Pure Intentions?: Gendered Online Deception in the Age of Hooking-Up

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Abstract

This study examines how different cultures on mobile dating apps as well as user gender influence the likelihood of deception and how that deception is employed. An anonymous survey was electronically distributed across a large, southern university campus to individuals who have been exposed to both Tinder and Bumble containing questions about deceptions they encountered and deception they employed while using the apps. Responses were then analyzed to discover any significant differences in deception across gender and mobile app. Cross-app examination is imperative due to the hookup culture perpetuated by Tinder and the level-playing field boasted by Bumble. Findings indicate that the intentions of users play a role in the amount of deception employed, but not in the way anticipated. Both casual and serious intentions increased the amount of deception employed, and women were slightly more likely to be deceptive than men on both apps.

Introduction

Research has established that deception is commonly found in online dating (OD) applications. Specifically, there have been studies conducted into the linguistic strategies used to employ deception on traditional dating websites (Toma & Hancock, 2012). Further, Hancock and Guillory (2015) put forth the feature-based model as to why deception is prevalent on computer mediated communication (CMC). CMC is characterized by its asynchronicity and distribution of users which facilitates deception. Both of these help users to strategically and, perhaps, deceptively construct their self-image. We hope to examine the intersection of deception and OD, specifically, how deception differs on dating apps with radically different cultures. In recent years, two new applications have dominated the OD culture. Tinder has helped normalize hooking up and thereby associated with creating casual relationships. Bumble on the hand, has specific features which contribute to it being viewed as platform for building more genuine connections.Tinder and Bumble has provided users with increased opportunities for deceiving and for being deceived. With an estimated 50 million users and 1.6 billion daily swipes on Tinder (Smith, 2018a), coupled with Bumble's estimated 37 million users and 24 million swipes per day (Smith, 2018b), it is clear that these platforms have reached mainstream popularity**,** it is therefore imperative to investigate how likely it is that users will engage in deception on these apps and to examine how gender plays a role in the deceptive strategies used.

Statement of Purpose

Although traditional dating websites have been examined for deception strategies **(**Toma & Hancock, 2012**),** there is a gap in general knowledge about modern dating apps. How deception is explicitly employed on Tinder and Bumble dating apps has yet to be explored, nor whether these strategies differ across gender. Tinder and Bumble have different reputations among users and non-users alike. According to Bumble.com, since women are required to message first on Bumble, Bumble boasts a reputation of "leveling the playing field" and "challenge[ing] outdated heterosexual norms" (2018). On the other hand, Tinder is debatably responsible for normalizing "hookup culture" which is discussed below. It is necessary to examine how deception is utilized within these popular apps. Our first question (RQ1) is: Which gender is more likely to engage in deception? If we can regard previous research as reliable, we posit H1a: Women are more likely to engage in deception and H1b: Men are less likely to engage in deception. Furthermore, we felt it necessary to assess how users actually perceive each app in order to confirm or challenge preexisting notions about their respective cultures. Therefore we present (RQ2): How do users perceive the culture of Tinder/Bumble? If the general assumptions about the dating apps can be believed, we will confirm H2a: One uses Tinder to find a hookup and H2b: One uses Bumble to find a genuine connection. Both (RQ1) and (RQ2) led us to construct (RQ3): Does the intention of the dating app (hooking-up vs. obtaining a relational partner) influence how likely users are to engage in deception? Due to the fact that users who are looking to engage in casual relationships have less at stake than individuals hoping to find a genuine connection, we present H3a: Tinder users are more likely to engage in deception due to the casual intentions encouraged by the platform and H3b: Bumble users are less likely to engage

in deception due to their more serious intentions. Definitions of specific terms and concepts are required to answer these research questions.

Definition of Terms

1. *Deception* - a deliberate attempt, without forewarning, to create in another a belief which the communicator considers to be untrue (Voida, 2002).

2. *Feature-based Model* - a model positing three features of communication contexts that influence deception: recordability, synchronicity, & co-presence (Hancock, 2015).

3. *Co-Presence* - the third part of the Feature-based Model. Co-presence refers to the physical proximity of communicators (Hancock, 2015).

4. *Hook-up Culture* - development of dating culture that focuses on the physical and sexual acts of dating and less on relational aspects (MacLeod & McArthur, 2018).

