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TECHNOLOGY AND PLEASURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON USING MOBILE

APPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE AND OFFLINE SEXUAL PURPOSES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Gabriella E. Locke

May 2021

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Counseling. Psychology, and Special Education

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

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March 11, 2021

TECHNOLOGY AND PLEASURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON USING MOBILE

APPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE AND OFFLINE SEXUAL PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT

TECHNOLOGY AND PLEASURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON USING MOBILE

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By

Gabriella E. Locke

May 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. David Delmonico

The internet has long been considered an accessible, anonymous, and affordable platform for sexuality and the emergence of smartphone applications has made facilitating online and offline sexual behaviors even easier for young adults. Despite the increase, there continues to be a lack of detailed research on the experiences of young adults who use these types of applications. This qualitative study explored how young adults use mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors and the motivations and perceived benefits and risks of such behavior. This study, analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, completed eight semi-structured interviews with individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 who had reported using mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes at least one time in the past five years.

This study identified four themes relating to how young adults use mobile applications for online and offline purposes: sexual exploration, casual sex, searching for romantic relationships, and developing friendships. This study identified three themes relating to the motivations behind use: convenience, connection, and seeking attention. Finally, this study identified seven themes relating to benefits and risks of using the apps: facilitating risk taking, feeling empowered, impeding deeper connections, vulnerability, being able to be yourself, conflicting family values, and breaking down barriers. Implications for practice, including increasing personal empowerment and navigating developmental transitions in young adulthood, are discussed in detail. In addition, limitations to the study and ideas for future research are discussed.

DEDICATION

    This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Kenyan. Always remember that God has a plan for your life. I didn't realize that you would "sign on" to this journey when I started, but I thank you for the sacrifices made as God fulfilled one of His plans in my life. Someone once told me that "God knew the son you needed," and they were right. I am forever grateful that you are my son.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), access to the Internet has never been more important to Americans. Because of the importance placed on data searching, the Internet has become a part of daily life for the vast majority of individuals throughout the United States. Technology is utilized for a variety of reasons in this day and age. Individuals use it to manage many aspects of their day-to-day activities, including making job searches, conducting research, shopping, comparative pricing, and entertainment. As the modernization of the Internet provides a platform for the use of technology for socialization, the Internet has even been beneficial in meeting new people to start some type of relationship (Tong & Van De Wiele, 2014). Traditionally, people have utilized desktop computers for Internet use, but as Internet use has increased, so has the accessibility. Over the years, use has transitioned from strictly desktop computers to laptops, tablets, and even smartphones (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). According to the Pew Research Center ("Mobile fact sheet," 2019), 81% of Americans reported owning a smartphone in 2019. Over the past decade, mobile phones and smartphones have become essential social communication devices, especially among college-age adults (Dir, 2013).

Interpersonal transactions are a significant aspect of society, and due to the extension of reach and immediacy of communication, mobile and smartphone use have altered their scope (Butt & Phillips, 2008). Previous studies have discussed mobile phone use as a personality characteristic; however, little to no research has been conducted on utilizing these phones and the applications that may be downloaded for specific purposes from young adults' perspectives. It is important to understand the implications of such technology, as the number of smartphone users across the globe exceeded two billion in 2016; mobile phone users are expected to achieve

57.5% of the global population in 2020, which is a significant increase from 47.4% in 2016 (Soto et al., 2017).

Internet Use

The Internet is considered a revolution of the combined use of computer technology and communications such that the world has never seen before. It has been described as a worldwide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and computers without regard for geographic location (Shaughnessy et al., 2014). The Internet was based on a notion of multiple independent networks, which eventually grew to encompass a collection of technologies and a collection of communities. Since its inception, the Internet has become a crucial aspect of modern society. Advances have resulted in continuous Internet access from almost anywhere in the world (Shaughnessy et al., 2014).

The Internet has been a prime setting for social interaction since it was first developed. Electronic venues provide a place for people to communicate with others who share their interests (Guosong, 2009). In more recent years, the Internet has also been leveraged as another venue to initiate sexual contact. Studies and observations of specific aspects of the Internet, such as chat rooms and other sites, suggest the Internet facilitates communication of sexual desires and in-person meetings resulting in sexual contact (McFarlane et al., 2000).

Smartphone Use

Internet use has increased with the prevalence of mobile devices and Internet-based applications (Hsieh et al., 2018). The smartphone has become the younger generation's favorite device surpassing notebook computers and tablets (Soto et al., 2017). In offering a method to easily connect with others across various modalities and multiple options to occupy one's time,

smartphones have become extensions of daily living for a growing number of people (Lappiere & Lewis, 2016). In fact, research suggests there is a typical emotional investment and connection with the smartphone that makes it seem like an extension of one's self (Cooper, 2017). A smartphone user can utilize their telephone to send and receive email, text, stay up-to-date on news, check the weather, take photographs and video, interact with others on social media, or access the Internet. Recent research shows individuals spend more time on a smartphone than they do watching television. In addition, many have described the smartphone as a "handheld computer." Smartphone software continues to improve, and new applications for various types of lifestyles are being developed regularly. Smartphone users can install mobile applications according to their individual preferences, and thus, the phones can be considered user-centered and user-completed media. To explore the implications of this capability related to this research paper's thesis, uses and gratifications theory will be briefly identified now, then expanded on in Chapter II. According to Soto et al. (2017), uses and gratifications theory focuses on identifying audiences' needs and the relationship between a person's selection of something and the gratification received from it. Essentially, various forms of media are utilized by individuals to satisfy their needs. Individuals purposely determine the type of applications to utilize to fulfill their needs. Because the decision is purposeful, they can identify the reasons for the choices they make (Guosong, 2009).

A smartphone's convenience is unprecedented, as it offers access to any type of information being sought at virtually any given time or place. Because of this, individuals are increasingly utilizing smartphones in new and innovative ways (Kwon, 2013). Smartphones increasingly permeate our daily routines, with 81% of smartphone users keeping their phones nearby the entire day and checking them 110 times, on average, per day (Krasnova et al., 2016).

Conversely, considering the technological power and capabilities that a smartphone offers to the individual user, this medium also can become a serious social problem in today's society. According to Rotondi et al. (2017), the literature has suggested that smartphone use can affect various aspects of everyday life. Excessive use of the smartphone can lead to addiction and a reduced capacity to enjoy leisure (Rotondi et al., 2017). Rotondi et al. (2017) also stated smartphones generate a continuous space that allows people to simultaneously engage in face-to-face and digital interactions without restrictions. One less positive potential outcome is that attention may be diverted from interpersonal experiences that would otherwise occur outside the virtual setting. Because of the many features they offer, smartphones are common with young people ages 18-25 (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). The ease, accessibility, capabilities, and applications of a smartphone make it attractive to this age group of individuals.

Mobile Application Use

Rather than connecting through an Internet browser, mobile applications (also known as apps) "cut through the clutter of domain-name servers and uncalibrated information sources, taking the user straight to the content he or she already values" (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 60). Apps are designed to run on mobile devices and perform specific tasks (Praschma, 2017), such as tracking health, staying connected with friends and family, and even practicing religion (Bellar, 2016). One particular type of application, the geosocial networking app, has become increasingly popular over the past few years. Location data submitted by individuals provide information that allows social applications to coordinate these users with events or individuals in the area that match their interests.

These apps are used by individuals to connect with other users based on geographical proximity via their cellphones (Ventuneac et al., 2018). Often, these social interactions lead to

online and offline risky sexual behavior. Risky sexual behavior is defined as sexual activities that increase the risk of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and/or increasing the probability of experiencing an unwanted pregnancy (Hittner et al., 2016). Because certain smartphone applications offer virtually constant access to sexual partners or sexual gratifications, they may offer the potential to seriously impact sexual health and sexual behavior. In addition, it may be considered that the risks could be even greater than utilizing the Internet for sexual purposes via computers for sexual purposes because most individuals carry their smartphones with them at all times, offering unconstrained access to these applications provided at virtually any time or place (Lehmiller & Ioerger, 2014).

Sexuality and the Internet

The Internet is considered an accessible platform utilized by individuals for various recreational activities, some of which may be sexual in nature (Wery & Billieux, 2015). Over the years, the Internet has become a way to discover sexuality accessibly without restrictive sexual standards (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2016). Cybersex is considered a method in which individuals, including adolescents, young adults, and older adults, explore their sexuality (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2016). The cyberhex model (Delmonico et al., 2004) offers a perspective on the attractiveness of the Internet and its enticement of individuals (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2016). According to the model, the Internet is accessible, offers sexual experiences every hour of the day, is low cost, anonymous, fast, simple, and allows individuals to interact with others while avoiding face-to-face relationships (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2016). In addition, individuals whose sexual tastes do not align with traditional norms might believe the Internet connects them with preferred sexual communities while shielding them from social scrutiny in personal and professional networks (Lever et al., 2008). The above-mentioned factors could make the idea of

sexual sensation seeking via mobile applications enticing, especially to young adults. It has become quite common for young people to engage in a range of sexually related activities on the Internet—often termed online sexual activity (OSA; Byers & Shaughnessy, 2014).

Sexual sensation seeking is defined as "the propensity to attain optimal levels of sexual excitement and to engage in novel sexual experiences" (Zheng et al., 2017, p. 191). Previous studies have focused on the relationship between sexual sensation seeking and sexual activity undertaken offline. Recent research shows sexual sensation seeking now correlates with higher rates of sexual sensations sought online. Because sexual sensation seeking is associated with offline and online sexual behavior, there is an indication that the same mechanisms that factor into offline sexual behavior also factor into online sexual behavior (Zheng et al., 2017).

Online Sexual Activity

OSA is defined as "the use of the Internet for any activity that involves sexuality. This includes recreation, entertainment, exploration, support around sexual concerns, education, purchasing sexual materials, trying to find sexual partners, and so on" (Cooper et al., 2004, p. 131). OSA can be divided into one of three groups: non-arousal, solitary-arousal, and partnered-arousal. Behaviors include using the Internet to hire a sex worker, viewing or downloading pornography, locating sex contacts, seeking sexual education, or visiting sex shops to purchase items (Weinstein et al., 2015). According to research, OSAs do not, in most instances, lead to negative outcomes (e.g., social, professional, personal); however, these activities can affect facets of daily living, especially when the activities become excessive (Wery & Billieux, 2015).

Minimum to moderate OSA can produce relationship benefits, including increased frequency and quality of sex and increased intimacy with offline partners (Zheng & Zheng, 2014). For instance, cybersex, a subcategory of OSA, can be beneficial for sexual development,

useful in that it provides a way to seek out sexual information and explore sexual preferences. However, this type of activity can also pose a potential hazard, as certain online behaviors could also lead to psychological and social concerns that interfere with daily life (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2016). Research has shown the time between the late teens into the early 20s is marked with profound change and importance, and that younger people may be more at risk for such negative behaviors and impacts (Arnett, 2000). Given that the frequency and intensity of Internet use peaks between middle to late adolescence and young adulthood (Baumgarner et al., 2010), this essentially may place individuals in this age group at increased risk for problematic behaviors, including risky OSA (Moore et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

As previously mentioned, research concerning online behavior has discussed using the Internet as an aspect that assists in facilitating identity experimentation and online relationships or sexual encounters (Blackwell et al., 2014). This includes behavior that is exhibited through interaction with mobile applications. Because the implementation of daily life has become intertwined with mobile media and applications, the utilization of these apps often extends to sex and intimate relationships (Albury et al., 2017). These apps represent a continuously emerging technology in the marketplace and are popular with college-age adults (Taylor et al., 2011). Individuals can utilize these apps and websites to see content such as video clips, blogs, and pictures, within an environment of shared common interests, to facilitate online and offline sexual behaviors.

Although there is not much research available on the positive aspects of some of these apps, a review of the literature discovered some pros associated with utilizing them, including the fact that the applications are convenient, nonthreatening, and often free. The applications

allow individuals to develop personal and sexual identities, initiate psychological and physical connections with others, and facilitate interpersonal interactions (LeFebvre, 2017). In particular, Tinder, one of the most popular dating apps around the world (albeit being viewed as a "hookup app"), promotes itself as being "a social discovery platform that empowers users around the world to create new connections that might not otherwise have ever been possible" (La Rosa et al., 2019, p. 1). Interpersonal relationships can begin with just one touch, and individuals can communicate and familiarize themselves with other people in relatively user-friendly environments (LeFebvre, 2017). In addition, because Tinder is a location-based app, it affords the convenience of connecting with individuals in close proximity, much like its counterpart, Grindr.

Grindr, another location-based app, caters to an all-male population (Corriero & Tong, 2015). One study researching the uses and gratifications of Grindr discovered the app's positives included socializing, feeling less lonely, satisfying sexual curiosity, finding new friends, building social networks, and finding someone to date (Tong & Van De Wiele, 2014). In addition, Grindr (as most other location-based apps do) provides the opportunity to operate in physical and virtual environments, facilitating connections with others in more than one way (Tong & Van De Wiele, 2014).

While the idea of this type of media and applications may be enticing, it can also present problems. User-generated content cannot be controlled, leading to potentially dangerous posts, misinformation, or risky behaviors. With the increasing accessibility of applications, many individuals spend vast amounts of time utilizing these applications, leading to decreased social interaction, barriers to quality of daily living, health concerns, and what some think of as "addiction."

Risky behaviors, including risky sexual behavior (RSB), are also prevalent among young adults (Moore et al., 2016). Behaviors include using unreliable birth control, having more than one sexual partner, and sexual activity without using a condom, bringing risks of negative outcomes, including unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (Moore et al., 2016). The impact of RSB can be immense (Hoyle et al., 2000)

Data show the commonality of a variety of negative consequences associated with sexual risk-taking of young adults. Engagement in RSBs is a significant public health concern (Ross et al., 2016). The literature review in Chapter II includes more in-depth information about other consequences resulting from RSBs. Because of the prevalence of smartphone application use and the perceived repercussions associated with RSBs, it is important to understand how young adults pursuing sexual purposes and behaviors utilize these applications and their implications.

Significance of the Study

Despite the growing number of young adults utilizing mobile applications, research has been limited in how these applications are utilized from this age group's perspective. In addition, few studies have focused on the prevalence of Internet use as a method of meeting sexual partners and for sexual purposes (Benotsch et al., 2013). Extant research has focused on specific application use, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tinder, from researchers' perspectives, while neglecting to obtain data from the age group in question. While studies have been conducted on general mobile applications, research has been focused on the affordances of applications or has taken a critical cultural approach, without seeking information from users that assists in understanding the relationship between these apps and society (Bellar, 2016). This study provides mental health counselors with information on mobile application use from the perspective of the age group being studied. Specifically, the study provides information on the

reasons for utilizing mobile applications for sexual purposes, the associated risks and benefits, and the types of applications utilized most often. The findings add to the limited research, provide information for public health purposes, and assist counselors in navigating the world of cyberspace from the perspective of young adults.

Theoretical

The theoretical underpinning for this qualitative study is phenomenology. A phenomenological study seeks to understand individuals' perceptions and perspectives on a phenomenon. Kafle (2011) defined phenomenology as an "umbrella term encompassing both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches" (p. 181. Findlay (2009) described it as the study of phenomena: their nature and meanings. In particular, this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to examine and describe the participants' experiences. Kafle (2011) stated that hermeneutic phenomenology researches the subjective experience of individuals and groups and went on to say that this method is an "attempt to unveil the world as experienced by the subject through their lifeworld stories" (p. 191).

According to Kafle (2011), five guidelines are recommended when establishing or participating in this type of research:

- being committed to a phenomenon that seriously concerns the researcher,

- orienting oneself to the question,

- investigating only the "lived" experience,

- description of the phenomena through writing and rewriting, and

- considering the parts and whole of the research.

