Dating & Mating in the Digital Age:
Relationships and technology in the modern era

Council on Contemporary Families
Miami, FL
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Pew Research Center
About Pew Internet / Pew Research

• Part of the Pew Research Center, a non-partisan “fact tank” in Washington, DC
• Studies how people use digital technologies
• Does not promote specific technologies or make policy recommendations
• Data for this talk is from nationally representative telephone surveys of U.S. adults
People have long sought assistance in finding a romantic partner

- Family and religious institutions → Matchmaking and arranged marriages
- Newspapers → Printed personal ads
- VCR → Video personals
- Internet era → Online dating sites
  - Personal ads (Match, OKCupid, Plenty of Fish)
  - Algorithmic (eHarmony)
  - Apps (Tinder, Grindr, Coffee meets Bagel)
Long-term changes in the nature of dating and relationships

- Record-low 51% of the public is now married
- Americans are waiting until later in life to get married
- “Non-traditional” living arrangements are increasingly common
- Other factors making dating challenging:
  - Increased mobility/migration, dispersal of social networks
  - Longer commutes
  - Demands of work life
Dating in the digital era

- Online dating – adoption and shifting attitudes
- Online dating – user experiences
- Other aspects of digital dating and relationships
11% of Americans have used dating sites or apps

• Among the currently “single and looking,” 38% have used online dating

• High usage groups include:
  – Those in their mid-20s to mid-40s
  – College attendees
  – Urban and suburbanites

• Main difference between dating site and dating app users: age
  – Median age of dating site users: 38
  – Median age of dating app users: 29
Familiarity with online dating through others, 2005-2013

% of American adults who...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know someone who has used online dating</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know someone who has been in a long-term relationship or marriage w/ someone they met through online dating</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Spring Tracking Survey, April 17 – May 19, 2013. N=2,252 adults ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. 2005 survey was conducted September 14-December 8, 2005, n=3,215 adults ages 18+. 
Opinions of online dating, 2005-2013
% of internet users who agree with each of the following statements

Online dating is a good way to meet people: 44% (2005), 59% (2013)
Online dating allows people to find a better match: 47% (2005), 53% (2013)
People who use online dating are desperate: 29% (2005), 21% (2013)
Online dating keeps people from settling down: n/a (2005), 32% (2013)

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Dating in the digital era

- Online dating – adoption and shifting attitudes
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- Other aspects of digital dating and relationships
### Most common online dating sites, 2005 vs. 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005 (n=204)</th>
<th>2013 (n=198)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Match.com</td>
<td>(29%)</td>
<td>Match.com (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo Personals</td>
<td>(21%)</td>
<td>eHarmony (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eHarmony</td>
<td>(11%)</td>
<td>Plenty of Fish (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td>OK Cupid (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Friend Finder</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
<td>Christian Mingle (2%), Zoosk (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Experiences with online dating

• Not everyone “succeeds” at online dating:
  – 66% of online daters have actually gone on a date with someone they met on the sites
  – 23% of online daters have entered into a marriage or long-term relationship with someone they met there

• Most (but not all) online daters enjoy the process
  – 79% agree that online dating is a good way to meet people
  – 70% agree that it helps people find a good romantic match
  – At the same time, 13% agree with the statement that “people who use online dating sites are desperate”
Other experiences

• 54% of online daters say that someone else has seriously misrepresented themselves on their profile
• 28% have been contacted in a way that made them feel harassed or uncomfortable
• 40% have used a site designed for people with shared interests or backgrounds
• 33% have used a paid dating site/app
• 4% have attended a group outing or event organized by an online dating site
Major reasons for using online dating

• 60% → Meeting people who share similar interests or hobbies
• 52% → Meeting people who share your beliefs or values
• 46% → Finding someone for a long-term relationship or marriage
• 33% → Having a schedule that makes it hard to meet interesting people in other ways
• 25% → Meeting people who just want to have fun without being in a serious relationship
Dating in the digital era

- Online dating – adoption and shifting attitudes
- Online dating – user experiences
- Other aspects of digital dating and relationships
Flirting and looking up old flames

- 24% of internet users have searched for information online about someone they dated in the past, up from 11% in 2005
- 24% of internet users have flirted with someone online, up from 15% in 2005
Social networks

- 31% of SNS users have used sites like Facebook to check up on past relationships
- 17% have posted pictures or details from a date
Among SNS users with recent dating experience...

- 30% have used sites like Facebook to get info on someone they were interested in dating
- 15% have used them to ask someone out on a date
- 12% have friended someone because another friend said they might like to date them
Couples and digital technology

- Most online adults don’t think technology has much of an impact on their relationship – and quarter of adults who do, say it’s mostly positive.

- Young adults much more likely to report that tech is a factor in their relationships – for good and ill.

- Technology can be both a source of tension and intimacy for online couples.

- Sharing of passwords is relatively common, while sharing email, calendars and social media is less so.
What impact does the Internet have on couples?

• 10% of internet users who are married or partnered say that the internet has had a “major impact” on their relationship, and 17% say that it has had a “minor impact.”
• 72% of married or committed online adults said the internet has “no real impact at all” on their partnership.
• 74% of the adult internet users who report that the internet had an impact on their marriage or partnership say the impact was positive.
• 20% said the impact was mostly negative
• 4% said it was both good and bad.
Impact of technology on relationships, by cell phone, social media, and online dating status

Among those in committed relationships, the % within each group who say technology has had a major vs. minor impact on their relationship

Pew Research Center's Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.
Pew Research Center
Couples and digital technology

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Impact of technology on relationships, by age and relationship length

Among internet users in committed relationships, the % within each group who say technology has had a major vs. minor impact on their relationship.

Pew Research Center’s Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.