5. *Self-presentation* - the process or "performance" wherein individuals attempt to control impressions others form of them (Guadagno, Okdie, & Kruse, 2011).

6. *Face* - positive public image you seek to establish in social interactions (Goffman, 1955).

7. *Mate Selection* - the act of seeking a mate with the intention to form an intimate relationship (Guadagno, Okdie, & Kruse, 2011).

Literature Review

Previous research uncovers how deception permeates online settings and provides a frame for analysis. Tong & Walther first highlight how in mediating romantic relationships online, social distance and the preservation of face are vital to understanding reactionary responses to rejection (2010). Their study indicates the primary motive of deception,

self-presentation or face, and how social distance, or the level closeness, effects responses. Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs posit how individuals who engage in finding romantic relationships want to have high accuracy in their dating profiles, but are pushed to be deceptive in disclosing personal information, such as: age, body type, and income (2006). The tailoring of self-presentation serves as a means to deceive. Toma & Hancock explore OD deception, specifically in relation to lying (2012). Their findings centered around communication in response to lying in CMC. Their research posits that individuals will utilize deceptive strategies in order to meet the expectations of their perceived audience. Moreover, Hancock & Guillory's study extends this definition of deception to encompass modifications to dating profiles that promote self-presentation contingent on their accuracy (2015).

Current research also addresses the effects of gender pertaining to OD, but leaves a gap in analyzing gender in wake of new OD platforms: Tinder and Bumble. *Sex, Lies and fMRI Gender Differences in Neural Basis of Deception* explains that in the case of presenting personal information, men and women were both willing to utilize deception for self-presentation (2012). However, neurological responses differed. Moreover, self-presentation serves as the doctrine of deception. Guadagno, Okdie, & Kruse's journal reports that men, specifically in mate selection, are more likely than women to approach (2012). Bumble, challenges this notion as women are forced into the role of initiator. This poses the question: does a platform's design modify communication in online dating?

Next, the structure of Bumble and Tinder in relation to the feature-based model highlights the need in research. The feature-based model discusses three important communication features that influence deception: recordability, synchronicity, and co-presence (Hancock & Guillory,

2015). First, recordability is the degree to which a communication medium can yield a record of the communication. This research indicates that a high recordability produces a low deception rate. Bumble and Tinder, specifically, can be interpreted as highly recordable as messages are kept permanently, thus predicting low deception rate. Second, synchronicity is the degree to which a conversation is occurring in real time. Hancock & Guillory disclose that communication that is highly synchronous can be highly deceptive as there is little time to communicate a genuine and true response. Bumble and Tinder messages can have high and low synchronicity as messages happen in real time, yet there is also time to craft messages in a way the user wants, deceptive or not. Moreover, with Bumble, the woman is made to send the first message and with Tinder, the man usually makes the first move. Last, co-presence refers to how close in proximity the communicators are. They suggest that if people are physically present, they are unable to lie about certain things and that CMC provides a greater number of opportunities to be deceptive. In relation to the present study, Bumble and Tinder, by being online mediums, push the frequency of deceptive behavior. Also, since Bumble and Tinder are dating applications whose settings allow for the control of social proximity of users, this could have a direct impact on the degree to which co-presence influences deception.

MacLeod & McArthur (2018) emphasize the pertinence in analyzing both platforms, Tinder and Bumble, as their cultures differ. The study coins the term, "hook-up culture," elaborating that Tinder specifically utilizes this culture in order to produce relationships amongst users that are of low-expectation. On the other hand, Bumble, by pushing women to make the first contact, implicitly acknowledges this increase in rejection and threat to face that is produced, thus making the platform high-expectation relationship based. Previous studies have

not acknowledged the distinction in cultures amongst mediums of communication in which analyze OD. Furthermore, in not specifying this culture they leave a gap of research concerning how deception strategies are utilized based on the apps' culture.