In this study, the phenomenon explored consisted of individuals who have utilized mobile applications for sexual purposes. Data analysis was completed using thematic analysis to identify

themes and draw conclusions from the data collected (Daly et al., 1997). Thematic analysis is utilized in phenomenology by focusing on the human experience subjectively. Conducting this type of analysis allowed the researcher to effectively identify, analyze, and report the information acquired while providing an in-depth and intricate account of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Because the researcher's goal was to provide a richer representation of the data, inductive thematic analysis was utilized instead of deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Utilizing inductive thematic analysis is a way for the researcher to describe the phenomenon without attempting to fit it into a preexisting theory, ensuring the information is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2008). To ensure the themes that emerge are comprehensive, the researcher used a six-phase approach developed by Nowell et al. (2017) to establish trustworthiness during the analytic process. Data analysis is expounded upon in Chapter III.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how young adults use mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors and the motivations and perceived benefits and risks of such behavior. The research question directing this study was: How do young adults describe their experiences using mobile phone applications for online and offline sexual purposes? The questions that assisted the researcher in understanding the entire experience were:

- How do young adults use mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes?

- What motivates young adults to use mobile applications for sexual purposes?

- What are the perceived benefits and risks of using mobile applications for sexual purposes?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach to research to understand the participants' perspectives on the phenomenon of mobile application use. The qualitative approach provides an opportunity to understand this phenomenon from the participants' perspective, actually taking part in the study. To recruit participants, flyers were sent to college campuses in southwestern Pennsylvania and posted on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. The researcher also provided flyers to colleagues in the counseling field who then distributed them to clients who met the criteria. Purposeful sampling, which is further explained in Chapter III, was utilized as a recruitment method. Participants were identified utilizing the following criteria: they needed to be between the ages of 18 and 25 and must have utilized mobile applications for sexual purposes at least one time in the past 5 years.

The study utilized individual semi-structured interviews to collect data. Interviews were conducted online or via phone due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. As part of the interviews, field notes were taken, and audio recorders were utilized. After data collection was completed, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher. After transcription, data were coded into themes that emerged from the research; these themes are discussed in this dissertation's results section.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms used in this dissertation and their definitions:

- *Cyberspace*: The set of possible communications that occur in the digital realm through different devices, channels, and media, and that allow interactivity between users (Asencio-Guillen & Navio-Marco, 2017)

- *Hookup culture*: A culture that accepts and encourages casual, uncommitted sexual encounters between individuals who are not dating or romantic partners (Garcia, 2013)

- *Mobile application* (app): A mobile application, most commonly referred to as an app, is a type of application software designed to run on a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet computer

- *Sexual purposes*: The act of pursuing something for sexual gratification

- *Smartphone*: A mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer (Alosaimi et al, 2016)

- *Young adult*: For purposes of the study, a young adult was defined as a person between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2000)

Chapter Summary

Chapter I began with a brief introduction to Internet use, smartphone use, and mobile application use, followed by information on sexuality and the Internet and online sexual activities. This chapter then presented a statement of the problem, the study's significance, the theoretical underpinning, and the study's purpose and research questions. Finally, this chapter provided information on methodology and a definition of terms. Chapter II reviews the current literature relating to the study.

Chapter II–Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the lived experience of young adults utilizing mobile applications for online and offline sexual behaviors. The transition to adulthood is a time of exploration and experimentation, as young people hone the life skills, relationship styles, and behavior patterns that impact their emotional functioning and health as adults (Grello et al., 2006). In addition, the journey of adulthood often includes experimentation with sexual behaviors (Grello et al., 2006). The Internet has become an accessible forum to explore human sexuality without restrictive sexual standards. Individuals often use the Internet for sexual purposes such as engaging in online sexual activities, facilitating an offline sexual relationship, or viewing online pornography (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2016).

To provide the reader with an understanding of communication over computer networks occurs, the literature review begins by discussing the context of cyberspace, mobile applications, and cybersex. The following section then provides information on personality traits, gender differences, and the emerging adulthood period to provide the reader with information on the participants' characteristics and brain development. In addition, a section on the uses and gratifications is discussed for the reader to understand how personality traits and brain development are affected by certain desires. The chapter concludes by discussing the hookup culture, casual sex, and the dangers associated with these behaviors to assist the reader in understanding the necessity of this study.

Cyberspace

According to Asencio-Guillen and Navio-Marco (2017), cyberspace is defined as the set of possible communications that occur in the digital realm through different devices, channels, and media, and that allow interactivity between users. According to the Oxford Dictionary

(2020), cyberspace is the environment that encompasses communication over computer networks. This became a popular way to describe these communications in the 1990s when networking and digital communications grew dramatically (Strate, 1999). Research undertaken for this study suggests there is no one official definition of this term, and it may often be used to describe anything related to the Internet. Beginning in the early 1990s, computer networks began gaining public attention. These "networks" (another name for cyberspace) allow people a wide range of social spaces to meet and interact with one another (Kolluck & Smith, 1998). Through these electronic media, individuals can communicate, work, create artistic media, read journals, educate themselves, play games, take part in conferences, and exchange ideas (Živko, 2011).

John Suler (2016) proposes that when people engage in some of these activities, they enter a space filled with a variety of purposes and, at an even deeper level, describe their computer and use as an extension of their mind and personality. Suler's suggestion that cyberspace as a psychological space contributes to the idea that individuals' journey into cyberspace reflects their attitudes and interests. Because virtual interactions differ from in-person interactions, researchers surmise that individuals often experience the "disinhibition effect," and act in a way they wouldn't normally act in face-to-face environments. Individuals become more uninhibited, expressing themselves more openly, due to factors including anonymity, invisibility, and minimizing authority (Suler, 2016).

Mobile Applications

Apps, or small computer programs available for various uses on mobile devices, are becoming ubiquitous, with more than 1.5 million apps and 1 billion downloads from the iTunes app store alone (Bellar, 2016). Mobile apps have also emerged as a unique way to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors. Recent literature addresses how app design and content

influence individuals and society (Bellar, 2016). Early scholarship on online social behavior

focused on the Internet as an independent space that transcends geography, thus facilitating

identity experimentation and online relationships or sexual encounters (Blackwell et al., 2014).

According to Živko (2011), there are both positive and negative aspects of cyberspace.

Positive aspects include temporal flexibility, no limitation of space, social multiplicity, textual

communication, recording ability, speed of exchanging communication, entertainment, an

unlimited amount of information provided, empowerment, equality, and diminution of the "halo

effect." The negative aspects include lack of sensual integration, absorbing information without

filtering it, frustration caused by technical difficulties, redefining identity, feeling that happiness

belongs to others, cyberstalking, behavioral disinhibition, and cyber-addiction. Cyberspace also

allows certain anonymity. Individuals can easily conceal their real identity and personal

information under false names and identify details. In turn, this encourages people to express

themselves more freely and sincerely than they would in face-to-face interaction (Živko, 2011).

Thanks to anonymity, self-disclosure and intimacy can be accelerated because people can

sometimes more freely disclose personal, intimate, and sensitive information in the virtual world

(Živko, 2011).

Online Sexual Activities

The use of the Internet for various sexual activities has become more prevalent over the

last two decades (Doring et al., 2017). The Internet provides anonymity and varying sexual

expressions that facilitate an ideal setting for an individual to explore sexuality (Grov et al.,

2011). In relation, the Internet allows for a plethora of behaviors known as online sexual

activities, which "describe materials, activities, and behaviors that sexual in nature" (Doring et

al., 2017, p. 1641). As previously noted, online sexual activities include use of the internet for

any reason relating to sexuality (Cooper et. al, 2004). Online sexual activities have become a common practice among the young adult population because of the types of activities, anonymity, easy access, and low cost (Barrada et al., 2019) and can include activities such as sexual chats, watching pornography, trying to find sexual or dating partners, purchasing condoms or birth control, visiting educational websites, participating in sex webcam activities, and so on (Chen et al., 2019).

Cybersex

Cybersex is one of the constructs of online sexual activities (Barrada et al., 2019). A review of the literature shows three leading definitions of cybersex. According to Caputo (2014), cybersex is defined as two or more people engaging in sexual talk while online for the purposes of sexual pleasure. It may or may not include masturbation. Caputo (2014) presented the idea that cybersex is a subcategory of online sexual activities, which she stated refers to any online activity involving sexuality and ranges from looking for a partner, chatting, viewing pornography, and having cybersex. Weinstein et al. (2015) took a narrower view of cybersex, defining it as "watching, downloading, and online trading of pornography or connecting to chat rooms using role plays" (p. 1). In yet another definition, Ballester-Arnal et al. (2016) took a broader approach by reporting that cybersex is simply using the Internet for sexual purposes.

In a study completed by Hartotyo and Abraham (2015), the researchers noted that cybersex was a "relatively recent sexual activity involving synchronous, online sexual interactions that occur between two people or more" (p. 75). According to Hartotyo and Abraham, three causes and two categories contribute to cybersex. The causes include accessibility, affordability, and anonymity, while the categories identified are isolation and fantasy. Accessibility depicts how easy it can be for individuals to access the Internet and certain

websites, while the affordability aspect describes the low costs associated with certain behaviors and websites. In addition, individuals' identities are not always detailed, so people can obtain a sense of inconspicuousness. Cybersex also supplies a way for individuals to participate in certain activities without direct contact with others and provides the opportunity to choose partners based on desired characteristics.

Hartotyo and Abraham (2015) also discussed the positives associated with cybersex, including developing knowledge about sexuality, improving sexuality, avoiding the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, and improving the quality of sexual relationships in real life. In most instances, cybersex is unproblematic and not associated with negative consequences (Wery & Billieux, 2017). However, there is the possibility of negative effects, such as being dishonest with the cybersex partner about who they are and preferring to have multiple partners in real life due to the ability to have multiple partners in the cyberworld. In addition, while engaging in cybersex does not necessarily correlate with "problematic" behavior, the possibility remains that problematic behaviors may develop. The following section discusses personality traits in conjunction with RSBs that may arise due to problematic cybersex activities.

Personality Traits and Gender Differences

According to Tan et al. (2017), "Human personality is the enduring emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational style that explains individuals' behaviors in different situations" (p. 185). Several studies have shown a correlation between certain personality traits and RSBs. According to Reynolds et al. (2020), varying personality traits have previously been shown to correlate with an increased tendency to engage in RSB. Personality characteristics, including extraversion and impulsivity, have been established as correlates of RSB (Moore et al., 2016): in particular, high extraversion, high openness of experience, and low

agreeableness (Reynolds et al., 2020). These specific traits are part of the Big Five model, one of the most stable and reliable models developed to help represent basic personality structures.

The Big Five model depicts personality through five different dimensions: agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience (Lane & Manner, 2012). For reference, individuals high on the agreeableness scale tend to be cooperative, sympathetic, and forgiving (Tan et al., 2017). Individuals who exhibit a high level of conscientiousness are dependable and self-controlled. The neuroticism scale corresponds with feelings such as anxiety, insecurity, shyness, and self-consciousness, while extraversion corresponds with being outgoing, optimistic, and a keen interest in others (Lane & Manner, 2012; Tan et al., 2017). Finally, individuals who score high on the openness to experience scale prefer variety and hold unconventional values (Lane & Manner, 2012). Theories such as the Big Five, depicting human beings in one or more personality traits, can help navigate personality traits and their relationships to certain behaviors.

Men and women are socialized toward different gender roles both in general and specifically within sexual activities (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). Traditional gender scripts depict men as highly sexual and experienced, and women as sexually reluctant and naïve (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). Numerous empirical studies have examined the stereotype that men have more sexual experience and hold more permissive sexual attitudes than women (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). A 1993 meta-analysis by Oliver and Hyde (as cited in Peterson & Hyde, 2010) assessed various behaviors and attitudes in both women and men. The study found that men reported more sexual activity and permissiveness in most, but not all, of the behaviors and attitudes, including frequency of intercourse and oral sexual behaviors and attitudes toward casual sex and general sexual permissiveness (Oliver, 1993 as cited in Peterson & Hyde, 2010). Because of the cultural

shifts since 1993, Peterson and Hyde conducted a new meta-analysis in 2010. The study

conducted in 2010 sought to update the original study by providing information on the gender

difference in sexual behaviors between 1993 and 2007 (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). The researchers

were able to discuss these gender differences in relation to more current research. Peterson and

Hyde (2010) determined that although the gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors

were subtle, men reported a more liberal view for most of the variables and a greater number of

sexual experiences.

Research has found many aspects of men's and women's reported sexual behavior and

sexual attitudes are consistent with these scripts. For example, compared to women, men

reported engaging in sexual intercourse at a higher frequency and younger age, masturbating,

watching pornography more frequently, having more casual sexual partners, and having more

permissive sexual attitudes (Shaughnessy et al., 2014). Overall, men's attitudes regarding

sexuality and the use of sexually explicit materials gravitate toward being more liberal (Doring et

al., 2017).

Related Theories

A plethora of theories offer explanations of why men and women differ in sexual

behaviors and thoughts. Peterson and Hyde (2010) described several of them, including

evolutionary psychology, cognitive social learning theory, and social structural theory for gender

differences in sexuality. Evolutionary psychology posits that sexuality gender differences are due

to variations in men's and women's strategies for genetic success, an idea that appears to be

ingrained in young adults as they develop over the years (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). In

comparison, cognitive social learning theory operates under the assumption that the gap in

attitudes and behaviors between men and women decreases over time as a result of women

portraying the images of sexually permissive women they see in the media, while social structural theory discusses sexuality in relation to psychological differences that are due to the gap of labor the gender disparity in power (Peterson & Hyde, 2010).

Emerging Adulthood

The idea of life course theory asserts that individuals' lives are marked by transitions, occurrences that indicate new roles and expectations in a series of stages that are distinct from the previous stage. Young adults are navigating a period during which they are assumed to be figuring out who they are (Olmstead, 2020). In his article, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," Jeffrey Arnett posited that the development of young adults can be summaries into the term *emerging adulthood*. Arnett (2000) provided a plethora of argument in defense of the idea that emerging adulthood is a distinct period characterized in terms of demographics, subjectiveness, and identity exploration; this period includes five distinct characteristics, experimentation/possibility, instability, identity exploration, self-focus, and feeling in-between (Arnett, 2000). An individual is free from parental control (to some extent) and has a greater sense of personal freedom as they form their identities (Hartotyo & Abraham, 2015). Because this is a period during which individuals explore love, work, and worldviews, it is a period of various changes and importance (Arnett, 2000).

Demographically, individuals during this period experience a diverse, unpredictable state due to their plethora of opportunities and activities available compared to other age groups. Individuals can be affected in one of three ways: residential status and school attendance (Arnett, 2000). Subjectively, individuals in this period believe they are no longer adolescents but are also not adults; important characteristics during this period include responsibility for oneself and

making independent decisions (Arnett, 2000). Finally, this period is crucial for exploring identities. During emerging adulthood, identity exploration is broken down into three main categories: love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) suggested individuals become more seriously involved in love and intimacy, jobs start to prepare for adult work roles, and worldviews learned in childhood and adolescence are questioned.

Although Arnett's research noted three major components, it is important to note other notable findings were discussed, including family relationships and risk-taking. For the purposes of this research, it is important to discuss the component of risk-taking, specifically. According to Arnett (2000), a plethora of research focuses on risk-taking in adolescence, while very little discusses this phenomenon in emerging adulthood, although certain types of risk-taking behaviors only peak during this period. Included in these behaviors are risky driving behaviors, substance use, and unprotected sex.

Brain Development and Risk-Taking

According to Moore et al. (2016), the period of adolescence and early adulthood is characterized by substantial brain development, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which may put individuals at an increased risk for risk-taking behaviors. Additionally, college-aged populations are thought to be at increased vulnerability during this transitory period because of increased autonomy and greater opportunity to participate in risk-taking. In particular, young people are often in situations where the opportunity to engage in risky behavior is high (Boot et al., 2016). Garcia et al. (2012) viewed emerging adulthood (e.g., traditionally, college-age) as a period of developmental transition, exploring and internalizing sexuality and romantic intimacy, now including hookups. Based on the lifespan of sexual development, a person between the ages of 18 and 25 is relatively free from the control of his or her parents or has more personal freedom

as well as increasing experience in searching for identity in terms of love, work, and way of life (Hartotyo & Abraham, 2015) and needs relating to sexual pleasure are more prevalent (Sumter et. al, 2016). Arnett (2000) also suggested these behaviors can be attributed to exploring identity before establishing themselves as adults and seeking out various experiences and gratifications.