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Couples and digital technology

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Positive technology experiences in relationships

Among internet users or cell phone owners in a committed relationship, the % who have experienced the following, by length of relationship

- Felt closer to partner due to online or text message conversations: Total 21, Married/partnered 10 years or less 12, Married/partnered 10+ years 3
- Resolved argument with partner online or by texting: Total 17, Married/partnered 10 years or less 9, Married/partnered 10+ years 3
- Texted partner while at home together: Total 25, Married/partnered 10 years or less 19, Married/partnered 10+ years 19
Negative technology experiences in relationships

Among internet users in a committed relationship, the % who have experienced the following, by length of relationship:

- Argued with partner about time spent online:
  - Total: 8
  - Married/partnered 10 years or less: 11
  - Married/partnered 10+ years: 5

- Upset by something partner was doing online:
  - Total: 4
  - Married/partnered 10 years or less: 6
  - Married/partnered 10+ years: 2

- Felt partner was distracted by cell phone when together:
  - Total: 25
  - Married/partnered 10 years or less: 36
  - Married/partnered 10+ years: 17

Pew Research Center’s Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.

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Sexting by age

Among cell phone owners, the % who use their phones to do the following...

- Receive sexts
- Send sexts
- Forward sexts

Pew Research Center's Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.

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# Sexting by relationship status

Among cell phone owners, the % in each relationship group who do the following ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single status</th>
<th>Online dating status</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Length of relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single, looking</td>
<td>Uses online dating</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>In relationship 10 yrs or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive sexts</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send sexts</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward sexts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                | Single, not looking | Does not use online dating | Not in a relationship | In relationship more than 10 yrs |
| Receive sexts  | 21               | 16                     | 25                   | 6                       |
| Send sexts     | 6                | 6                      | 10                   | 2                       |
| Forward sexts  | 2                | 2                      | 4                    | 1                       |

Pew Research Center’s Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.

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Couples and digital technology

• Most online adults don’t think technology has much of an impact on their relationship – and quarter of adults who do, say it’s mostly positive.

• Young adults much more likely to report that tech is a factor in their relationships – for good and ill.

• Technology can be both a source of tension and intimacy for online couples.

• Sharing of passwords is relatively common, while sharing email, calendars and social media is less so.
Sharing online accounts with a partner

Among internet users in committed relationships, the % who share the following with their partner...

- Share password: 67%
- Share email account: 27%
- Share online calendar: 11%
- Share social media profile: 11%

Pew Research Center’s Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.
*Sharing social media profiles was measured among all social media users in committed relationships (n=889)
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# Sharing passwords

Among internet users in committed relationships, the % who have ever shared a password with their partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share passwords</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (n=1,268)</strong></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Male</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Female</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 18-29</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b 30-49</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c 50-64</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d 65+</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a White</td>
<td>72&lt;sup&gt;bc&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b African-American</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Hispanic</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a &lt;$50,000/year</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b $50,000+/year</td>
<td>76&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Parent</td>
<td>71&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Not a parent</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pew Research Center’s Internet Project survey, August 7-September 16, 2013.
Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., <sup>a</sup>) indicates a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g., age).
### Sharing email accounts

Among internet users in committed relationships, the % who share an email account with their partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share an email account</th>
<th>Total (n=1,268)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Male</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Female</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 18-29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b 30-49</td>
<td>24&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c 50-64</td>
<td>33&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d 65+</td>
<td>47&lt;sup&gt;abc&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a White</td>
<td>28&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b African-American</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Hispanic</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Employed full-time</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Employed part-time</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Retired</td>
<td>42&lt;sup&gt;abd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Unemployed</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a &lt;$50,000/year</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b $50,000+/year</td>
<td>32&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
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# Sharing social media profiles

Among social media users in committed relationships, the % who share a social media profile with their partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share a social media profile</th>
<th>Total (n=889)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 18-29</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b 30-49</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c 50-64</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d 65+</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Employed full-time</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>d Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>a &lt;$50,000/year</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Who Shares an Online Calendar?

• Middle aged couples – 16% of 25-34 year olds, and 12% of those ages 35-44, share an online calendar with their partner. Calendar sharing also increases at retirement age, as 11% of those 65 and older share an online calendar with a partner.
• Couples with children living at home – 13% of parents share an online calendar.
• Those who are employed full-time – 12% of those who are employed full-time share an online calendar with their spouse or partner.
• Those with higher income and/or education levels – 16% of college graduates, and 15% of those with an annual household income of $75,000 or more per year, share an online calendar with their spouse or partner.
# Sharing online accounts and passwords, based on the length of the relationship

*Among internet users in committed relationships, the % who share the following with their partner, by length of relationship*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Online calendars</th>
<th>Email account</th>
<th>Passwords</th>
<th>Social media profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 years or less</strong></td>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td><strong>59%</strong></td>
<td><strong>8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6-10 years</strong></td>
<td><strong>13%</strong></td>
<td><strong>24%</strong></td>
<td><strong>70%</strong></td>
<td><strong>7%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10+ years</strong></td>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td><strong>38%</strong></td>
<td><strong>72%</strong></td>
<td><strong>14%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Sharing social media profiles was measured among all social media users in committed relationships (n=889)*

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Dating, couples and digital technology

• Websites and apps are a part of a modern daters toolkit, especially those from “thin” dating markets.

• Stigma is declining as online dating becomes mainstream.

• Online dating is generally pretty enjoyable for most people, though women are more likely to have negative experiences.

• New kinds of information about potential (and past) partners is plentiful – and tempting.
Dating, couples and digital technology

• Tech impact is modest on most couples – but greater on young adults and those in shorter relationships.

• Technology can be both a source of tension and intimacy for online couples.

• Digital media is now embedded in the functions and functioning of shared lives.
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