Methodology

We created and distributed a Qualtrics survey with basic demographic questions as well as questions on deception. This allowed us to analyze cross sections of our data by gender, as gender is a large component of our first hypothesis (1a and 1b). Whereas the current field of research in online dating analyzes websites like Match.com or eHarmony, we hope to expand research on youth practice in newer platforms, in this case, Bumble and Tinder. To capture this demographic, this survey was distributed via Facebook groups and other social media to University of Texas at Austin undergraduates who use these apps. Our survey was open for two weeks and included 179 respondents. It comprised of fourteen questions in total, five of which had options to enter free responses to provide more detail about deceptive situations (e.g., "What was your main goal in using Tinder", with multiple choice options and one fill in option of "Other"). Of our 179 respondents, 84 were male and 94 were female, aged 18-26+. The questions aimed to examine gender differences in deception (H1a & H1b), user perceptions of the apps' cultures (H2a & H2b) and whether there is a difference in deceptive practices in online dating based on intentions or motive (H3a & H3b). In order to measure deception, the survey included an assurance of anonymity, and, in order to avoid confusion about what constitutes each deceptive practice, each term mentioned was defined within the question (e.g., deception).

Protection of Human Rights

Subjects voluntarily took part in the research project; participants were not be required to sign any legally binding documents and were able to quit the survey at anytime. In order to protect the subjects' confidentiality, unless given consent by the participant, we did not keep a record of any contact information. The purpose of retaining contact information is to provide the participant with a copy of finished study if they wish to acquire one. Finally, participants were given full discretion on whether their data was actually used in the findings.

Data

The data from our research questions fully supported two of the three of our hypotheses. On both apps, 55% of men used deceptive behavior versus 57% of women (there were a statistically insignificant number of "other" responses to the gender question, so they were excluded). As shown in Figure 1, this data supports our first hypothesis (H1a) that women are more likely to engage in deceptive behavior than men (H1b). In addition, users do perceive the culture of Tinder and Bumble to be different. The second hypothesis was supported with this data**.** As shown in Figure 2a and 2b, Tinder is used more often when seeking fun/entertainment (H2a) (39% vs 28%), and Bumble is used more often when trying to find a relationship (H2b) (48% vs 29%). The data supports our hypothesis (H3a) that the users' intention for using an app influences their likelihood of being deceptive; however, contrary to our hypothesis (H3b), these behaviors differed between the apps. As shown in Figure 3a and 3b, our hypothesis (H3a) was supported by the data from Tinder users, where the likelihood of deception was much higher when the intentions were less serious. Among users who used both apps, they used deceptive practices on Tinder more often for fun than for finding relationships (67% vs. 58%). Conversely,

our hypothesis (H3b) for Bumble was not supported by the data we collected. Users indicated higher rates of deceptive practices when looking for a relationship on Bumble than when using the app for fun or entertainment. Among users who used both apps, they used deceptive practices on Bumble more often for finding relationships than for fun or entertainment (70% vs. 65%).

Discussion

The results suggest there are correlations between gender, users' intentions, and how these intentions influence the likelihood of using deceptive practices. This study confirms that there are differences in the levels of deception used by each gender. Our data suggests women are more deceptive on these two dating apps consistent with H1a and H1b. This consistency could be a result of the effect we mentioned in the literature review, where women feel higher societal pressure to appear, act, or look a certain way (Toma & Hancock, 2012). The societal pressures put on women increase their necessity to self-present in a way that is socially desirable. In order to do this, women may feel more obligated to engage in more online deception.

Furthermore, users perceive the apps' cultures differently, confirming H2a and H2b. Responses about users' perceptions of the apps indicate that users view Tinder as a platform for fun/entertainment or low-expectation relationships, and Bumble as a place to find a lasting relationship; consistent with MacLeod & McArthur (2018). These different perceptions create an opportunity for users to interact differently on the platforms based on their expectations. Tinder fosters a low expectation environment, cultivating hook-up culture and will inevitably influence users to act accordingly. On the other hand, as outlined by MacLeod & McArthur (2018), Bumble pushes women into more active roles in developing online relationships. In

doing so, they implicitly modify the culture to focus on the construction of genuine connections. The prospect of finding a genuine relational partner effectively raises the stakes and expectations for Bumble users.

The data suggests that the intentions of dating app users influence how likely they are to engage in deception. When examining Tinder, users with casual intentions produced a higher frequency in deceptive strategies, confirming H3a. The casual intentions held by Tinder users indicate that they may be less invested in portraying themselves accurately. Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs study specifically forms the conclusion that individuals seeking high-expectation relationships want to have high accuracy in relation to their online presentation (2006). Therefore, it can be assumed that opposite is also true in that low-expectation relationships produce more deception. However, our findings contradict H3b by indicating that despite seeking high-expectation relationships, Bumble users used deceptive practices more often than users with less serious intentions. Even though the Ellison et. al (2006) study found that high-expectation relationships produced a need to be more accurate, the root of his findings indicated that the need to preserve self-presentation superseded one's desire to be accurate. They further lament that deception can still permeate within high-expectation relationships. Thus, providing a rationale to why Bumble users would still utilize deception in the pursuit of a genuine connection.