Uses and Gratifications

Certain desires, needs, and motives are often specific to an individual's developmental stage or personality (Sumter et al., 2016). The uses and gratifications theory postulates how and why individuals utilize media to fulfill needs and motives (Joo & Sang, 2013). The theory was originally developed in 1959 by Elihu Katz and is utilized to gain an understanding of why individuals use certain types of media to fulfill needs and desires. In 2004, the theory was extended to incorporate media expectancies (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The theory posits that individual's use of media is purposeful, as they are actively attempting to fulfill their needs that are essentially triggered by personal and individual characteristics; the approach also assumes that motivations play an extremely important role in facilitating a person's behavioral intention and actuality of the media usage (Joo & Sang, 2013). According to Mull and Lee (2014), four types of gratifications are obtained from using media, including: personal identity, information, entertainment, and social interaction. In addition, a study conducted by Katz et al. (1973) discovered 35 of the needs individuals may attempt to fulfill via media usage and divided them into 5 explanatory groups. The groups include personal integrative, cognitive, affective, social integrative, and tension-free needs (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Previous uses and gratifications research has effectively demonstrated how media technologies can satisfy young people's needs (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2016).

Gratifications from Mobile Applications

For the age group being studied (18-25-year-olds), media use is often controlled by needs for autonomy, intimacy, and identity with expectations that engaging in certain types of social media or social applications meet needs such as interacting with others, passing the time, seeking information, and escaping the pressure of daily life (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Literature has suggested three gratifications drive users' consumption of certain online applications (Sumter et al., 2016). Physical gratification relates to sexual pleasure in that these needs are extremely present during young adulthood. Social gratification relates to establishing new friendships or finding a romantic partner, while psychosocial gratification relates to needs with a psychosocial foundation that mixes with social variables (such as self-worth; Sumter et al., 2016).

Specifically relating to this study's purpose, a review of the literature found that various studies reveal certain mobile application use (e.g., online dating sites, Facebook, Tinder) is prompted by motives such as ease of meeting new people fun, seeking sexual partners, or relaxation. One example is Dunne et al.'s 2010 study researching the uses and gratifications of Bebo, a previous social networking site that now makes social applications. Results from this study revealed Bebo was utilized for interactions with friends and members of the opposite sex, escaping from boredom, entertainment, and impression management. A review of 24 studies between 2008 and 2014 revealed the most popular uses for Facebook are entertainment, companionship, relationship maintenance, and passing time (Ryan et al., 2014). While the sites and applications studied varied in nature, most results indicate a similarity in gratifications and motivations across the board.

Hookup Culture

Sevi (2018) stated, "one of the most primal human desires is the want to engage in sexual behaviors" (p. 1). Many societies have become more sexually liberated over the past 60 years, and over the past 50 years, sexual attitudes and behaviors have notably changed, especially in American society (Sevi, 2018). A cross-temporal meta-analysis conducted by Wells and Twenge (2005) showed young people's sexual attitudes and behaviors shifted dramatically and became more liberal between 1943 and 1999. It has been deemed a "sexual revolution," altering American culture (Wells & Twenge, 2005). During this revolution, the individual began to view long-term relationships as interrupting career goals, and young adults began replacing these long-term relationships with quick hookups (Sevi, 2018). The term *hookup*, defined by Flack et al. (2016), refers to a single sexual encounter that may or may not have the expectation of further contact between partners and is increasingly used to describe sexual encounters between young adults. In further research terminology, these types of relations have been referred to as chance encounters, one-night stands, and anonymous sex. Regardless of the terminology being applied, all describe sexual relationships in which the sexual partners do not define the relationship as romantic or their partner as their boyfriend or girlfriend (Grello et al., 2006).

Previous research has subscribed to the idea of applying the theory of emerging adulthood to explain young adults' engagement in hooking up (Farvid & Braun, 2016). This perspective's premise is that individuals' behavior in this stage of life is related to exploration and experimentation during this period (Olmstead, 2020). In addition, media representations are crucial factors in the increase of the hookup culture. The themes of books, plots of movies and television shows, and lyrics of numerous songs all demonstrate a permissive sexuality among consumers (Garcia et al., 2012) and demonstrate the pervasiveness of a sexual hookup culture

among emerging adults. The hookup culture is often portrayed as positive and facilitating sexual freedom and has taken root within the culture of adolescents, emerging adults, and men and women throughout the United States. Over the past 60 years, the prioritization of traditional forms of courting and pursuing romantic relationships has shifted to more casual hookups (Garcia et al., 2012).

Casual Sex

Hookups and casual sex are generally alike in that the behaviors occur apart from committed relationships (Bendixen et al., 2018). Casual sex, which is described as sex without emotional bonding and outside a committed relationship, has become prevalent among young adults (Boot et al., 2016). Traditional dating behavior has decreased, and sexual behavior outside of conventional committed romantic pair bonds has become increasingly typical and socially acceptable (Garcia et al., 2012). Many popular representations suggest uncommitted sex, or hookups, can be biophysically and emotionally enjoyable (Garcia et al., 2012). In Western culture, particularly, individuals are exposed to sexual images and erotica, and non-committed sexual behaviors are often depicted, contributing to the idea that sex with no strings attached is more widely accepted (Bendixen et al., 2018). According to Garcia et al. (2012), a vast majority of today's young adults report some personal "casual" sexual experience. College student samples have suggested 70% of college students report having engaged in intercourse with partners they did not consider romantic in nature (Grello et al., 2006).

Research hints sexual culture changes are directly correlated with changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). It has been said that changes in personal values, attitudes, and traits are rooted in the broader changes in the surrounding culture and vice versa (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). Such changes may include a less worrisome take on certain

sexual behaviors, despite the repercussions of what could be considered risky demeanor. Existing research has often portrayed casual sex as risky behavior, associating it with mental health concerns, sexually transmitted disease, and unwanted pregnancies (Tholander & Tour, 2019).

Dangers

Risky behaviors, including RSB, are prevalent among college-aged individuals (Moore et al., 2016). RSB is generally defined as participation in sexual behaviors that increase the chance of contracting/transmitting disease and/or increased likelihood of unwanted pregnancy (Moore et al., 2016). Examples of these behaviors include having more than one sexual partner, using unreliable birth control methods, and sexual activity without using a condom (Alexander et al., 2018). Although RSB is defined by the behaviors, rather than the consequences of the behaviors, RSB is correlated with several negative outcomes, such as sexually transmitted disease and unplanned pregnancy (Moore et al., 2016). Repercussions of RSB relate to significant emotional and financial stress (Reynolds et al., 2020). Because of the financial and psychological consequences associated with RSBs, the phenomena can be considered a public health concern (Alexander et al., 2018). Given the potential adverse outcomes associated with RSB, increased attention on factors contributing to engagement in such behavior is warranted to help inform prevention efforts (Moore et al., 2016).

According to research, high-risk sexual activities are a global public health concern (Reynolds et al., 2020), and Ward et al. (2011) suggested that sexually risky behaviors peak during the ages of 18-25, while 75% of college students engage in casual sexual behavior before graduating. However, consistent use of protection is rare, with only one-third of sexually active students consistently using condoms (Ward et al., 2011). Research demonstrates that online sex seeking is associated with more risks than casual sex arranged in-person and it's suggested that

people who specifically seek sex online tend to be more willing to take risks (Choi et. al, 2016).

It follows that one might expect that sex seeking via smartphone apps would be associated with

heightened sexual risk. However, the use of these apps could potentially precede risks that are

even greater than previously observed with computer-based websites. In addition, because

certain apps are enabled to immediately notify users being sought by others, it is possible that

using these types of apps are an increased factor for risky sexual behaviors, including sexually

transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies (Choi et. al, 2016).

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The impact of RSB is staggering. As of 1998, 12 million cases of sexually transmitted

diseases (STDs) were reported every year in the United States, making an STD the most

common reportable disease in the United States (Hoyle et al., 2000). According to the Centers

for Disease Control, the number rose to more than 20 million new sexually transmitted infections

as of 2016. STDs are a substantial problem facing the United States. Because many cases often

go unreported, this surveillance data likely only captures a portion of the burden (Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

Unintended Pregnancy

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, unintended pregnancy is a

pregnancy that is reportedly unwanted (children or more children were not wanted) or mistimed

(pregnancy occurred prior to being desired; Mulugeta et al., 2018). Herd et. al (2016), estimates

that 51% of pregnancies in the United States are unintended (p. 421) and the consequences of

unintended pregnancy can be serious. Unintended pregnancy has been linked to postpartum

stress and depression during pregnancy and the postpartum period, as well as "one of the leading

causes of unsafe abortions and maternal mortality and morbidity" (Mulugeta et al., 2018, p.

3459). Research has also suggested associations with domestic violence, child abuse, and negative attitudes toward the infant (Herd et. al, 2016). Despite the negative consequences resulting, engagement in RSBs continues to be a significant public health concern (Ross et al., 2016). Because of public health implications, it is important to understand why young adults utilize mobile applications for such purposes.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II began with an introduction to the literature review, then discussed cyberspace, mobile applications, online sexual activities, and cybersex. This chapter then reviewed personality traits and gender differences before narrowing it down to theories of young adults development, brain development and risk taking, and the uses and gratifications that may lead to hookup culture. The idea of hookup culture and casual sex were discussed. Chapter II ended with the dangers of risky sexual behaviors. Chapter III discusses the methodology of the study.

Chapter III–Method

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of young adults who utilize mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behavior. Few studies have explored this phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals included. Due to the increase in mobile application use and the link between the Internet and online and offline sexual activities, it is imperative for clinicians to learn more about this phenomenon (Choi et al., 2016). A qualitative approach was taken to help understand the phenomenon of utilizing mobile applications in the ways described above. The research question to be answered during the study is: How do young adults describe their experiences using mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes? The questions that assist the researcher in understanding the entire experience are:

- How do young adults use mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes?

- What motivates young adults to use mobile applications for sexual purposes?

- What are the perceived benefits and risks of using mobile applications for sexual purposes?

There is limited qualitative research available from the perspective of the age group (18-25) that was the focus of this study. The researcher chose this age group, specifically because individuals' brains are still developing during this period, leading to either riskier behaviors or a change in behaviors. In addition, after a review of the literature, previous studies have been focused on homosexual males or attaining quantitative data regarding this phenomenon. Because mobile applications are becoming increasingly popular, especially with the age group being studied, the research contributes to mental health counselors from the perspective of the

population being studied. If insight is provided into individuals' experiences and the meaning behind the experiences, clinicians could better develop interventions to help address the phenomena.

Research Approach

For decades, the social science field has utilized qualitative research to study phenomena to understand the meaning of certain experiences (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Qualitative research is especially beneficial in providing insight into problematic behaviors, situations, or experiences and the meaning individuals and/or groups give to these experiences. Because the researcher sought to more deeply understand the phenomenon of utilizing mobile applications for sexual purposes from the perspective of the individuals engaging in this behavior, a qualitative research method was the most appropriate. In particular, because the researcher sought to provide a detailed description of the experience, hermeneutic phenomenology was utilized.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

A phenomenological study seeks to understand individuals' perceptions and perspectives of a phenomenon. Kafle (2011) defined phenomenology as an umbrella term encompassing both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches. Findlay (2009) described it as the study of phenomena: their nature and meanings. In further research, the underpinning for this study is narrowed to hermeneutic phenomenology, which is based on Martin Heidegger's writings. Kafle (2011) stated hermeneutic phenomenology researches the subjective experience of individuals and groups and goes on to say this method is an "attempt to unveil the world as experienced by the subject through their lifeworld stories" (p. 191).

Based on this information, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized to examine and describe the participants' experiences. According to Kafle (2011), there are only five guidelines recommended when participating in this type of research:

- being committed to a phenomenon that seriously concerns the researcher,

- orienting oneself to the question,

- investigating only the "lived" experience,

- describing the phenomena through writing and rewriting, and

- considering the parts and whole of the research.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived (Laverty, 2003). For this study's purposes, this approach was utilized to help examine the lived experience of young adults who use mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. According to Husserl, items in our external world do not exist independently of how individuals view themselves or their immediate experiences (Groenewald, 2004). Because of this, an individual's reality is considered a phenomenon, and to arrive at certainty, this is the most appropriate data on which to begin (Groenewald, 2004). A qualitative approach focuses on the participants' descriptions of the utilization of mobile applications for sexual purposes. In a phenomenological approach, the researcher must dismiss preconceived notions and describe the information in an unbiased manner (Dowling, 2007). The approach also allows for the deeper exploration of individual accounts of their own mobile application usage. Because of the limited in-depth research on the phenomenon being studied, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate investigative method.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research often provides rich details about human behavior, emotion, and personality characteristics that quantitative studies cannot match (Madrigal & McClain, 2012). This type of research originated from studies of human behavior conducted by researchers in education and social sciences (Berg, 2009). Qualitative research helps explain life experiences and give them meaning, and deeply explores individual behaviors and various perspectives (Berg, 2009).

Sample

Participants were from colleges and the general population in the geographical area of southwestern Pennsylvania. To be included in the study, participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 25 and have utilized mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes at least one time in the past 5 years. In addition, participants needed to be comfortable discussing their experiences. Based on the criteria, the researcher interviewed eight individuals, where saturation was reached, and recruitment ended.

According to Patton (1990), qualitative inquiry traditionally focuses in-depth on relatively small samples purposefully selected. Because the researcher sought to understand the sample's experiences, this idea of purposeful sampling was utilized to obtain a certain depth of understanding and provide a rich, detailed analysis of the phenomena being studied (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Because purposeful sampling provides opportunities for identifying and selecting the rich, detailed participants' experiences, it is widely used in qualitative research (Patton, 1990).

Recruitment

Although the researcher initially planned to distribute flyers at community centers, colleges, and churches through Pennsylvania, the coronavirus pandemic hindered the recruitment process. After completing the institutional review board (IRB) process at two public universities in Western Pennsylvania, flyers were emailed to students at each campus. Both universities are part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and offer a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs. In addition, the flyer was posted on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram; the initial flyer was shared on the researcher's page, with subsequent individuals "resharing" the information on their own respective pages. The researcher also provided flyers to colleagues in the counseling field who distributed them to clients meeting criteria. The approved flyer provided information about:

- the purpose of the study and the incentives being offered,

- criteria for the participant, and

- information about the researcher, including contact information.

Individuals interested in participating were asked to contact the researcher via telephone or email. Once a potential participant contacted the researcher, primary screening was completed to ensure the individual met the criteria for participation and to explain the study in greater detail. During this period, the researcher discussed the informed consent, selection of participants, the study's purpose, the types of interviews being offered, confidentiality, risks and benefits of participating, and the interviews' duration.

Data Collection

Data were collected utilizing individual, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were delivered online or via telephone due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The formats offered

were as follows: via telephone or Thera-Link, an online video conference resource designed for counselors and therapists who engage in online counseling sessions. According to Thera-Link's website, Thera-Link provides a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act compliant platform that works on multiple devices and is easy to use.

Prior to beginning the interviews, the informed consent form was reviewed with the participant. If the individual remained interested in the study, demographic information was collected, the participant signed and returned the informed consent, and an interview was scheduled on the participant's preferred platform. Each individual interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded. In addition, field notes were taken during the interview to describe the researcher's thoughts and reactions and observations on any verbal and nonverbal expressions. After completing the interview, the interviewer transcribed the interviews and then provided a copy of the transcript to the participant to ensure accuracy prior to data analysis.

Individual Interviews

Data were collected utilizing individual, semi-structured interviews. According to Jamshed (2014), interviewing is one of the most prevalent forms of qualitative research data collection. Semi-structured interviews are formatted on semi-structured interview guides and provide the participants' the opportunity to answer preestablished open-ended questions. Because semi-structured interviews are only conducted one time, and to achieve the best use of that time, the researcher developed a guide to help maintain the participant and researcher's focus on the desired line of research (Jamshed, 2014). The interview guide consisted of questions relating to the overall research question/s (Jamshed, 2014).

Interviews were delivered using this semi-structured format and recorded on a password-protected device. In addition, field notes were taken during the interview process. The interviews were conducted via telephone or online via Thera-Link and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. After completing each individual interview, the interviews were transcribed by this researcher, given to the participant to review for accuracy, and then placed into a locked file cabinet for data analysis. Transcriptions were coded utilizing numerical combinations to ensure the anonymity of the participant.

