

    _____ Text Messages

4. Please indicate how many hours per day you use the internet to do the following activities:

    ___ Gaming

___ Instant messaging (AOL, etc.)

___ Emailing

___ Social networking websites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

___Watching movies/television

___ Job/ School related activities

___ Other

5.   Please indicate which social networking websites you are currently a member of

below:

__ Twitter

__ Facebook

__ Pinterest

__ Instagram

__ LinkedIn

__ Blogging websites (Bloggster, Xanga etc.)

__ Four Square

__ Google +

__ MySpace

Other (Please specify) _____

6.   Have you ever joined an online dating website (i.e. eHarmony, okCupid,

Match.com)?

Yes____   No____

7. Please indicate your experience on the online dating website. *Please skip if you have never used an online dating website.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negative			*Neutral*			*Positive*

8. Have you ever met a romantic partner online?

Yes____   No____

9. Did you meet your current romantic partner online?

Yes ____   No____

10. What is the primary form of communication you would use or currently use to stay in contact with your current romantic partner?

__ Face to face communication

__ Online communication (email, FaceBook messaging)

__ Cellular phone communication (texting, phone calls, etc.)

__ Handwritten communication (letters, etc.)

11. On average, how many times per week <u>do you flirt</u> with people that you know *personally and outside of the internet* through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter?

_____ times per week

12.   On average, how many times per week do people that you know *personally and outside of the internet* flirt with you through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter?

_____ times per week

13.   On average, how many times per week <u>do you flirt</u> with people that you know *only through the internet* through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter?

_____ times per week

14.   On average, how many times per week do people that you know *only through the internet* flirt with you through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter?

_____ times per week

15.   On average, how many times per week do you flirt with people through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter *while you are NOT in a committed romantic relationship*?

_____ times per week

16.   On average, how many times per week do you flirt with people through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter *while you are in a committed romantic relationship*?

        _____ times per week

17.   On average, how many times per week do people flirt with you through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter, *while they are in a committed romantic relationship with someone else*?

        _____ times per week

18.   On average, how many times per week do you communicate with people that you met through the internet?

        _____ times per week

19.   How comfortable would you be with joining an online dating website?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Comfortable			*Moderately Comfortable*			*Extremely Comfortable*

20.	How comfortable are you with flirting with people through online messaging

websites, such as Facebook or Twitter?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not			*Moderately*			*Extremely*
Comfortable			*Comfortable*			*Comfortable*

21.	How comfortable are you with flirting with people through online messaging

websites, such as Facebook or Twitter?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not			*Moderately*			*Extremely*
Comfortable			*Comfortable*			*Comfortable*

22.	Please describe how **you** would <u>ideally flirt with people</u> through online social

media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

23.	Please describe how **other people** would ideally flirt with you through online

social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

24.   Describe below how you flirt <u>with people</u> through online social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

25.   Describe below how <u>other people</u> flirt with you through online social media, such as Facebook and Twitter?

_____

_____

_____

_____

26.   How would you describe the way people flirt online through social media, such as Facebook and Twitter? Please include personal experiences, if any.

_____

_____

_____

_____

27.   Have you ever posted, said, or done something online that you have regretted? If

yes, please explain below.

        ___ Yes ___ No

_____

_____

_____

_____

28.   Please explain any <u>negative</u> repercussions you have experienced from flirting with

people through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

29.   Please explain any <u>positive</u> effects you have experienced from flirting with people

through an online social networking website, such as Facebook or Twitter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

30.   How differently do you think people behave while using the internet compared to offline when they are not using the internet ?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Different			*Moderately Different*			*Extremely Different*

31.   If you think people do behave differently online compared to offline, please explain how they do below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questionnaire by checking or circling the appropriate number. All of your responses will remain confidential. Please do not place your name on this questionnaire. If you feel atypical from the majority of the University of Dayton student population, please do not answer question #3.

1. Gender: Male ____   Female ____

2. Classification:

   Freshman ____   Sophomore ____   Junior ____   Senior ____   Other ____

3. Race:

   1. ____   Caucasian (White)   2. ____   Asian / Pacific Islander

   3. ____   African American   4. ____   Latino/a

   5. ____   American Indian   6. _____   Other (Please specify)

4. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

            Yes ____   No _____   Other____

5. What is the nature of your current romantic relationship?

   __ Friends with Benefits

   __ Dating (open relationship)

   __ Dating (exclusively)

__ Engaged (not living together)

__ Engaged (living together)

__ Married

6. How long have you been with your romantic partner?

_____ Months _____Years

7. How long ago did your previous relationship end?

_____ Months _____Years

8. Have you ever been or are you currently in a relationship where you and your partner were separated by a considerable distance?

Yes _____   No _____

9. Please indicate what method of communication you and your partner long distance partner used the most.

__ Face to face communication

__ Online communication (email, FaceBook messaging)

__ Cellular phone communication (texting, phone calls, etc.)

__ Handwritten communication (letters, etc.)

__ Not Applicable

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Online Flirting

Investigator(s):   Jasmine Smith, B.A. and Lee J. Dixon, Ph.D. (Faculty Advisor)

Description of Study: Participants will complete a series of self-report questionnaires addressing demographics, internet usage, and perceived level of detriment to a romantic relationship caused by online versus offline flirting.

Adverse Effects and Risks: No adverse effects are anticipated. However, you will be asked to think about past repercussions of flirting outside of a romantic relationship, which may possibly raise minor negative emotions. If at any time while completing the questionnaires you begin to feel uncomfortable, please discontinue your participation, knowing that doing so will not affect your receiving credit for participating. Students who are experiencing distress are further encouraged to schedule an appointment at the university counseling center at 937.229.3141. There is no charge for counseling services to undergraduates at U.D.