Applications

Our data and findings can be extended to real world applications. By understanding how an app's culture can influence user deception, app developers should keep in mind how preference settings and user expectations impact perceptions of an app's culture. For example, by

taking away the ability to expand your match distance beyond your immediate vicinity, app

developers could increase user accuracy. Also, our research could benefit dating app users. By

making them aware of user interactions on the apps, users are able to make more informed

decisions when choosing an app that's best suited for their needs.

Limitations

The number of responses and homogenous demographics limited the accuracy and scope

of the data. Our response rate was fairly limited, given the time constraints for data collection,

and there were more women than men who completed the survey. A more comprehensive

analysis could have been conducted had there been more time for people to submit responses. In

addition, Tinder is two years older than Bumble, which likely means Tinder is more familiar and

used, which led to fewer responses from individuals who solely use Bumble. Next, the

population we sampled from is overwhelmingly white and young, which limits our sample

demographics. Rather than having a representative sample of the entire youth population that

uses these dating apps, our sample was confined to group members' social networks. This is

unlikely to be an accurate representation of the larger demographics of Bumble and Tinders'

users. Therefore, our findings cannot be generally applied to all mobile dating app users and

future research is necessary.

Possibilities of Future Research

Our limitations and research into the apps have led us to propose two separate paths for

future research. First, current apps allow users to control physical distance of potential matches

in relation to their personal proximity via distance preferences in the apps' settings. This allows

the user to control the level of co-presence/social distance thus, posing the question: "Does user

control of social and physical distance of potential matches affect the likelihood and/or the strategies of deception on mobile apps?". Secondly, Bumble and Tinder both allow users to select sexual orientation preferences. Therefore, future research could address online deception in relation to sexual orientation. Our research does not explicitly outline or account for cases in which culture is modified on these platforms in wake of sexual orientation that is not heterosexual. For example, in lesbian relationships that exist on Tinder, females will have to assume a more proactive role in making contact that is already simulated on Bumble by requiring females to initiate contact. As mobile dating apps continue to become increasingly popular, it is important to continue examining how online deception functions on these platforms. Deeper understanding of deceptive practices and motives for using these apps are necessary to understand the new and changing ways people form romantic relationships.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Question 1: What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Neither of these/other

Question 2: What is your age?
- 18-20
- 20-22
- 22-26
- 26+

Question 3: What is your race/ethnicity?
- White
- Black
- Latinx
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern
- Bi-/multi-racial

Question 4: Which platform have you used before?

- Tinder
- Bumble
- Both

Question 5: Displayed to respondent if "Tinder" only is selected on platform question.

What is/was your main goal for using Tinder?

- Find a relationship
- Hookup/sex
- Friendship
- Fun/entertainment
- Other

Question 6: Displayed to respondent if "Bumble" only is selected on platform question.

> What is/was your main goal for using Bumble?
> - Find a relationship
> - Hookup/sex
> - Friendship
> - Fun/entertainment
> - Other

Question 7: Displayed to respondent if "Both" is selected on platform question.

> What is your main goal for using Tinder?
> - Find a relationship
> - Hookup/sex
> - Friendship
> - Fun/entertainment
> - Other

Question 8: Displayed to respondent if "Both" is selected on platform question.

> What is/was your main goal for using Bumble?
> - Find a relationship
> - Hookup/sex
> - Friendship
> - Fun/entertainment
> - Other

Question 9: How frequently do you use this/these app(s)?
- Multiple times a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- I don't use this/these app(s)

Question 10: Drag the slider. How likely are you to use deception in the following situations? (Deception is defined as: a deliberate attempt, without forewarning, to create in another a belief which the communicator considers to be untrue)

Q26 Drag the slider. How likely are you to use deception in the following situations? (Deception is defined as: a deliberate attempt, without forewarning, to create in another a belief which the communicator considers to be untrue)

	Not at all likely (1)	Not very likely (2)	Somewhat likely (3)	Very likely (4)
	0	1	2	3	4