Demographic Information and Interview Questions

All participants were asked for demographic information as part of the interview process. In addition, following the demographic line of questioning, initial questions were asked to build rapport with the individual. The demographic questions asked were:

1. What is your age?

2. What gender do you identify with?

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

4. What is the highest level of education you completed?

5. Which category best describes your employment status?

6. What is your current religion, if any?

7. How important is religion in your life (very, somewhat, not too important, not at all)?

8. What brand of smartphone do you utilize?

9. About how long have you been utilizing this form of technology?

10. How long have you been using (or did you use) mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes?

Following the collection of the demographic information, participants were asked the questions identified for rapport building (listed below), followed by questions identified for purposes of this research. The full interview guide is listed in Appendix A. Because the researcher utilized a semi-structured approach, unscheduled prompts were used to align the scheduled interview questions with the overall research questions (Berg, 2009).

- What do you think of technology as it relates to intimacy and sexuality or relationships?
- Has technology been helpful for you in meeting people for dating or romantic relationships?

Field Notes

During the interviews, this researcher also took field notes that were missed in the recording of interviews, such as participants' verbal and nonverbal expressions and the researcher's reaction to certain information. Field notes are essential to qualitative research and help develop thick, rich descriptions of the interview and data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Upon completing each interview and during the data analysis, the researcher returned to the notes to reflect on the interview and any thoughts, opinions, emotions, or biases from the interviewer (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018).

Transcriptions

For the purposes of this research, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher. All eight of the transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher, and transcriptions of interviews one and two were reviewed by the dissertation chair. The researcher listened to recordings of the interviews, transcribing the questions and responses verbatim. Identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and transcripts were kept locked when the researcher was not utilizing them. Each transcript was given to the correlating participant to verify accuracy.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the primary researcher is the central instrument involved. The instrumentation section is dedicated to discussing reviewing the researcher's qualifications and biases. Therefore, the instrumentation section is discussed in first person, as the primary researcher reviews this information. Following this section, the researcher returns to using the third person to complete the dissertation.

After completing the rehabilitation counseling master's program in 2011, I began working at the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in Pennsylvania. During the four years I was employed there, I worked with a population of clients with substance dependence diagnoses. I obtained experience working with clients 18 years of age and older who had a diagnosis of substance abuse or substance dependence. During this time, I became more interested in the young adult population and their descriptions of maladaptive behaviors and certain sexual experiences they were engaging in (in addition to the substance use) and how these behaviors affected them. Although my position was not required to determine a diagnosis, I did provide counseling, career services, and support to clients in addition to running career-oriented groups for individuals suffering from substance use and creating employment plans.

After being accepted into the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Duquesne University, I began obtaining my license in Pennsylvania. Upon receiving my license in October 2014, I began working part-time as a licensed professional counselor at a private practice and at a drug and alcohol and mental health outpatient center in southwestern Pennsylvania. While working at these facilities, I gained experience working with children, adolescents, and adults with a wide range of mental and emotional health and substance use disorders. I am currently working at a private practice where I specialize in working with children, individuals with

trauma exposure and domestic violence, and individuals with sexual acting out and impulse control disorders. My experience and training in working with individuals who engage in offline and online sexual acting out behaviors have solidified my interest in conducting this study.

Although I entered the doctoral program interested in researching violence among adolescents, I became more interested in offline and online sexual behaviors after personal experiences with individuals whose relationships and/or marriages fell apart due to online and offline sexual behaviors. In most of these instances, the individuals in my life who experienced this started out simply utilizing mobile applications for behavior such as chatting with members of the opposite sex or watching porn and then graduating to applications such as Tinder to engage in sexual activity. Most of these individuals were between the ages of 18 and 25, leaving home for the first time, interacting with different people after being in long-term relationships, and questioning the beliefs and values ingrained in them as they were growing up. My interest further developed after completing part of the training to become a certified sex addiction therapist and beginning to work with individuals who struggle with problematic offline and online sexual behaviors. More recently, I have become interested and started working with children, adolescents, and young adults who engage in online and offline sexual activities, some of which are utilizing mobile applications to do so.

While my professional experience and training have played a part in my interest in conducting this research, I am also aware that these experiences and prejudices may increase my biases while completing the research. Because of the work I have done with individuals who have experienced negative consequences resulting from problematic online and offline sexual behaviors, my experiences may bias the research. To minimize the implications of bias in the

research, I utilized a journal to reflect on my biases and opinions, remained aware of the potential for biases, and discussed any biases that arose with my dissertation committee.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting any research, the research study was submitted to Duquesne University's IRB for approval. According to the IRB protocol summary, four areas of concern needed to be addressed. Therefore, when developing the informed consents, the researcher was attentive to the following areas:

- treatment of participants,

- confidentiality,

- data storage/retention, and

- reporting the findings.

Treatment of Participants

During the recruitment process, participants were provided information on the purpose of the study. Once an individual contacted the researcher expressing interest, the informed consent was discussed in more detail. The informed consent process reviewed the study's purpose, the risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality procedures, the incentive being offered, and an offer to receive the research (after completion) for free. Participants were also informed they could withdraw from the research at any time and were not obligated to participate. Prior to scheduling interviews, demographic information was collected to ensure participants met the criteria, and a written informed consent was provided for a second review and signature of the participant. Once the signed informed consent was given back to the researcher, the interview was scheduled.

Because of the nature of the questions being asked, the researcher was aware participants may experience minimal discomfort. To minimize possible uncomfortable feelings, participants were advised they did not need to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with and reminded they could withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

Confidentiality

During the informed consent process, participants were advised of this study's confidentiality process and how the data would be reported in this dissertation's results. In addition, participants were informed of any mandated reporter laws the counselor is bound by. The primary researcher was the only person with access to identifying information. Identifying information was removed during the transcription process, and transcripts were identified using a numerical code for each participant. Recorded interviews were kept on a password-protected device, and transcripts were locked when not utilized by the researcher.

Data Storage

Participants were advised that interviews would be recorded and kept on a password-protected device. Written copies, including the interview transcripts and field notes, were kept in a locked file cabinet that only the primary researcher had access to. The recordings of the interview were destroyed following the completion of the transcriptions. All written data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation.

Reporting

Participants were advised their interviews would provide data relating to young adults' experiences using mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. In reporting the data collected, all identifying information was removed. Transcriptions of the interviews were

numerically coded. Participants were given the transcriptions to review for accuracy and being offered a copy of the study's final results.

Delimitations of the Study

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher made initial decisions on the research questions and utilized a qualitative research design. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research in the form of individual, semi-structured interviews allowed for a personal reflection on experiences from participants' points of view. This allowed for themes to emerge in response to the interview questions that contribute to the field. The focus of the study was on individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 for two reasons. The first is due to the literature gap regarding individuals within this age range, discussing the phenomena in detail. Second, while there is research on individuals in this age range utilizing mobile applications (in general), there is very limited research on utilizing mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors.

Data Analysis

To understand the data, thematic analysis was utilized. Van Manen (2014) described a theme as the focus on the experience's meaning. Based on the type of research conducted, a thematic reflection occurred. The first step in this process was to review all of the notes and interview transcripts. During the first review, the researcher looked for relevant and important information in the study to begin coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This process was continued with every interview transcript. Themes began to emerge through the coding process. Categories developed based on the themes that emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Thematic analysis is utilized in phenomenology by focusing on the human experience subjectively. Conducting this type of analysis allowed the researcher to effectively identify,

analyze, and report the information acquired while providing an in-depth and intricate account of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Because the researcher's goal was to provide a richer representation of the data, inductive thematic analysis was utilized instead of deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Utilizing inductive thematic analysis is a way for the researcher to describe the phenomenon without attempting to fit it into a preexisting theoretical theory, ensuring the information is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2008). To ensure the themes that emerge are comprehensive, the researcher used a six-phase approach developed by Nowell et al. (2017) to establish trustworthiness during the analytic process.

According to Nowell et al. (2017), a diligent thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings. However, because the researcher acts as the primary analytic instrument, it is his or her responsibility to ensure trustworthiness during the process. Nowell et al. (2017) utilized the criteria provided by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba in 1989 to establish trustworthiness and provide a six-step approach for ensuring it. The criteria utilized to establish trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility provides a certain level of confidence in the accuracy of the fit between participants' beliefs and the researcher's depiction. Transferability addresses whether findings can be generalized in other contexts, while dependability ensures findings could be duplicated, and confirmability is "established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 3). Confirmability ensures a certain neutrality level that the findings describe the participants' experiences and not the researcher's bias (Nowell et al., 2017). Following Nowell et al.'s (2017) six-step approach for analyzing data and ensuring trustworthiness during the process, the researcher conducted the data analysis as outlined below.

Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data

As a way to initially familiarize one's self with the data, the researcher transcribed all interviews verbatim and then read and examined the transcripts repeatedly until becoming very familiar with the entire body of interviews (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). According to Nowell et al. (2017), ensuring trustworthiness during this initial phase includes the following techniques: "prolonging engagement with data, triangulating different data collection modes, documenting thoughts about potential themes and codes, documenting theoretical and reflective thoughts, storing data in well-organized archives, and keeping records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals" (p. 4). To achieve trustworthiness during the initial phase, the researcher transcribed all interviews verbatim and then spent time immersed in the data to understand the phenomena (prolonged engagement). In addition, the first two interview transcripts were provided to the researcher's dissertation chair for review, reflection, and feedback, and field notes were utilized to attain the triangulation of the data.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

During the second phase of the analysis process, the researcher began developing initial codes using inductive thematic analysis. The codes in this research consisted of a short, basic, systematic unit originally attached to the phrases being analyzed. For this research, open coding was used; the researcher noted at this time that statements made by participants could cross between various codes, therefore as the researcher worked through the data, codes were continuously developed and modified. Each transcript was coded by the researcher, coding sections of text relevant to the research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Microsoft Excel was used to code and identity initial themes, with new codes being modified and developed, as necessary. Techniques for trustworthiness during this process include: "peer debriefing, researcher

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triangulation, use of a coding framework, reflexive journaling, audit trail of code generation, documentation of all team meetings and peer debriefings" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4). During this phase, the researcher also used the Microsoft Excel record to include observations from field notes and initial derived meaning from the data. Once the Microsoft Excel record was completed (audit trail of code generation), the researcher provided the record to the dissertation committee for review, reflection, and debriefing.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Although there is no one set definition of a theme, researchers agree that a theme ultimately shows a pattern of significant information and meaning related to the data (Javardi & Zarea, 2016). A theme is the outcome of coding, defined by significance (Javardi & Zarea, 2016). During this stage, the researcher continued to examine codes, organizing them into more general themes relating to the research questions, remaining cognizant that statements could cross between themes. At this point, codes were meaningfully organized under similar, overarching themes; themes being the higher-level categories identifying the major element of each content analysis of the text (Javardi & Zarea, 2016). Ensuring trustworthiness in step 3 of the approach includes "researcher triangulation, diagramming to make sense of theme connections, keeping detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4). To accomplish trustworthiness, the researcher expounded on the initial Microsoft Excel record of generating codes by outlining to "make sense of theme connections" and maintaining notes regarding the theme development (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 8).

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

During the fourth phase of data analysis, the researcher continued to reassess and review themes for development (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). At this point, the researcher examined all

the data to determine if it was significant and backed the themes. During this process, themes were modified, and the 25 groups of themes initially established in phase 3 were decreased to 15. To establish trustworthiness in this phase, one must incorporate "researcher triangulation, themes and subthemes vetted by team members, and testing for referential adequacy by returning to raw data" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4). Therefore, consultation with the dissertation committee was incorporated, and field notes and notes on theme development continued to be utilized.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

During phase 5 of the analysis, the researcher refined the themes to define and name them. According to Maguire and Delahunt, the goal of phase 5 is to "identify the essence of what each theme is about" (p. 33511). During this phase, the researcher was able to identify what each theme was saying, how the themes related to the research, and what research question each theme corresponded with. At this point, the 15 themes in phase 4 were refined into 14 overall themes. In this phase, trustworthiness incorporated "researcher triangulation, peer debriefing, team consensus on themes, documentation of team meetings regarding themes, and documentation of theme naming" (p. 4). The researcher addressed the concept of trustworthiness in this phase by documenting theme development and naming and continuing to consult with the dissertation committee.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The final phase of the analysis incorporates the "end-point of the research" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 33,511). For the final phase of this approach, the researcher must incorporate "member checking, peer debriefing, describing the process of coding and analysis in sufficient detail, thick descriptions of context, description of the audit trail, and reporting on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study" (Nowell et al.,

2017, p. 4) to establish trustworthiness. Therefore, the researcher provided a detailed description of the research in the final two chapters of this dissertation.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Based on the six-step approach from Nowell et al. (2017) and the criteria utilized to establish trustworthiness, the researcher employed the following tactics throughout the research. To address credibility, the researcher implemented prolonged engagement, triangulation, and debriefing with the dissertation committee. To address transferability, a thick description of the phenomenon was completed (Cope, 2014). To address the concept of dependability, continual consultation with the dissertation committee was utilized to audit the process. Finally, confirmability was addressed by using triangulation and an audit trail detailing the steps taken from the beginning of the dissertation through the dissertation report and results in the final two chapters (Nowell et al., 2017).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate how young adults use mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors and the motivations and perceived benefits and risks of such behavior. Because the phenomenon of this age group utilizing mobile applications for online and offline sexual behaviors (as well as the motivations, benefits, and risks) has not been studied from the point of view of the specific age group, a phenomenological qualitative approach was effective in gathering the information.

Data were collected utilizing individual, semi-structured interviews. Participants were chosen utilizing purposeful sampling and met certain criteria to participate. In addition to recorded interviews, field notes were collected. Interviews were transcribed and provided to participants to review accuracy prior to being included in the data analysis. Data analysis was

completed utilizing inductive thematic analysis, with Nowell et al.'s (2017) six-step approach to

ensuring trustworthiness.

Chapter IV- Research Findings

This study's findings resulted from examining the lived experiences of young adults who used mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors. Chapter IV provides a case-by-case analysis of the information obtained from the semi-structured interviews, participant demographic information, and the in-depth exploration of the data obtained.

Participant Information

The study included eight participants. Twelve individuals initially volunteered to complete the interview, but four did not follow through with completion. To protect confidentiality, all eight participants were identified using a number instead of their names in the research findings. The participants ranged in age from 18-26 (one individual was selected to participate at the age of 25 but could not be scheduled for an interview until after her 26th birthday). Six participants identified as female, while two identified as male. One participant identified as Black/African American, six identified as White/Caucasian, and one identified as White/Caucasian and Asian/Asian American. Four of the participants had completed one year of undergraduate programs, one individual had completed three years of an undergraduate program, two individuals were in graduate school programs, and one individual had completed graduate school. One participant was employed full-time, two individuals were employed part-time, one individual was not employed but looking for work, and four individuals were full-time students. One participant reported being Christian, one identified as "spiritual," three reported they did not identify with any religion in particular, one reported "other," and two participants identified as agnostic or atheist. Seven participants reported utilizing an iPhone, while one reported using a Samsung. Smartphone use ranged between one and over five years, and the use of mobile

applications for sexual purposes ranged from one to over five years. Table 1 provides participant characteristics.

Individual Interviews

All interviews were completed utilizing a semi-structured format and recorded. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, interviews were conducted via phone or online using Thera-Link, a HIPAA-compliant platform. Two interviews were completed using Thera-Link, and six interviews were completed over the phone. Each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. Field notes were taken during each interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher.

Analysis of Individual Interviews

Because qualitative research can be influenced by the researcher, reflexivity was utilized to minimize my influence on the research (Palaganas et al., 2017). According to Palaganaset al. (2017), reflexivity entails continual reflection and self-awareness by the researcher to be aware of the "specific ways in which our own agenda affect the research at all points in the research process" (p. 427). To practice reflexivity, I engaged in an ongoing internal monologue to challenge my perspectives and assumptions (Palaganas et al., 2017).