Duration of Study: The study consists of one session that will take approximately 60 minutes.

Page 1 of 2

Confidentiality of Data   You will not be asked to place your name on any of the questionnaires, and your responses will be identified with a research code.

Contact Person:

If you have questions or problems regarding the study, you can contact Jasmine Smith at smithj7@udayton.edu, *the faculty advisor, Lee J. Dixon, Ph.D. at (937.229.2160)* lee.dixon@udayton.edu, *or the chair of the Research Review and Ethics Committee, Greg C. Elvers at (937.229.2171)* greg.elvers@udayton.edu

Consent to Participate:

I have voluntarily decided to participate in this study. The investigator named above has adequately answered any and all questions I have about this study, the procedures involved, and my participation. I understand that the investigator named above will be available to answer any questions about research procedures throughout this study. I also understand that I may voluntarily terminate my participation in this study at any time and still receive full credit. I also understand that the investigator named above may terminate my participation in this study if s/he feels this to be in my best interest. In addition, I certify that I am 18 (eighteen) years of age or older.

_____   _____
Signature of Student   Date

_____
Student's Name (printed)

_____   _____
Signature of Witness   Date

Page 2 of 2

APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING FORM

Information about the Study

Online behaviors are dramatically different from offline behaviors (Suler, 2004a). Since its creation, the internet has been a growing phenomenon and is currently used daily all over the world. Over sixty percent of internet use is dedicated to online text communication through social networking websites, such as Facebook (Pew, 2012). Communication online through the use of messaging and chats often influences a person to do and say things that he or she would not normally do or say in real life. This phenomenon is known as online disinhibition (OD) and is a lowered inhibition that results from people communicating through online text communication (Suler, 2004a). Due to the influence of the OD, at times people may behave in a manner that is outside of their usual behavior exhibited offline. An example of this can be seen when a person flirts with someone outside of their dyadic romantic relationship while online when they would not normally in person. According to Feinberg (1996), the purpose of flirting is to portray sexual attraction, and is generally thought to have a detrimental influence on a romantic relationship when a person in the relationship is flirting with someone outside of the relationship. With the high amount of online text communication through the use of social networking websites, billions of people all over the world are experiencing disinhibited online behavior. Despite this increase in internet use, there is a lack of research about online flirting and the impact and perception of online flirting versus offline flirting; as a result this study will examine these flirting behaviors in college students. In addition, this study will assess participants' perception of how detrimental the impact of online flirting would be on their romantic relationship compared to offline flirting. This research will also look at the impact of public versus private online flirting on the perception of detriment on a dyadic romantic relationship.

In this study, you responded to several questionnaires addressing the hypotheses that we are testing. First, you read four scenarios and rated how hurt you would be if each occurred. This will allow me to understand the differences in perceived detriment to a relationship depending on the offline or online situations. I am anticipating that online flirting will be perceived as less detrimental to a romantic relationship than offline flirting as a result of an informal understanding of disinhibited online behavior. Secondly, you completed an Internet Usage Questionnaire that will help me to understand the norms of internet use on this college campus and the prevalence of online flirting.

Your responses on the above measures will be analyzed and applied to my hypotheses, in hopes of gaining insight into the relationship between offline and online flirting.

For more information on these topics please see the following references:

Suler, J. (2004a). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & behavior*, *7*(3), 321-

      326.

Whitty, M. T. (2003). Cyber-Flirting Playing at Love on the Internet. *Theory & Psychology*, *13*(3), 339-357.

Assurance of Privacy

      Your responses will be confidential and they will only be identified by a participant number in the data along with other participant's numbers.

Contact Information

      If you have questions or problems regarding the study, you can contact Jasmine Smith at *smithj7@udayton.edu*, the faculty advisor, Lee J. Dixon, Ph.D. at (937.229.2160) Lee.Dixon@*udayton.edu*, or the chair of the Research Review and Ethics Committee, Greg C. Elvers at (937.229.2171) *greg.elvers@notes.udayton.edu*.

Some items from the surveys you completed measured levels of hurt pertaining to current or past romantic relationships. Individuals who endorse that they have experienced hurt may benefit from receiving counseling. You can schedule an appointment at the university counseling center at 937.229.3141. Counseling services are free for U.D. undergraduates.

Thanks and Credit

      Thank you for your participation in this study. I will award you one research credit for your participation.

VITA

2012	B.A., University of Dayton, Dayton, OH
2013 – Present	M.A., University of Dayton, Dayton, OH

Presentations

Reeb, R. N., Snow, N., Kinsey, R., & Smith, J. (2013, May). *The Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale: Further evidence of validity*. Poster accepted to be presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, Illinois.

Bidwell, S., Kasper, K., DeLuca, H., Bartel, A., Smith, J., Snow, N., Stayton, L., Steel, A., & Mason, S. (2012, April). *The Psycho-Ecological Systems Model for engaged scholarship and service learning: Theory, research, and practice*. PowerPoint presentation at Stander Symposium at University of Dayton, Dayton, OH.

Davidson, W., Majka, T., & Majka, L., Reeb, R., Rosing, H., Furco, A., Steel, A., Mason, S., Stayton, L., Ufholz, K., & Smith, J. (2011, October). *Psycho-Ecological Systems Model of Engaged Scholarship and Service-Learning Research: Multidisciplinary Research Applications.* PowerPoint presentation at Annual Meeting of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, Chicago, Illinois.