Friendship

First encounter with a potential romantic interest

One-night stand/hookup

New/casual dating or relationship

Committed/serious relationship

Question 11: Select which behaviors you have done on the app(s) from below (select all that apply):

- Used a photo that was not yours in your profile
- Used a photo that is more than a year old
- Photoshopped photographs in profile
- Provided misleading information in profile description
- Misled another user within the app via other means
- I have not done any of these

Question 12: Select which behaviors you have encountered on the app(s) from below (select all that apply):

- Used a photo that was not yours in your profile
- Used a photo that is more than a year old
- Photoshopped photographs in profile
- Provided misleading information in profile description
- Misled another user within the app via other means
- I have not been misled, to my knowledge

Question 13: What was the gender of the person who did this/these?

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Doesn't apply

Question 14: If you misled a user, what were your intentions in doing so?

- Please write your answer briefly here:
- I have not misled a user
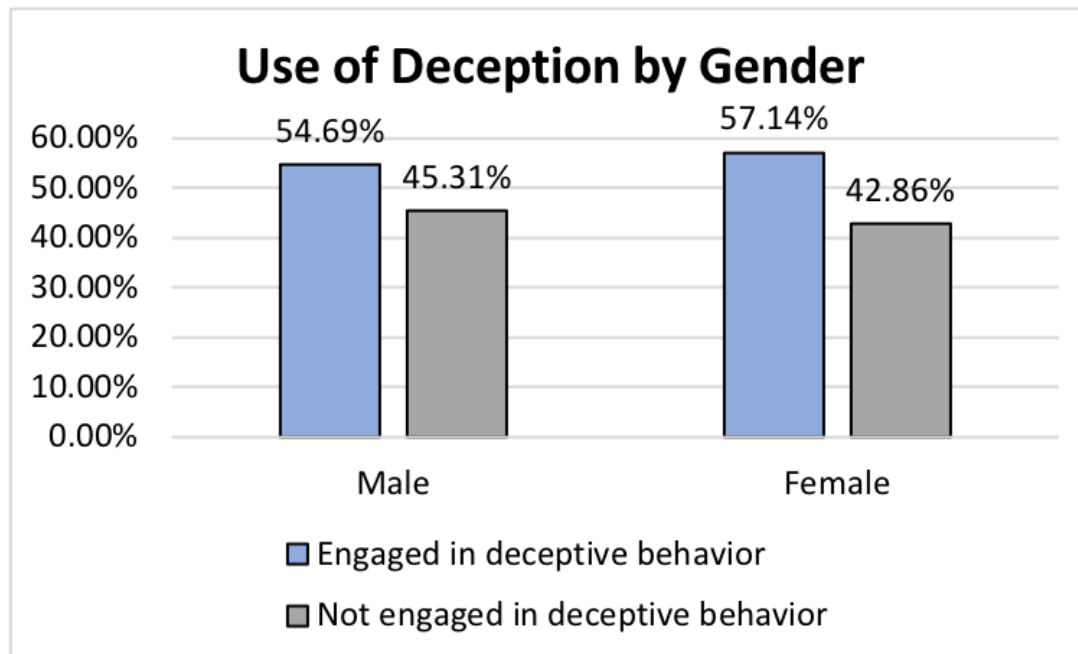
Appendix B: Graphs and Tables
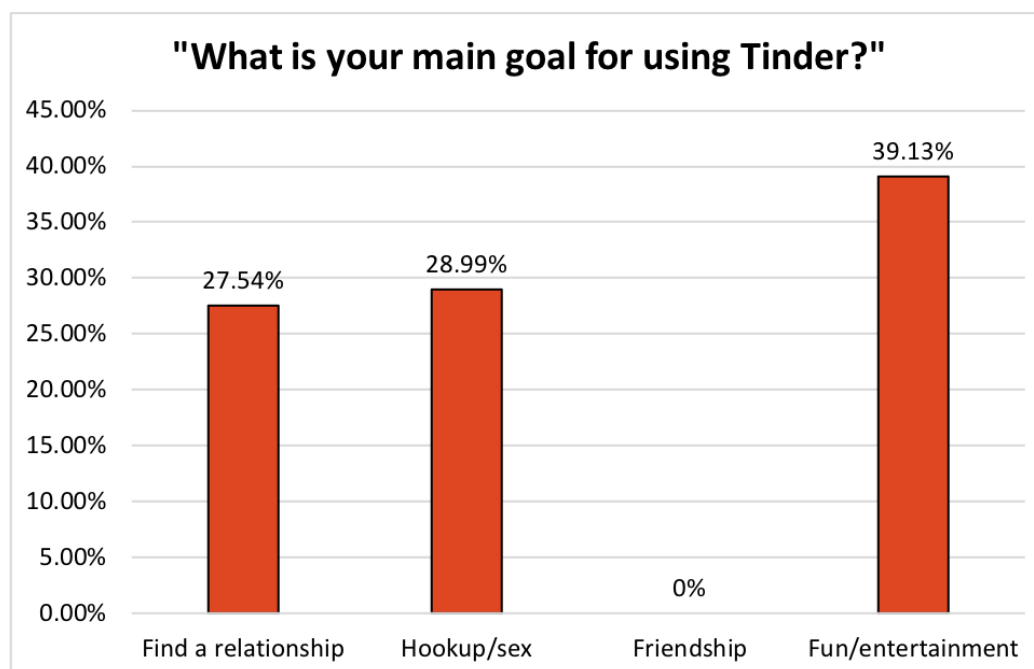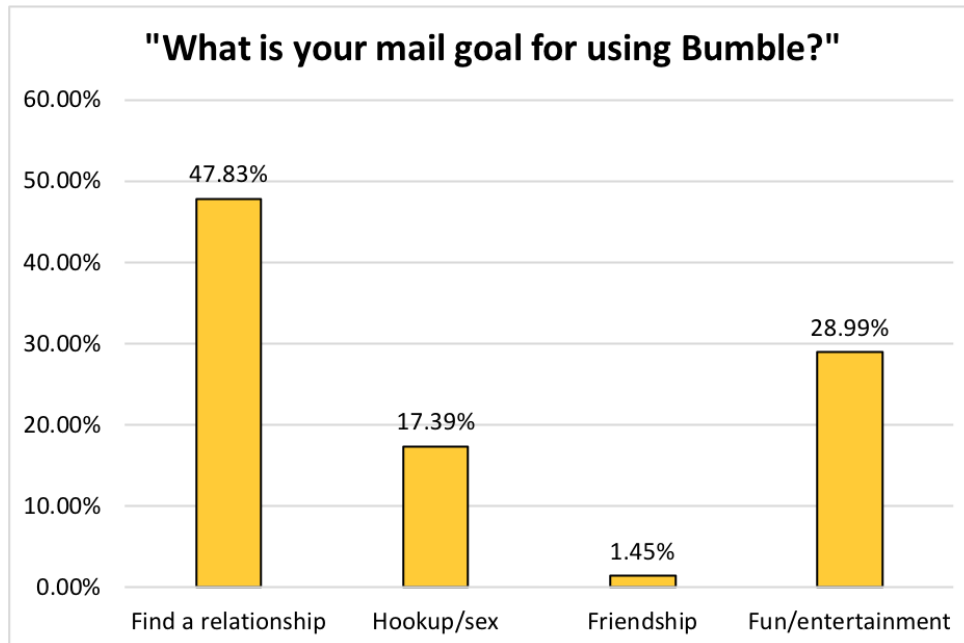
Figure 1.