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Education	Employment	Religion	Importance of Religion	Smartphone	Technology Use	Use of Apps for Sexual Purposes
1	24	F	Black/African American	Graduated from college	Student	Christian	Somewhat Important	iPhone	Between 1 and 3 years	Over 5 years
2	26	F	White/Caucasian, non-Hispanic	Completed graduate school	Employed full-time	Other "Spiritual"	Not too important	iPhone	Over 5 years	Between 1 and 3 years
3	25	M	White/Caucasian, non-Hispanic	3 years of college	Employed, part-time	Nothing in Particular	Not at all important	Samsung	Over 5 years	Over 5 years
4	19	F	White/Caucasian, non-Hispanic	1 year of college	Student	Other	Somewhat important	iPhone	Between 1 and 3 years	Over 5 years
5	19	F	White/Caucasian, Asian or Asian American	1 year of college	Not employed, looking for work	Nothing in particular	Somewhat important	iPhone	Between 1 and 3 years	Between 1 and 3 years
6	18	F	White/Caucasian,	1 year of college	Employed, part-time	Nothing in particular	Not at all important	iPhone	Between 1 and 3 years	Between 3 and 5 years
7	19	M	White/Caucasian	1 year of college	Student	Atheist or Agnostic	Not at all important	iPhone	Between 1 and 3 years	Between 1 and 3 years
8	23	F	White/Caucasian	Some graduate school	Student	Atheist or Agnostic	Not at all important	iPhone	Between 3 and 5 years	Between 1 and 3 years

After completion of interviews, information was transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher. Transcribing the data provided the opportunity to continue familiarizing myself with the data and patterns emerging. Throughout the analysis process, I listened to the interview recordings and read the transcripts several times. While listening to the recordings and rereading the transcripts, I continued to add to the field notes that had been developed as a way to remain 1aware of the patterns beginning to emerge.

As discussed in Chapter III, inductive thematic analysis was utilized to develop the themes discussed in greater detail in Chapter V. After generating initial codes using the phrases discussed by the participants, I spent time searching and reviewing themes that emerged before defining the significant themes that emerged. The themes that emerged were divided and related to the research questions. Any information that did not relate to the research questions was excluded from further analysis.

Case-by-Case Analysis

This section provides an in-depth description of each participant's interview. Each description discusses the identified themes in relation to the participant.

Interview 1

Participant 1 was a 24-year-old female who identified as Black/African-American. At the time of the interview, the participant was completing a master's degree. The interview was conducted via telephone. The interview started with introductions. Although the participant had already reviewed and consented to participate, the researcher reminded the participant about voluntary participation, that she did not need to answer any questions she was uncomfortable with, and that she could withdraw her participation at any time. Participant 1 confirmed an understanding of the process and a willingness to continue participation in the study. The

interview lasted approximately 45 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted about 1 hour. Prior to beginning the interview questions, participant 1 sounded confident and excited, but I (the researcher) noticed feeling nervous about completing the interview. There was a fear that questions would be forgotten or omitted, and the information being sought would not be acquired. However, as the interview continued, the participant's openness helped to alleviate my anxiety.

The researcher first asked the participant for her thoughts on technology and its relation to intimacy and sexuality or relationships. She responded by saying, "I feel like it just depends on who you are and how you use it," and then elaborated:

> I think technology can mess up relationships in terms of that. Like people read into things and let other people control their decisions about the relationship. I also feel like, for me personally, I'm a person who likes to educate myself and like know my body, so like, I'll go out and research things and get information on technology and whatnot, um and then like I'm, I have . . . My significant other lives in Texas, so I mean I know I can depend on technology to communicate with him whether it's through Skyping or Snapping each other. So, it really just depends on how people use it, whether it has a negative or positive impact on like their relationships or just like, them sexually.

The researcher then asked the participant if technology has been helpful (personally) in meeting people for dating or romantic relationships. She responded that it had and noted, "being an open person sexually and meeting new people." Therefore, she had "met a friends with benefits on Tinder, but also a guy who she just dated," and attributed it this way, "It depends on who you meet and whether you'll either be just another hookup or it becomes a romantic relationship."

To better understand her experiences, the researcher asked for more information on how the participant has utilized mobile applications for online or offline purposes. Laughing, the participant then began to describe her experiences using these applications over the years for various purposes, including watching porn to get to know herself sexually, making friends, hooking up, and out of boredom. At this point, the researcher noted in the field notes that the way a person uses these applications may depend on the individual's motivation. When asked about personal thoughts on using mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes, the participant discussed negative connotations with the apps and reiterated her belief that what one gets out of an app depends on one's reason for using the app. In addition, she discussed the convenience of using apps to meet people and how it can break down personality barriers:

> I feel like how people . . . like we live in an age where at least our generation, like we're taught to constantly hustle and if you don't have someone, if you don't have a foundation, there's no way that you can get married or date or whatever. Like you have to have all your ducks in a row before you can commit to anything. So, with that mindset of constantly hustling, it's not very convenient for someone to just go out and meet people. Like personally, I go out and stuff, but I'm just like, "How on earth can I meet people?" because some people are just socially awkward, and I'm kind of intimidating. (laughing) It's not like I look to be intimidating, but like my personality when I want to be social, it's very, it's a lot. So, I know that using technology is more convenient for people.

Participant 1 also described the freedom of being able to be oneself online because interactions may not be (or ever be) deep:

> I feel like our generation, for some reason, has this high connotation of having to be perfect. . . . Um, the millennial generation had to put this façade up. So, I think when

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you're online, it's easier to be yourself because you're not worried about, like, having to

put up this mask. You know, it's easier talking to strangers than it is talking to someone

you know about certain things. So, I think that's why, you know, online is also more

convenient. Because, you know, 50/50, you may meet this person who's not, and you're

not really worried about them like putting out your business because like, y'all don't

know each other like that.

To understand the participant's motivations for using these applications, the researcher

asked her to talk more about her present and past motivations for use. Participant 1 was quiet

before discussing how her use was initially motivated by not wanting to date or hookup with

individuals from her school:

I'm the type of person that like doesn't like bringing my business to school 'cause people

talk so much shit. So, I would rather date someone from a different campus or a different

district than I'd rather date someone like, at my school. So, like, that's where I was at.

Further elaborating, participant 1 discussed motivations changing as she moved into her college

years:

And like, I can say, I had, I had, it was like a lot of hooking up. . . . Like I wanted to

reclaim my sexuality and not beat myself up for having sex. Because, you know, that

whole idea of like, oh if a girl is hooking up with people, then she's a hoe. But like it's a

double standard, and I was like, screw the double standard.

As she has gotten older, and after risky behavior, her motivations have continued to change:

I was like, "How am I dating you for eight months, and this is the first time, after all the

reckless behavior I've had in my past, this is the first time I get an STD?" This isn't right.

(laughing) So, I was like, yeah, this isn't happening anymore. But yeah, since then, if I

use the app, it's to like, talk to people. And I tell them like, "Yo, I'm not having sex with you" 'cause, over time, like, sex, has meant something different for me now."

We talked about whether other people's opinions factor into whether she uses/has used the apps. She stated:

Um, I'm the baby in my family, and so like I have an older . . . so the order is my brother, sister, my brother, and then me. And so, I'm really close with my eldest brother. And the fact that I, like at the times, there were times I wasn't really dating anyone, and my brother would call me a loser. And my brother actually, like he encouraged me to download dating apps so I can like, start dating people.

She discussed her relationship with her mother, who "still thinks I am a virgin, . . . There are things you just don't talk about." She also discussed certain family values but stated they do not affect whether she uses the apps:

So, in terms of our values, like our values never really affected how I use apps because I just saw it as, like another way of me exploring myself. . . . Yeah, I know my values will reflect like how my family respond in some things, at least revealing it to them. But I still do it because, like again, I'm all about exploring myself and learning more about myself and what I like and don't like.

When asked about her perception of the associated benefits of the apps, participant 1 discussed convenience:

It's more convenient . . . but in terms of like, like I said, that whole hustle and constantly on-the-go type of lifestyle, it's easier to use apps because you're not required to like, constantly respond back to them, at least initially.

She also stated, "Oh yeah, like I said before, I think it allows people to, um, be themselves in a sense."

When questioned about her perception of risks, she discussed the fact that one might not know who one is talking to:

But the risk again is that you're talking about complete strangers and you don't, you don't know . . . You only know what they show you. So, like, the person could be someone who might be trying to hack your system or whatever. Or the person you meet could just be someone who is dangerous and is just trying to get information so that when they come meet you or pick you up, they like brutally beat you up or rape you. So, like the main risk is that you don't know who you're talking to. And so . . . and also like you don't know what you're getting into.

After transitioning into the participant's interest in participating in the study, the participant noted:

I'm very open about it. So, I wanted to least talk about it and have a discussion with you and see your perspective, at least in terms of what your study is doing. Like, because I think people don't have these conversations, and I know, like, I know with my experience, that at least, we can make sense of it. Because we do live in a technology-driven world and I, I'm okay with telling people that yes, I use this app to have sex with people, or yes, I use this app to go on dates. Like, I'm okay and open about that.

The researcher asked the final question in case there was anything else the participant wanted to disclose about her experiences that the researcher had not inquired about. The participant's response was again, "that you don't know who you're talking to," and referenced

the potential for risky behaviors including sending nude photos, especially when a person is younger:

> But like before, you know, I think that every generation there's still the idea of sending explicit pics when you're like in junior high or whatever cause that's what's in, and you just don't think about it until like later on, so I think that's another thing about technology again.

She mentioned that people using technology "really could be using it wrong." Upon rereading the transcript and this statement, the researcher realized that an opportunity was missed to have the participant elaborate on this statement, if comfortable. Instead, the interview ended with some general conversation and the participant being thanked for her openness and transparency.

After the interview concluded, the researcher wrote field notes regarding the first interview. The researcher noted her own initial anxiety present at the beginning of the interview that dissipated due to the participant's friendliness, transparency, and apparent confidence in answering questions openly. The participant's demeanor contributed positively to the interview experience, with the interviewer not being aware of any uncomfortable feelings toward the information being disclosed in the interview. The researcher was aware that nonverbals and body language can be missed during phone interviews and made a note to be more cognizant of the tone of voice, pitch, rate, and volume while completing other interviews via phone.

The description above provides a review of the first participant's discussion and the themes being studied. Table 2 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been excluded.

Table 2

Participant One Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of Applications	Sexual exploration	I used to watch a lot of porn. And I'd watch a lot to get to know myself sexually.
	Casual sex	So, I would use them for hookups, I guess. And like I can say, I had, I had, it was like a lot of hooking up. But then like we hooked up, and yeah, it wasn't even like a dating app, and I still found someone.
	Searching for romantic relationships	And then, I met another guy who like I dated for six months on another dating app. think one or two of the guys, I had like, one was kind of serious.
	Developing friendships	Every now and then, just having that one person that I've, uh, I've met, but we're just like friends. So, I've met guys on Tinder and Bumble who I'm just friends with.
2. Motivations	"It's convenient."	So, I know that using technology is more convenient for people. It's not very convenient for someone to just go out and meet people. It's easier to use apps because you're not required to like, constantly respond back to them, at least initially.
	Connection	I used the apps, but it wasn't to hook up with people. It was more so just to talk. And I used, yeah, it was just to talk to people. But yeah, since then, if I use the app, it's to like, talk to people.
3. Benefits and risks	Facilitates risk-taking	I put myself in such sketchy situations that I ended up getting out of. the catch about that is that I was not being safe whatsoever.
	It's empowering	But yeah, I was really, I was being really reckless like I wanted to reclaim my sexuality and not beat myself up for having sex.

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
		Like I'm a woman, I can do whatever the hell I want as long as I'm being safe.
	Impedes deeper connections	and you're not really worried about them like putting out your business because like, y'all don't know each other like that.
		And there was times when I would use it because I'm bored.
	You're more vulnerable	You're talking about complete strangers, and you don't, you don't know . . . you only know what they show you. And so . . . and also like you don't know what you're getting into.
		So, like, I think that in itself can be scary 'cause, like again, with some of these apps, you still don't know who you're talking to.
	The mask can come off	Oh yeah, like I said before, I think it allows people to, um, be themselves in a sense.
		I think when you're online, it's easier to be yourself because you're not worried about, like, having to put up this mask.
	Conflicting family values	you know my mom, my mom still thinks I'm a virgin, which ugh
		so, there are things you just don't talk about.
		Yeah, I know my values will reflect, like how my family respond in some things, at least revealing it to them. But I still do it . . .
	Breaks down barriers	because some people are socially awkward, and I'm kind of intimidating so

Interview 2

Participant 2 was a 26-year-old female who identified as White. Although the participant contacted the researcher to schedule an interview while she was 25 years old, the interview was unable to be scheduled until after the participant turned 26. At the time of the interview, the participant held a master's degree and was employed full-time. She reported using mobile

applications between one and three years. The interview was conducted via Thera-Link, a HIPAA-compliant video platform and followed the same process as the first interview. The interview lasted approximately 40 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted 50 minutes. Due to the time between the first and second interviews, again, I noticed feeling very anxious prior to starting the interview. In addition, participant 2 initially mentioned needing to be done within the hour due to a prior engagement, which made me nervous because I wanted to make sure we had time to discuss all the questions. However, participant 2 seemed excited to participate, and her demeanor helped to calm my nerves.

The interview started by asking what the participant thought about technology related to intimacy, sexuality, and relationships. She initially seemed taken aback by the question, stating, "Oh my gosh," and then laughing. However, she then delved into the question stating that she believed it speeds up the process and may diminish certain aspects of intimacy:

Um, well, I think that it obviously has allowed for things to be rapid. So, it has created, um, you know you can get on and be involved in something in an hour (laughs) . . . um realistically, if that's what you're looking for. Um, which I think also to counter that, also takes away from a lot of, um, so if you were looking to just be sexually involved, it checks that box, but if you were looking for more intimacy and relationships, it kind of diminishes those aspects.

Upon rereading the transcript, the researcher realized there was a missed opportunity to have the participant clarify her answer by providing deeper reflection on the initial comment. Instead of asking the participant to tell more about her initial answer, the researcher just transitioned to the second question, asking participant 2 her thoughts on using mobile

applications in particular for sexual purposes. Upon reflection, the researcher would've liked to take the opportunity to hear more on the participant's thoughts and build rapport but wanted to make sure all the questions were discussed, which may have contributed to rushing into the next question.

Participant 2 paused before providing a detailed reflection:

Um, in some ways, it allows you to, no actually in a lot of ways it allows you to meet people who are outside of your own, um, social circle, um, in multiple dimensions, right. So socioeconomic, race, ethnicity, age, um, etc. So that part is very enticing to me.

She then went on to describe what she felt was a negative association, "And I think that there are also drawbacks in it, obviously as far as safety for women. So, um, you have to do things very cautiously." Interestingly enough, participant 2 also noted that although women take certain precautions, she didn't believe men took the same precautions:

And also, men don't go through that. So, me and a friend recently within the past six months were sitting down with men in our age range, and we literally looked over at them and were like, do you guys do these things . . . and they were like, "No."

After discussing more of the notion that men may be privileged in a way women are not when it comes to certain aspects of using these applications, participant 2 was asked to speak more on her own experience using mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes:

Um, I guess Tinder is just the go-to one that's always been around, like essentially the first. There's tons of people on it. It gets the job done, per se. Um, yeah, I'll stick with that answer on that. Hinge is enticing. I know that like, um, it kind of has like a sister site, Bumble. Um, and I've toyed around with that idea, and I have plenty of friends that have discussed using that for themselves, um, and I'm a very bold woman and would definitely

message guys first. But essentially, all of them cross-contaminate their users anyway. So, like, if you see somebody on one, you're going to see them on all the others. So, um, also, it's just a lot to manage. Like I don't need three different apps at one time. So, Hinge is for, um, I often dabble in and out of like keeping my account on pause at different times. So, I myself am a therapist, so I do a lot of internal reflection of where I'm at. So, like, am I at a place of seeking out relationships? So, those are times where, like, Tinder is on pause because, like, I'm looking for a relationship, and that's where Hinge comes into place. So, because, what's their hashtag? It's like the app that's made to be deleted or something like that.

After the researcher acknowledged being aware of the slogan for the Hinge app, the participant reflected further:

It's funny, and it's known that people on there are not just total fuckboys, but whenever I'm not in the best place for myself, and I'm not ready to be in a relationship, I'm like, okay, Hinge back on pause and back to Tinder.

Again, upon rereading the transcript, the researcher realized there was a missed opportunity for asking the participant to clarify what she meant by the statement, "not in the best place for myself," and instead transitioned to the next part of the interview.