Figure 2a.

Figure 2b.

"What is your mail goal for using Bumble?"

- Find a relationship: 47.83%
- Hookup/sex: 17.39%
- Friendship: 1.45%
- Fun/entertainment: 28.99%

Figure 3a.

Deception by Intention-Tinder
(Among respondents who use both apps)

- Find a relationship: Have been deceptive 57.89%, Have not been deceptive 42.11%
- Hookup/sex: Have been deceptive 65.00%, Have not been deceptive 35.00%
- Friendship: Have been deceptive 0%, Have not been deceptive 0%
- Fun/entertainment: Have been deceptive 66.67%, Have not been deceptive 33.33%

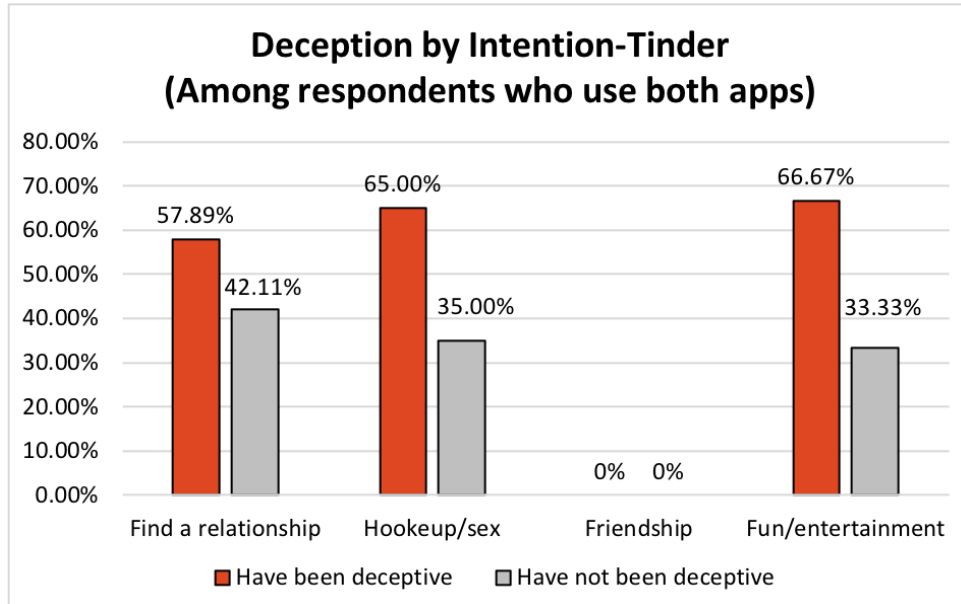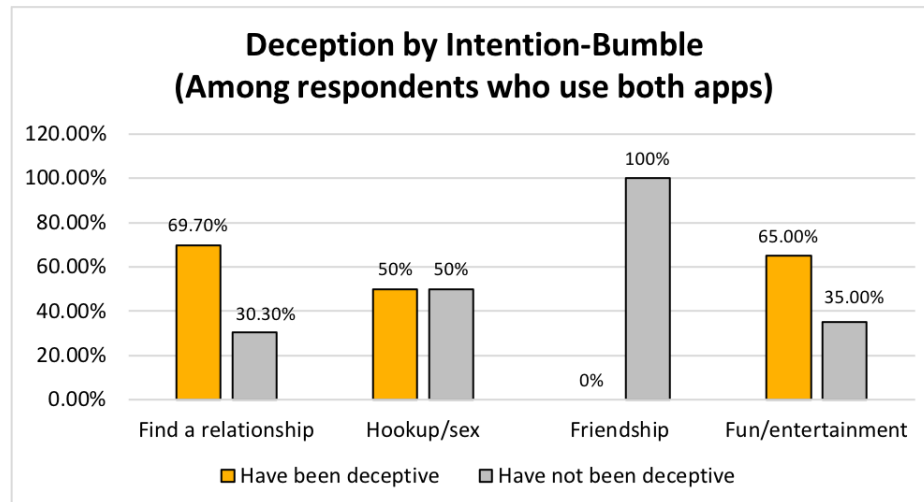■ Have been deceptive ■ Have not been deceptive

Figure 3b.

PART II

Reflection and Recommendations

As we reflected on the group research project overall, we found that the process was tedious yet rewarding. The group thought that, generally, the class structure gave great emphasis on group work in relation to academic understanding and writing. First, with weekly discussions, we learned to understand and reflect on academic studies that better prepared the group for the research part of the final project. These discussions also helped the group better understand each other in how we think and how we can best contribute to the final project when it came down to assigning project duties. The structure of how the group assignments were spaced out was helpful in formulating our ideas and pushing the project forward. The research proposal specifically was helpful for our group to meet and discuss how we wanted to conduct our research and what academic literature we wanted to base our study off of. The proposal forced the group to not procrastinate in forming the early parts of our final project which, in the end, benefited us greatly as school became a burden to all of us in the busy final weeks of classes. The group also thought that the group sizes were perfect since we could each participate in meaningful ways while not being too stressed by the workload. The presentations, on the other hand, presented some stress to the group process, while the presentation itself does not award a great deal of the overall grade to the final project as a whole. The group also thought that the specific instructions for the presentation itself was not presented very clearly as there is not rubric or something similar. The group also thought that the peer evaluations done in class for the groups presenting for that day gave no real purpose and was not clear in how this would help us learn more from the class. The actual presentations themselves, even with the problems

discussed, helped our group better understand our findings because it forced us to be able to make it understandable to those who have not been working on it. It was helpful to think of the presentation in the way that we were trying to get funding for our research. It helped us think of why our research is important and helped the group form the discussion and latter sections. The final group paper brought about no complaints from the group as it was a straightforward research paper.