The next question was posed to gain a perspective on what the participant feels is good about these apps, and what the participant feels is bad about the apps. She began discussing the fact that the apps can sometimes provide too many options, leaving the potential for an individual to be unable to choose or be disappointed:

So, I think we're living in an era right now where you're given thousands of choices out there in the palm of your hand. So, you're consistently meeting people and vetting them

out, but you can find so many flaws quickly within them because essentially, they're

disposable, and you can move on to the next one. So, I think it's bad in that way.

She also discussed feeling like a lot of the more negative personality characteristics and attitudes

are found on Tinder; "Um, oh and I think that in general there just becomes this vapidness of

like, that's kind of the attitude and which it's obviously more on Tinder."

As far as positives, the participant noted that there are a lot more "options" available

when using these apps and again noted that it provides opportunities for meeting people outside

of one's "circle." "I think it's always good to meet people that are not like you. That you did not

grow up alongside and to um, to expand outside of your comfort zone." Overall, participant 2:

> I think people created these apps for the good, and I think it always just comes back
>
> to . . . the fact that it's helpful if people are introspective. Like, if people know what they
>
> want and they're forward and open and honest about it, these apps can be helpful.

The researcher took the time to converse with the participant about the ability to be introspective

and how being introspective may be a part of certain individuals' values, which helped the

transition into the next question come more naturally.

To understand more about the influences on using the apps, participant 2 was asked if any

values factor into whether she chooses to use the apps and whether other people's opinions factor

into using the apps. Participant 2 responded with, "Mmm, good question," contemplating for

several minutes before stating, "Um, okay, so the first part of the question, I think that my values

and motivation is human connectedness." She then went on to describe how that value can be a

spectrum for her, and the look can vary from time to time, depending on how she feels. Despite

noting the value of connection, the participant went on to then clarify that although that was a

value ingrained in her during childhood, her current methods for fulfilling that value are "not

something my mama would agree to, okay?" In addition, she noted, "Um, and I myself have had to do like therapy work around that to release myself from the whole grip of like White Christian, purity ways, in which I was brought up to," in relation to the conflicting values between how she was raised and who she is now. The participant seemed slightly hesitant or uncomfortable while disclosing the information about her religious upbringing. In addition, the researcher noted being very uncomfortable during this part of the interview due to the researcher's own Christian background.

Because the participant mentioned some of the internal struggles she experienced happening around age 19-20, the researcher asked for clarification on the transition from her home (with some of these values ingrained) to college-life and figuring out who she was as a person. She noted, "Ehh . . . you learn to compartmentalize a lot, um between like your school life and your going home life," also stating:

> That it's just sad in which you know at that point, you are a grown woman. At that point,
> those conversations should be had, so it's just sad that those are missed opportunities in
> young adult lives because we have so much built, ingrained belief systems at that point."

Unfortunately, there was a transition to the next question instead of asking for further reflection on the participant's statement.

At this point, the researcher wanted to seek clarification on what the participant felt were risks and benefits, and so participant 2 was asked to discuss any other risks or benefits that she did not previously mention. Participant 2 described being vulnerable when interacting with individuals via the apps because you don't really know them. She also felt like there is a negative personality characteristic associated with people you interact with via apps:

I think continual risk can also be based upon not knowing this person and the lack of, you know, when you're trying to form intimacy and intimacy on a rapid, um, timeline, everything is expedited. And so along that goes, you know, can include multiple things. Including intimate photos, so when things like that get involved, it runs the risk of high trust in another person. So, I think that's another risk of everything that's involved in that, right. So, um, that's always another risk because it's a stranger. It's not like, oh, I half know this person. Um, so that's something. Um, yeah, I think always just, you know, whenever . . . like dishonesty can be pretty high within this population. I mean, even if you agree between the two of you, you know, like, whatever agreement is made, whether it's like oh, I won't talk with other people or sleep with other people or the account will be deleted. I mean, realistically, what's stopping them from doing that?

Participant 2 then went on to discuss how the app can be "addicting," especially when a person is seeking validation and described an experience with an ex-boyfriend:

In fact, actually, when I had met an ex off of Tinder, that was a struggle in the beginning because he got such high validation from the app from other people, um, that a couple of times I caught him on the app again and I was like, "What the fuck is up with this?" And he was like, "Oh, I just love being on here because I feel so validated."

This led to a brief discussion about instant gratification and validation between the researcher and the participant.

At this point, the researcher wanted to explore the participant's transition (behaviorally), so the participant was asked whether she thought her sexual behaviors had changed since she started using the apps. She answered, "Um, probably," before noting:

I think that's hard to answer because I think it's hard to say whether or not you released

yourself to go and engaged in these things or if there's more of a freedom there. Or . . .

but yeah, I guess I would say yes. I mean, I definitely have had an increase in partners

than prior, like more often encounters.

Before asking the participant if there was anything she would like to add about her experiences

that was not discussed, the researcher did acknowledge the transition between adolescence and

adulthood that could contribute to certain behaviors changing.

Participant 2 initially stated, "I don't know," before mentioning she thought doing the

study during the coronavirus pandemic was probably interesting. She laughed while noting that

she could "tell you about some of my funniest experiences with that." The participant then went

on to note that she takes more risks when it comes to using these apps and this behavior than she

does in other areas of life:

I'll be clear about that. Uh, I'm a very conscious, conscientious, I mean fuck, I'm a

trauma therapist. I am very hypervigilant. Like I am terrified of interpersonal violence.

But um, not terrified, but I mean, it's very real to me. Uh, and at the same time, when it

comes to these types of things, my risks, um . . . I talked to you about all the things I

make sure I do when I'm going with someone, and it's not like I talk to them that day,

and I meet them that night. Uh, I vet them out for a bit of time, but definitely, I am much

more riskier in these situations than I would be anywhere else in life. Um, so I don't

know what that's about, right. I think that, as I said, I think I value human connectedness

and intimacy, so that's where I find value, and it's crazy what those things will make

people do, I guess. I don't know.

Noting the participant's educational background and type of employment, the researcher decided to explore whether the participant's background factored into decision-making when using the apps. The participant noted it did, stating:

Yeah, I do, honestly. Because when I think back to my experiences being on Tinder when I was 19, uh, some fucking foolery happened then. Uh, and I think about how blessed and grateful I am that nothing did happen to me. Um, because I did put myself in some precarious situations where, yeah, I told my friends like yeah, I'm going to meet up with somebody. But I did not go through the things I go through now. Um, you know, I would drive an hour away to go meet somebody, and nobody would know my location. Nobody would know the person I was with. Nobody knew his number or what he looked like. Uh, again, my location or even the town I was meeting him in. It's like, what the fuck, you're 19. Uh, and now here I am 26 doing all of those things, and it's like I feel more capable of like doing and acting like that now. But like, I would not.

The interview ended after the participant stated she did not have any questions but was "super pumped about the study." Participant 2 noted the following when asked why she was interested in participating:

What interested me was the actual content of the study. Secondly, I also know what it's like to conduct a study and the difficulties to gather participants. Again, why not give back to that? Also, it is something I enjoy talking about with my friends, so I figured it'd be easy and fun to talk about. Of course, I'd be lying to not mention that monetary incentive also plays a small part in motivation.

After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect on it and continue field notes. The participant was open during the interview, appeared thoughtful, and maintained excellent eye

contact. Interview two flowed well, but upon further study, the researcher noticed several missed

opportunities for the participant to reflect on her statements in more detail. This may be due to

the stress the researcher felt to complete the interview in the allotted timeframe.

The description above provides a review of the second participant's discussion and the

themes being studied. Table 3 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the

phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been

excluded.

Table 3

Participant Two Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of applications	Casual sex	But whenever I'm not in the best place for myself, and I'm not ready to be in a relationship, I'm like, okay, Hinge back on pause and back to Tinder.
	Searching for romantic relationships	So, like am I at a place of seeking out relationships. So those are times where like, Tinder is on pause because like I'm looking for a relationship, and that's where Hinge comes into place. But sometimes that also extends out to like searching whether or not that person is a potential, like, suitor.
2. Motivations	It is convenient	And so, it is helpful to have a place where that is all brought together.
	Connection	I think that my values and my motivation is human connectedness. I think I value human connectedness and intimacy.
	Seeking attention	It does give that instant gratification from people.
3. Benefits and risks	Facilitates risk-taking	I definitely take a lot more risks within this than I do in my regular life. But definitely, I am much more riskier in these situations than I would be anywhere else in life.
	It's empowering	Um, and I'm a very bold woman and would definitely message guys first.
	Impedes Deeper Connections	and the lack of, you know, when you're trying to form intimacy and intimacy on a rapid, um, timeline, everything is expedited. It sets up for not great starts for relationships realistically So, you're consistently meeting people and vetting them out, but you can find so many flaws quickly within them because essentially, they're disposable, and you can move on to the next one.

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
	You're more vulnerable	Including intimate photos, so when things like that get involved, it runs the risk of high trust in another person. So, I think that's another risk of everything that's involved in that, right. So, um, that's always another risk because it's a stranger. So, um, you have to do things very cautiously. So, whenever you go to meet up with somebody, you're meeting a complete stranger basically. I'm meeting somebody that nobody knows, um, so you have to take the female precautions around that
	Conflicting family values	You know when you go home, you only talk about XYZ, you totally leave out ABC, um, and because there's a lot of fear around the guilt and shame of like I said, your mama always taught you that that's not the behavior that you engage in. The style or the way in which I'm going about it is not something that my mama would agree to, okay? We'll just, we'll put it like that. I did have shame . . . because I did wrestle with that internally, of like, no you shouldn't be doing this. Like this is a lot of floozy behavior. This is not how your mama born and raised you.
	Breaks down barriers	it allows you to meet people who are outside of your own, um, social circle, um, in multiple dimensions, right. So socioeconomic, race, ethnicity, age, um, etc. I think it's always good to meet people that are not like you, that you did not grow up alongside and to um, to expand outside of your comfort zone.

Interview 3

Participant 3 was a 25-year-old male who identified as White. At the time of the

interview, the participant had completed three years of college and was employed part-time. He

reported using mobile applications over five years. The interview was conducted via phone and

followed the same process as the first and second interviews. The interview lasted approximately

35 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted

50 minutes. By the third interview, I noticed feeling less anxious about the process. However, participant 3 sounded nervous and unsure.

The interview started by asking the participant his thoughts on technology as it relates to intimacy, relationships, and technology, and he answered:

Uh, so, I haven't thought too much about it, but uh, I know that there has been some like advances in just like sex toys and stuff like that. I haven't looked into it too much, but I think any advancement is great. Nat way to innovate or any new inventions.

Although there was some reinforcement by the researcher, "Right and there is a lot coming out nowadays too. It seems like every other day or every day even, something new pops up, sooo . . . (laughing)," it was upon rereading the transcript that the researcher realized there was a missed opportunity to have the participant further reflect upon his positive thoughts of advancement and whether he meant advancements in items related to sex or advancements in general.

Instead of asking for further clarification, the researcher transitioned to the second question, asking whether mobile applications have been helpful for him in meeting people for romantic or dating relationships. The participant stated:

Uh, I haven't used anything like that. Um . . . like, I did try Tinder just because like my one friend, like basically I lost a bet, so I did, but that's the extent of my experience with it. I don't . . . I think they're kind of dumb.

When asked about the types of applications the participant used, he stated, "Um, mobile applications, I pretty much just stick to email, YouTube, podcasts, and the Internet browser, but that's pretty much it." He denied using specific applications for online or offline sexual purposes. There was some worry at this point that the participant did not fully understand the purpose of

the study and did not actually qualify, so the researcher attempted to clarify by asking what the participant uses the Internet browser for. He stated:

> Uh, I usually look up videos online. Uh . . . sorry. My cat just jumped up on my lap. He's putting his tail by my mouth; I don't think he wants to hear this. (laughing) But yeah, I mostly just use the Internet browser to look up videos and new things.

It was at this point the researcher became aware that the participant did not sound comfortable discussing the subject matter. However, the researcher took the opportunity to ask for clarification by encouraging the participant to talk more about his use. He responded by saying that he used the Internet browser app to explore sexual games, technology, and toys. "I'm more fascinated by it than anything, but I do try and like keep on top of like what's going on and like what new crazy things are being made." When asked, he mentioned some of the things he had found more recently included porn games. The researcher took the opportunity to have the participant further reflect on the games:

> Yeah, um, so, there are some games that just have like straight-up sexual content, and they are being sold on the STEAM marketplace. STEAM is just like an application you can get, and you can just purchase a bunch of games and play it through that application. But um, just recently, I think within a year, they started and allowing people to sell adult content on there. And it looks like things are like, pretty gray and wishy-washy in what gets removed and what doesn't. So, some people will release a game, and it has full-on sexual nudity, actual, like, uh, sex in there.

The participant did seem to become a little more comfortable at this point, and when asked how long these games have been offered (based on his knowledge), he replied:

Yeah, I'd say roughly a year ago they started just saying, yeah, we'll allow whatever on here. Or maybe a little, maybe a little over a year, but I know all the other, uh, big video game corporations, Nintendo, Microsoft, Sony—that is unheard of. You will not be able to find any of these kinds of games on there. It's just on the STEAM marketplace, which I think is the biggest game thing on computers. So, yeah, you're as of within one or two years of today, they just started allowing anyone to release just sexual, pornographic games on their storefront.

With the participant seemingly more comfortable, the next question was posed, and the participant was asked what his motivation was for looking up some of these pornographic videos and things along the same lines. He responded:

Um, I would be lying if I . . . uh, I don't know how to say this. I do find like some enjoyment out of it. Like, half of its curiosity. The other half is just like, uh, kind of a sexual thing. . . . Mostly it's just like . . . Sometimes, it's just like a desire. Sometimes, it's like I'm fascinated and curious by this.

It seemed the participant was slightly uncomfortable acknowledging his desire, so rather than ask another question, the researcher chose to have some discussion about how hard it is to keep up with all the new games being created and the lack of restrictions that are in place. Per the participant:

Yeah, and like, also, going back to the STEAM thing, one of the things that I'm fascinated by . . . they'll release Japanese adult games and like at the beginning it'll say "We just want you to know that everyone in the game is 18 years of age or older," but if you actually play the game, it's obviously not true. Like, I am fascinated by how that got, like how it's being sold on the store.

The researcher allowed the conversation to continue as a way to continue to build rapport with the participant in hopes of breaking down any barriers (of being uncomfortable) that remained. The participant discussed how it may be difficult to check and ensure only adults are playing the games, although there is a description that is posted that states participants must be of a certain age:

> So, if you look at the game and the game say, oh yeah, this 18-year-old goes out and has fun with 5 other 18-year olds, it's like well . . . how are you . . . it's really hard to check against that I guess.

The conversation led naturally into asking the participant if he thought any dangers or negative consequences were associated with the videos or games, to which he responded that he did not believe there was a risk or danger at all. When asked about his thoughts on positives, he discussed it being money. "Uh, really the only positive I can think of is just money . . ." and further went on to state:

> So, if they're going to release it on some weird website I've never heard of before, I'm probably not going to look or buy it. But now that it's on STEAM, I'll maybe give it a look, maybe buy it out of some weird curiosity that I have, just to see, like how this is even happening in 2020. But I'd say like, the more places it can be, the better. I don't see, like, since you actually have to opt into it . . . Uh, I'm sorry I don't have my thoughts straightened out. But I don't really see any negative to it, and the only benefit I see to it is money, 'cause like I said earlier, you know what you're opting yourself into so . . . and it just gives the game more exposure so . . .

The researcher was not sure the participant completely understood the question, but instead of clarifying it to determine if his answer changed, the researcher went on to the next

question. Upon further reflection, the researcher realized this was a missed opportunity to delve further into the client's thoughts. However, at the time, the researcher did not want to make the participant any more uncomfortable (given what seemed to be inconsistent comfortability throughout the interview). In addition, the researcher did not want to skew the participant's experience or perception by having him discuss another topic just to appease the researcher.

When asked if any values have influenced his use of pornographic games or videos, the participant discussed growing up in a religious household but growing out of it, "But I know my family is religious, and I grew up religious until I kind of just fell off." He did mention one value that influenced his decision, as well as the fact that he hid this part of his life from his family:

But, um, really, the values that I have is that I see this as like a victimless thing. So, as long as I'm not hurting anyone by buying the games or looking up videos online, then I don't see anything wrong with it. So, even though my family doesn't like, I still do it. I hide it from them, of course, but . . .

At this point, the researcher asked the participant to reflect more upon the statements of falling out of religion and developing new values:

'Cause as a child, I grew up as like a sheltered person, lived under a rock, lived in a bubble. And then, um, I know my, like the only reason I know this is because I was going to have a little brother. And then he was alive for five days, but he was premature, so, unfortunately, he died five days later. But I was like, well, why did God take this away from me, and then that just kind of spiraled into who I am now today, of me thinking there probably isn't a higher power. . . . That's when I started questioning it and eventually came up with the ideas and values that I have, which is that if I'm not hurting anyone, it's not bad.

While the participant was answering, the researcher again noticed feeling uncomfortable with the mention of "not having a higher power," again due to the researcher's own Christian background. At the same time, the researcher noticed a twinge of sadness for the way the participant's experience of losing a sibling factored into his beliefs.

When asked if any other values factor in, he responded:

I know that, like, I have a girlfriend now, and she's pretty okay with it. But if I had a girlfriend that didn't, uh, let's see. . . . You know what? That's a good question. I'm not sure that like, if . . . one value that you might have to consider besides your one would just be that of your significant other, so I guess that'd be something I'd have to think about.

Based on his response, it was easy to transition into the next question of whether other people's opinions factor into use. He mentioned that other people's values do not factor in and that friends also engaged in some of the behaviors he did, "I do have most of my friends also look up pornography, and they also have some of the same curiosity I do. So, some of those games we see on STEAM, we'll actually just play in as group together." Before the researcher could ask for more information, the participant further stated:

I don't think their values would change my mind that much, unless they can somehow turn it around and prove that watching porn or buying these games or using Tinder or whatever mobile application is actually hurting someone. Then yeah, I don't think that would change how I look at it.

At this point, the researcher was interested to know more about the conflict between his value system and that of his parents, so the participant was asked to talk more about that. He stated that although he has talked about some of these things with his parents before, it is not

something he discussed with them now and compartmentalized this part of his life when he was

around his parents because they were still actively involved in their religion and spirituality:

So, like I know they know, and we've had a discussion about how they think it's

sacrilegious and all that. But I'm not too religious, so it doesn't really mean anything to

me. So, what I do, is just hide the fact that I do use these applications and that I look up

porn, that I play these games and just pretend that I don't do it. . . . Like the past 10 or 20

minutes we've been talking . . . there is no way that I would discuss this anywhere within

a 10-mile radius of anywhere near my parents.

The participant denied experiencing any negative effects from his behaviors:

Um, like I know some of the effects of pornography are just like you don't wanna . . . like

you think of women as objects, or you think that . . . I know these are some negative

effects that people talk about, but I personally don't think I've experienced that at all.

When asked if his sexual behaviors have changed, he responded that he has watched and

engaged in it less and less as he has gotten older. "It's like I get less desire to and I'm busy all

the time, so . . . yeah." When asked if there was anything the researcher should know that was

not discussed, the participant responded that there was not, but then again emphasized that use

had decreased.

The interview ended after the participant described how he had accidentally stumbled

across porn as a child after a misunderstanding. He stated he was interested in participating for

the following reasons:

Well, I won't lie. . . . There was like a financial incentive. There was a $15 gift card, but

also, like I've mentioned earlier throughout the interviews. I am kind of fascinated by

this, so . . . just so yeah . . . 80% because I get a gift card out of it and 20% like I'm

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actually kind of interested in how people are using apps to, like hook up now and how

you're able to buy adult video games."

After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect on the interview and continue field

notes. The researcher wondered if the participant was minimizing the reporting of his use and

behaviors due to the varying levels of comfortability that seemed to be present during the

interview, and there was some concern about whether his beliefs and experiences were fully

being captured. There was also some concern, as there were only a few themes in interview three

that connected with interviews one and two, and the researcher began to wonder about reaching

saturation.

The description above provides a review of the third participant's discussion and the

themes being studied. Table 4 provides a review of the significant phrases related to the

phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been

excluded.

Table 4

Participant Three Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of applications	Sexual exploration	I mostly just use the Internet browser to look up videos and new things. I know there's like an imageboard online that people post on, and that's where I try to find new things.
		Uh, new like games, technology, toys. I'm more fascinated by it than anything.
		I know there's porn games being released for that, and so I've been fascinated by that. I can't believe that's being sold on the digital market. So, I was looking into that, just for pure curiosity.
		Sometimes, it's like I'm fascinated and curious by this.
2. Motivations	Connection	So, some of those games we see on STEAM, we'll actually just play in as group together and laugh about how ridiculous it is.
3. Benefits and risks	It's empowering	I do find like some enjoyment out of it.
		I'm just like, this feels good, so I might as well keep doing it.
	Impedes deeper connections	Um, like I know some of the effects of pornography are just like you don't wanna . . . like you think of women as objects, or you think that . . .
	Conflicting family values	Like I said earlier, my parents aren't too fond of it.
		So, like I know they know, and we've had a discussion about how they think it's sacrilegious and all that.
		So, what I do, is just hide the fact that I do use these applications and that I look up porn, that I play these games and just pretend that I don't do it.
		There is no way that I would discuss this anywhere within a 10-mile radius of anywhere near my parents. So even though my family doesn't like, I still do it. I hide it from them, of course, but . . .

Interview 4

Participant 4 was a 19-year-old female who identified as White. At the time of the

interview, the participant had completed one year of college. She reported using mobile

applications for sexual purposes over five years. The interview was conducted via Thera-Link

and followed the same process as the first three interviews. The interview lasted approximately 42 minutes. The entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted a little over one hour. Participant 4 appeared excited to participate in the interview, and her demeanor was open and inviting. The researcher did not notice any anxiety, having completed the previous three interviews.

The interview began by asking the participant her thoughts on technology related to dating, intimacy, and sexuality. As previously noticed, initial questions were asked to help build rapport with the participants. The participant responded, "Uh, I mean I think it definitely opens like a lot of doors that weren't really available before, you know, as far as like when Internet wasn't really available," then went on to state:

> Um, I think a lot people are both coming into themselves very early, which can be kind of damaging. But, it's also like helps like kids to form an identity sooner. I know it helped me. But it also was like, I know a lot of people who just ended up being, like, groomed for a while. And I guess it's like because we're the older Gen Z when things were still a little weird . . . you know like it's normal to talk to 26-year old's when I'm 13.

Although this was an opportunity to ask the participant to speak more on her statement, the researcher made a note to touch upon this later if the participant did not bring it up. This was due to the desire to continue building rapport with the participant. After a brief discussion on how "cool" it could feel to talk to an older person online, the participant was asked if mobile apps have been helpful for the participant in meeting people for romantic or dating relationships. The participant stated that they had, mentioning, "The person I'm currently talking to, we met on Bumble, which was cool." The participant stated that it may be "harder to form like a relationship-relationship, rather than just sex because a lot of people are looking for that," but

ended by positively affirming her experience with her current interest. After asking for more

clarification on her current relationship, the participant noted that she and the person were not

dating, just interacting, "That's another thing. Technology can such because the talking phase

lasts the entire time. And that's it."

The participant provided more reflection on the new individual:

Yeah, fairly new. But it's going well. So, I'm pretty happy. It's pretty much the best . . .

any, sort of dating app anything has turned out before, so that's pretty cool. Um, it's neat,

though. Like Tinder and stuff like that. It's like helping me figure out what I don't like a

lot easier because I have bad anxiety, so it would be hard for me to like, approach

someone in person, which I'm sure a lot of people say. So, it's like a lot easier for me to,

like, chill out and find people that I actually do want to pursue something with. Um, it's

also really easy to ignore people, which I love.

Participant 4 was then asked to describe more about the apps she used and described

using Tinder, Bumble, and Instagram:

Um, so I only have Tinder and Bumble on my phone. Just like the swiping, whatever

message. And then I actually don't meet with people from them that often. So, I'll usually

just use like Instagram or something, um, as like a primary or whatever. And then I meet

people on there.

She described not utilizing "dating apps" unless she was bored. Although the researcher was

interested in hearing more about the use of Instagram, the opportunity was not taken advantage

of at that time due to wanting the participant to clarify any other apps she utilized. The topic of

Instagram was discussed later in the interview, however. The participant stated she did not

currently use any other apps but previously utilized Kik and Tumblr. "I used to use like Kik and

Tumblr a lot, um just like messaging kind of stuff. Like, I tried people on Tumblr, and then, I'd like ask for their Kik or something, and then we'd message on there."

The researcher asked participant 4 to discuss the Kik app more, as the researcher was not extremely familiar. This seemed like a good opportunity to continue building rapport and helping the participant feel comfortable. After describing the app, participant 4 was asked to describe more of her use of the apps (she mentioned) for online or offline sexual purposes. She responded:

Um, so more recently, I've only been using Tinder or Bumble and then Instagram. And then like I'll find people, and we'll talk, and you know, I'll figure out if I actually like them. Um, and then we always meet in person. I don't like to do anything over the phone anymore just because it just feels weird at this point.

She then described how her use had changed since she first started using the apps as a teenager:

'Cause when I was lot younger, I used to like . . . I can't remember exactly what apps I used. Probably like Kik and Snapchat or something like that. But like, I would send nudes all the time. I would never meet up with anybody when I was younger because I was 14. So, um, I would just like find people and add them on Snapchat or Skype or something. Oh my God, I was . . . dredging up memories . . . But yeah, just like sending nudes and stuff when I was younger. But now I just am like, "Hey, do you want to hang out?" And so, it works.

After a brief discussion on how her use has changed and things she did not think of as a teenager ("And also, I realized like, oh wait people have those pictures now and can keep them. I don't really like that."), the interview moved to how the participant uses Instagram (in particular). She described her use of Instagram to search for potential partners:

I mean, like at the very base level, I'll go through and look at the people my friends are

following that I think are hot. Or I'll like go through their followers or the people they

tag, like, "Oh, this person is cute." And then, I'm like a little crazier than most people, so

I'll like go through their whole account, figure out things they like or don't like. And then

I'll follow them, and I'll like respond to their stories or something. Very simply . . . kind

of make it be their idea to talk to me. So, it's just a lot more . . . less like Tinder and

Bumble and just like a friendship kind of thing. But, like, I, it's like the intent is still

there. That's how ****, the guy I'm talking to right now . . . we met on Bumble and then

just moved to Instagram. And um, it works. I like it a lot more actually than, um, dating

apps . . . just cause there's no like preconceived, "I am on this to have sex."

At this point, the researcher was curious to know more about the participant's thoughts

on potential preconceived notions of the other apps (Bumble and Tinder), so the question was

posed. The participant stated that she believed there were some preconceived notions of just

being on the apps for sex:

Um, I think it varies person to person because there are so many people that are like, I'm

just here for sex, and then there are the people who are like, I criticize people who are

only here for sex. So, it's just those two things, but I mean, I think most people are just

like yeah, we use Tinder for hookups, and that's it.

Participant 4 was then asked what motivated her to use some of the apps. Her motivations

appeared to vary depending on the app she chose to use. She described using Tinder and Bumble

when bored and not taking it very seriously, although she did acknowledge taking it more

seriously if she actually connected (or matched) with someone she liked. The researcher was

interested in knowing more about the development of behaviors over time, so participant 4 was asked how she became engaged with some of the online apps. She responded:

> So, I was on Tumblr a lot. I was a fan of like creepy stuff and supernatural, so I followed like blogs and stuff. And they usually post fanfiction, and sometimes they would post like add me on Kik or add me on Instagram or whatever. So, I'd do that and like get involved in fandom group chats, I guess that way, or like fans somehow that way. So that's how I'd make friends. And then I would . . . there are people that would like find me or like I'd find them that way. So, like we'd add each other out of a group chat and talk privately.

At the end of her description, she mentioned one app, Omegle, that the researcher had never heard of, so to gain clarity, the researcher asked the participant for more information on the app.

> Participant 4 described that Omegle is "like chat roulette basically," and when asked for more reflection, she responded:

> Um, you like get on. You just like type your interests in little hashtags, and it's like a video chat, but you're just video chatting with random strangers. And you can like leave or whatever. You can switch a bunch of times. But a lot of times, it's like people jerking off and like, um, predators because they knew that like a lot of young people liked to use Omegle. Um, yeah, it was spooky.

Participant 4 went on to describe the application being monitored now but still around for use. Upon reflection, participant 4 noted, "It was pretty fun back in the day. But it was also just like . . . essentially very strange and not like very safe." She then went on to talk about a current app that is not specifically related to online or offline sexual behaviors, but that the participant believed it is "definitely just like a sex trafficking." The participant described her experience

with the app, noting that it was not related to the study; the researcher agreed with this but

continued to allow the participant to describe her experience, to maintain rapport and out of

curiosity:

> Randonauting . . . it's like this app you download, and it gives you like a random place to
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> go to that you like manifest weird energy. Yeah, like I downloaded it, and it was like go
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> to this random location in the middle of the woods, and I was like, no thank you.

This seemed a good time to transition into the next question, which was the participant's

thoughts on what is good about the apps and what she thinks is negative about the apps. She

discussed different aspects of "good," including it being beneficial for someone with anxiety and

being able to engage in casual sex easier:

> Um, I think it's good for people with like anxiety and stuff like that to kind of alleviate
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> um a lot of like the general nerves that you may get on a first date, where like you have
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> no idea who you're talking to. Um, and for stuff like that, it's good. And also, it just
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> makes hooking up easier because, like you don't have to like go out with someone and
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> then go home with someone for a night. It's just like, "Hey do you want to have sex?"
>
> "Yes." "Okay, cool." And you can be in bed by like 11:00 o'clock.

> She then went on to discuss one general negative aspect, "Um, but also, I think it's very

easy to lie about how old you are, and it's very easy to um, you know you could just get into a lot

of dangers stuff." She described unknowingly "matching" with someone who was underage and

her attempts to mitigate that chance (after her experience). "I've like asked people like, can you

send me a picture of your driver's license?" In continuing to discuss negative aspects, she noted

people being "mean" and "entitled." "Um, and then it's also just like the people that are like . . .

people are just mean sometimes, which I guess is unavoidable, but people are like much more entitled to sex because of it."

The conversation then transitioned into her negative and positive consequences with the apps. She responded, "I don't know, I guess. I mean nothing that, I, that really comes to mind." However then, without prompting, noted, "being groomed is not that great, but you know, I'm not . . . I guess damaged from it" before describing her experience with depression and anxiety and how those illnesses contributed to her behaviors:

I have like, depression and anxiety . . . and I've struggled with them for a very long time. Um, for a while, like, when I was 12 or 13 or whatever, I was very hypersexual as a result. Um, and it kind of allowed me to just keep letting that happen. Um, and I didn't get better for a really long time. So that was kind of bad.

After rereading the transcripts, the researcher realized this was a missed opportunity to ask the participant to talk more about her statement. Instead, the researcher chose to ask (again) for positive outcomes. The participant reported starting one relationship as a result of using apps but had difficulty thinking of any more. She was encouraged to let the researcher know if she thought of any more before moving on to the next question. The researcher asked the participant's thoughts on any dangers associated with the apps and began discussing a plethora of various dangers:

Um, I think generally like sex trafficking, pedophilia, that kind of stuff. Like vic crimes. Um, and the also, I guess it's just kind of not great for people who like, you know. I guess people who are like closer to where I used to be where like they don't know how they're actually like coping very badly. Um, and then I think I've noticed like a lot more objectification of people because it is like . . . people feel entitled to it after there's an

absence. It's like, oh yeah, let's hookup. Um, and there's like less relationships in general now, which is pretty wild.

Without being prompted, she also added, "I've gotten a lot of like unsolicited photos and stuff like that, um, so people are more open to doing that, I've noticed. They just kind of expect that you're going to be okay with it."