The recommendations of the group come mostly from the presentation part of the process. We thought that the ambiguity of the presentation process, the unimportance of the presentation evaluations done in class, the point spread for the presentations, and the time limit for presentations could be done in a better manner. First, the presentations process should contain some sort of rubric and specific instructions to help eliminate the ambiguity. Though the group does not think it was a problem for the class, we think it would be beneficial. With more emphasis on specific presentation qualities, we thought that the presentation itself should be worth more than 10 points of the total 150 of the final group project. The presentation seemed like such an integral part of the class and group process yet the amount of points earned, which is equal to that of a Wednesday activity during the semester, felt unequal. As for the evaluations, the group believes that this should be kept for the sake that, if not, it would discourage some people to come to class during presentation days or to pay attention to such presentations. We do, however, feel that these evaluations do not help in the learning process of the class content or the group project process. Lastly, with presentation recommendations, our group felt that the allotted time given for the presentations themselves was not sufficient enough for groups to be able to address all parts of the research paper, at least not in good, academic detail. We understand there

was no strict time limit, yet the ambiguity of the presentation details and the notion that the

presentations should be concise added extra stress and caused most groups to rush through their

presentations. In conclusion, though we had some troubles with the presentation process, the

group research assignment overall was extremely helpful in the learning process for the class.

Parts of the Final Paper

Danielle Castillo: Literature Review, Possibilities of Future Research, Discussion (Applications)
An Duong: Limitations, Discussion (Applications), Protection of Human Rights
Tynan Holt: Methodology, Data, Discussion, Appendices
Alyssa Morris: Abstract, Introduction, Statement of Purpose, Discussion (Applications)
Brandon Slovacek: Possibilities of Future Research, Discussion, Definition of Terms
Abby Triño: Limitations

PowerPoint Slides

Pure Intentions?

Gendered Online Deception in the Age of Hooking-Up

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Introduction

❖ The emergence of Tinder and Bumble has changed online dating

❖ Tinder and Bumble have developed different cultures

❖ Culture differences generate questions of user intent and deception

Prior Studies

❖ Hook-up Culture (MacLeod & McArthur)

❖ Self-Presentation Processes (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs)

❖ Gendered Online Deception (Guadagno, Okdie, & Kruse)

Research Questions & Hypotheses

RQ1: What is the likelihood of each gender to engage in deceptive behavior?

H1a: Women are more likely to engage in deception.

RQ2: How do users perceive the culture of Tinder vs. the culture of Bumble?

H2a: Users perceive Tinder to be more for finding a hookup.

H2b: Users perceive Bumble to be more for finding a relationship.

RQ3: Does the intention of the dating app user (hooking up vs. obtaining a relational partner) influence how likely they are to engage in deception?

H3a: Tinder users are more likely to engage in deceptive behavior.

H3b: Bumble users are less likely to engage in deceptive behavior.

Methodology

❖ Qualtrics survey

❖ 20 questions total including multiple choice, fill in the blank, slider questions, & optional free response

❖ Distributed online via our personal social networks that consists primarily of undergraduates, ages 18-25+

Findings

RQ1: In general, on both apps, 55% Men used deceptive behavior vs 57% Women.

H1a: Data **supported** the hypothesis that women are more likely to engage in deceptive behavior than men.

Use of Deceptive Strategies by Gender

Implications

Our data suggests that although women engage in more deception than men, both men and women were likely to engage in deception on these apps. Consistent with the Guadagno et al. study that posits men and women "were both willing to utilize deception for self-presentation".

Users perceive apps' cultures differently. Consistent with MacLeod & McArthur's differing culture.

Tinder users: less serious intentions = higher deception. Consistent with MacLeod & McArthur's findings that users desiring low-expectation relationships would use Tinder due to its "hook-up culture".

Who benefits?

Limitations

TIME CONSTRAINT

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATION

Possibilities for Future Research

Online Deception in Relation to Control of Social Distance

Online Deception in Relation to Sexual Orientation

Questions?