Because the participant noted various dangers, the researcher was curious to know if she felt any incentives were associated with using the apps, providing examples. Although it was not the researcher's intention to lead the participant to a certain answer, upon reviewing the transcript, the researcher noted how providing examples could have swayed the participant to answer a certain way. Nevertheless, the participant reported that validation is an incentive. "Oh my gosh . . . it makes me feel good just seeing how many matches I have, and then I just delete. It's just nice to know that people think I'm cute." She then noted, "It also creates an unhealthy dependence on people thinking you're cute, so, you know pluses and minuses." The participant continued to describe her experience working with a therapist to help decrease her depending on other people for a positive sense of self-worth. Upon reflection, the researcher noted that asking the participant to further clarify her thoughts on her own "dependence" on the apps may have been beneficial.

Before moving on to the next question, a conversation ensued in which the participant described her experience with one man she hooked up with but remained in contact with, signaling more of a connection than just casual sex, "Mmhmm, yeah, and I mean we still talk. So, he's cool. We don't talk often, but we are still . . . We communicate every once in a while." When asked if her sexual behaviors have changed since she started using the apps, she responded:

Um, so I mean, I guess I've always been very like into more like taboo things, just

because I was exposed to them so young . . . like fetish wise. Um, so I guess 12-15 or 16.

I was very like into that, and I could really only get that online. Um, so I wouldn't like to

go and meet up with anybody. I would just like watch porn or something like that. But I

would still talk to people online to try to get whatever else I was looking for. Um, so like

I would have guys connect with me over like FaceTime. Um, but yeah. And so, after that,

I started kind of realizing, oh . . . not it. Um, and I'd like lay off a little bit. But I was still,

like you know, watching porn on my own or whatever. But I wasn't like talking to guys

to like have sex with them, um, or girls. I am, I am bi. That's another thing. Lots of more

gay people now that the Internet exists. And so, more recently, I've kind of stepped away

from that. I'm like, okay, I don't have do this on the Internet. I can go meet people and be

like a little more relaxed and normal. And then if I trust them, we can have a good

relationship. Then we can move forward. So, I guess I've just matured in general.

She also noted that she did not watch porn as much now.

At this point, the researcher was somewhat overwhelmed by the all the information

provided as a result of that question. Although it would have been a great opportunity to pick

apart the participant's response and ask for clarification on certain things, the researcher instead

moved to the next question. Upon that revelation, the researcher became aware of some

disappointment in missing that opportunity due to the richer context it could have provided to the

study.

The researcher asked participant 4 if other people's opinions factored into whether she

used the apps, and the participant discussed how they used to, but over time, she has stopped

worrying as much about what people thought about her:

I didn't download Tinder for a while because I was like, "Only desperate people use Tinder." But then I was like, "Everybody is desperate and nothing matters. So, download the app and fuck everyone else." You know? 'Cause I also spend a lot of time worrying about what people think of me, and like for some things, I'm just so sick and tired of thinking about it. I don't really care. So, stuff like that to me just doesn't really matter. You know?

The interview naturally drifted into the next question of what values influence choosing to use some of these apps. The participant described various values that did or did not factor in:

I'm very like, I don't like to just hookup and leave because I like to be able to trust a person. So, if they can't talk to me for a like a little bit before we meet, then I'm not interested in them. And I guess I'm also like, don't be like an asshole to people. But I don't have any really like, traditional values or whatever. Like I'm not religious. I wasn't really raised religious, and my parents don't really care about, like, what my relationships are like. It's like, that's my business. You know? And my friends are also the same way. So, it's just kind of like, I value respect and honesty. But, you know, besides that, I'm not really paying attention to very much.

Without prompting, she then went on to describe an experience with a man she met online:

A lot of people lie. There's a lot of people lying. It's very horrible. I don't like it at all. Oh, my fucking . . . I was talking to this guy in Tinder, and we were like chilling, or whatever, and I added him on Snapchat, and I forgot what his name was. I don't really care, but he started texting me after like . . . texting, texting. He was like, "We should FaceTime; we should FaceTime" after like two days. He was like pressuring me to FaceTime, and he wouldn't like tell me very much. I'd be trying to text him and have

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conversations, and he'd be like, let's FaceTime. Finally, I was like, okay, fine, whatever.

Um, and so I, he calls me, and I pick up, and he's in a tent. Um, I can hear his brother and

his brother's girlfriend like having sex next to him. And he goes, "Oh yeah, I'm in a tent

neighborhood." Like, he was homeless. Um, he was homeless, living in a tent. And he, so

he picks up a bar of Xanax and like takes it. And then he's like, oh yeah, I'm like

addicted to XYZ drugs. He starts listing all of his problems to me, and I'm like, boy, I'm

not your fucking therapist. And he starts talking about "Oh yeah, I just want someone to

take care of me," and like his youth pastor had to pick him up from his tent neighborhood

and take him to his house for night so he can sleep in a bed and not in a tent next to his

brother and brother's girlfriend having sex very loud. And um, he hangs up while he's in

the car, so I blocked him on everything and texted him like I don't want to talk to you

anymore. Your lifestyle scares me. And he goes, "but you were so easy to talk to." And I

was just like mmhmm the whole time because he was venting all of his problems to me.

Um, but yeah. Just telling that story . . . that was probably one of my fun stories. He lied

to me because he did not tell me he was homeless and addicted to drugs.

The description of this experience led to a discussion about how a person can portray

themselves as they want to online. The participant acknowledged this idea but stated, "But even

so, it's so easy to tell when someone is like being ingenuine, I guess." She then went on to

describe her thoughts on determining whether a person is being genuine:

People who don't have a 5 out of 10 picture are horrible, and I don't match with them.

Um, so people who like . . . It's really to tell if somebody is lying because they don't

make an effort to be anything other than perfect in their bios and stuff. So, I guess it's

like easy to know what to look out for. . . . I guess that's a lot of profiling you have to do

before, um, that might also just be me.

The researcher noted that is sounded like the participant had figured out what worked for her

based on her experiences, with the participant agreeing, "Yeah, 'cause it's like if you have all

pretty pictures, people are going to assume, you're either a catfish, or you're just like, these are

the only good pictures that you ever take."

At this time, the participant noted her excitement for participation in the study and the

study in general, "This is so fun. I love doing this." A brief conversation ensued about interest in

the study and the researcher's interest in the topic before moving on to the last few questions.

When asked about her interest in participating, the participant stated:

Um, I have experience. I've been kind of dealing with sex online for a long time. So, I

don't know, I figured I'd have some interesting stories to tell. And I was also just so

interested in seeing how this turned out. It's a really cool topic, so why not. You know?

And it's something to do.

The researcher then asked if there was anything the participant thought would be

important to note that was not addressed. The participant stated, "I don't think anything . . .

Yeah, no, I pretty much brought up everything." However, she then mentioned, "Hyper-

sexualization, big word, keyword, I guess in all of this."

Curious to know more about this perspective, the researcher asked her to speak more on

this, as the participant had previously mentioned it was a symptom of depression and anxiety.

Although she sounded hesitant for the first time in the interview, the participant responded:

I wasn't, um, diagnosed until very recently, and it's still a working diagnosis. But I was

definitely very depressed, and I was seeking out fulfillment in ways that I should not

have, um, because I was very lonely and very self-hating, and I wanted people to validate me. And I thought that sex was the only way for that to happen. Um, yeah.

The researcher was curious to know what continued to motivate the participant to use some of these apps and engage in certain behaviors, being that the participant had spent a lot of time working through some of the previously mentioned concerns, so the participant was asked about her continued motivations. She responded:

Um, I mean . . . you know, as much judgment as a I do pass on hookup apps or whatever, there is the possibility to develop an emotional connection with somebody. And it is a lot easier. It's way more convenient to just meet people. And like, I go to college super far away. So, I guess that too. It's easier to just find people in the area that you know I might not have thought about. And I've actually just made a couple regular friends off of like dating apps if whatever didn't work out. So, I mean, it's still fun. And because I know now that I don't have to have sex with you for you to like me, it's like way more . . . it's more fun, you know, and I'm not just like . . . I'm more cautious about what's happening. But I'm having a good time. So whatever bad stuff has happened, it doesn't happen anymore 'cause I'm smart now. I know what's going on.

After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect on the interview and continue field notes. The researcher spent a long time processing and decompressing after the interview due to the amount of information discussed. After relaxing, the researcher did note that themes were beginning to appear (more) between the first four interviews.

The description in Table 5 provides a review of the fourth participant's discussion and the themes being studied. Table 5 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the

phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been

excluded.

Table 5

Participant Four Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of applications	Casual sex	And also, it just makes hooking up easier because like you don't have to like go out with someone and then go home with someone for a night. It's just like, "Hey do you want to have sex?" "Yes." "Okay, cool." So, it's just those two things, but I mean, I think most people are just like, "Yeah, we use Tinder for hookups," and that's it.
	Searching for romantic relationships	So, it's like a lot easier for me to, like, chill out and find people that I actually do want to pursue something with. The guy I'm talking to right now . . . we met on Bumble and then just moved to Instagram.
	Developing friendships	So, it's just a lot more . . less like Tinder and Bumble and just like a friendship kind of thing. And I've actually just made a couple regular friends off of like dating apps if whatever didn't work out.
2. Motivations	"It's convenient"	I mean, I think it definitely opens like a lot of doors that weren't really available before. You know as far as like when Internet wasn't really available. It's way more convenient to just meet people.
	Connection	And then like I'll find people, and we'll talk, and you know, I'll figure out if I actually like them. But now I just am like, "Hey, do you want to hang out?" As much judgment as a I do pass on hookup apps or whatever, there is the possibility to develop an emotional connection with somebody
	Seeking attention	Oh my gosh. . . . It makes me feel good just seeing how many matches I have, and then I just delete. It's just nice to know that people think I'm cute. I was very lonely and very self-hating, and I wanted people to validate me
3. Benefits and risks	Facilitates risk-taking	But yeah, just like sending nudes and stuff when I was younger.

	Even when I was growing up, it was still super cool to be a teenager and talking to an adult, and that made you awesome so . . .
	I FaceTimed this dude who was 20 something . . . or I don't even know. We were FaceTiming, and it was like Cybersex. It was weird. It was very weird.
	And also, I realized like, "Oh wait, people have those pictures now and can keep them."
It's empowering	I don't really care. So, stuff like that to me just doesn't really matter. You know? So, okay, if you're going to judge me for like hooking up with somebody, I don't like you anyway.
Impedes deeper connections	Um, but like Tinder and Bumble stuff, it's just when I'm bored and like, "Hey, what's up?" Like you're cute or whatever. You know? I don't take it very seriously, honestly.
	Because they're so used to just being like, "Oh, I want to hook up with you," and it's like, "Uh sure."
	It doesn't really allow for a lot of emotional connection.
	Um, and I guess it's like a little bit harder to form like a relationship-relationship, rather than just sex.
	Technology can suck because the talking phase lasts the entire time.
You're more vulnerable	think it's very easy to lie about how old you are, and it's very easy to um, you know, you could just get into a lot of like dangerous stuff.
	But a lot of times, it's like people jerking off and like, um, predators because they knew that like a lot of young people liked to use Omegle.
	A lot of people lie. There's a lot of people lying.
	I think I've noticed like a lot more objectification of people because it is like . . . people feel entitled to it after there's an absence.
	I think generally like sex trafficking, pedophilia, that kind of stuff.
Breaks down barriers	you know, being groomed is not that great because I have bad anxiety so it would be hard for me to like, approach someone in person.
	I think it's good for people with like anxiety and stuff like that to kind of alleviate um a lot of like the general nerves that you may get on a first date

Interview 5

Participant 5 was a 19-year-old female who identified as White and Asian/Asian American. At the time of the interview, the participant had completed one year of college. She reported using mobile applications for sexual purposes between one and three years. The interview was conducted via phone and followed the same process as the first four interviews. The interview lasted approximately 34 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted about 45 minutes. Participant 5 appeared comfortable, and her demeanor was open and inviting, although there were points during the interview that the participant seemed hesitant or slightly less comfortable. The researcher felt increased confidence in completing the interview process, having completed the previous four interviews.

The interview started with the same rapport-building questions utilized in the previous interviews. The first question assessed the participant's thoughts on technology relating to intimacy, sexuality, and relationships. She answered:

Um, well, I've actually been in a long-distance relationship before . . . so . . . and I'm actually in one right now because of school. And I think that it can be beneficial, um, to connect people and to help people connect to each other, like sexually, without having to actually interact.

She then went on to describe a negative experience with it:

Like, I think some people don't realize that it's digitally, and sometimes it can really affect you mentally too. So, it's like two sides of a coin, because again, it's really helpful in my current relationship where I feel structured and strengthened by my partner. But in a previous relationship, it was, it's, it's not . . . it wasn't really helpful. It was actually more hurtful.

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The researcher was curious to know more about the negative experience mentioned but decided to continue building rapport with the participant and made a note to come back to the participant's apparent negative experience later. The participant was asked if apps had been helpful for her in meeting people for dating or romantic purposes. The participant responded that she did not use the apps casually, "But I did meet my first long-distance, well actually my first two long-distance relationships on um online." She reiterated that there were both positive and negative occurrences as a result, stating, "Um, it's complicated, but . . . I mean . . . I think they can, they can be helpful."

At this point, the researcher was curious about the participant's use of mobile applications for sexual purposes. The participant asked for clarification on whether the researcher meant "in regards to connecting with other people or in general," so the researcher asked the participant to talk about both. The participant answered:

> Well, you know, obviously, um, I personally generally sometimes just Google Internet pornographic material, you know. But, um, I guess, um like my phone . . . I use FaceTime sometimes, um, or um, like texts—a texting app. Um, I actually, I didn't meet my . . . Um, I don't know if this is like relevant. But I didn't meet the people that I met online on like dating apps. I actually used Instagram.

Since this was the second time a participant had mentioned using Instagram, which was interesting, the researcher asked for clarification on use of the app. The participant responded that she was not specifically using Instagram for the purposes of connection or online or offline sexual behaviors, but "It just happened." She reported it was not her intention to use the app to find people, but she did.

The researcher then asked the participant to continue describing her use of apps for online or offline sexual purposes. The participant sounded hesitant and again asked for clarification on the question. After clarifying that the researcher just wanted to know "how you use some of the applications for sexual purposes," the participant responded, "Okay, well, um, well you know . . . Instagram was to connect with people and like, you know, look at photos. Personally, for self-serving, I guess, it's you know." In addition, she discussed using photography and texts, as well. Although the researcher was curious about the use of photography and texts to engage in behaviors, the participant sounded hesitant to expound further. So, the decision was made to transition to the next question, which involved the participant's motivations for using some of the apps. The participant noted some themes along the lines of self-empowerment:

To feel good. Um, I'm actually am trying to rebuild a relationship with my body because of the, what I described before about previous relationships . . . not just like physical needs, but like mental needs too.

The next question asked was, "Do you think there's anything good or bad about these types of applications? And if so, what do you think is good, and what do you think is bad?" The participant responded:

I think that it can be good because, like I said, right now, I'm in a relationship that has become long-distance because of circumstances, and I think that can really help strengthen our connection because, you know . . . sex is, for me personally in a relationship is important. Um, so being able to interact together that way and all that. But I think the effects of it can be bad too because . . . well, first if we're just talking about by yourself, um, watching pornographic material. . . . I don't think there's anything wrong with it. But I think that it can go too far sometimes. People can get addictions to porn or

get interested in like, things that are kind of appear harmful to women. Um, so that's something by yourself. And then the effects with other people are that you're not really realizing if you're . . . It's difficult because it's over the phone. And it's more like peer pressure than, um, than anything like sexual assault. But um, you can feel really pressured by it without even realizing it, especially if it's not casual and it's a relationship that turned into a sexual relationship that involves online sex.

The researcher was curious to know what the participant meant by feeling pressured, so the participant was asked, "What do you mean when you say you can feel pressured? Pressure to do certain things or . . . ?" The participant simply responded, "Yeah." The researcher recognized the participant did not sound as comfortable when discussing this, but it did seem to be a good way to naturally transition to the next question of whether the participant thought there were any dangers associated with using these apps for sexual purposes. The participant answered, "Um, yeah, like I said, there can be." She further elaborated:

I don't want to generalize that it's all dangerous because, um, even though I have negative experiences, these people were who they said they were, um, so I wasn't like tricked. But that can happen, obviously. Um, it's easy for especially . . . I don't know if you've heard about it, but like (inaudible) where um, like the . . . someone can have their face put on someone else's body and it looks real. And that's really dangerous because you don't know. There are random women get affected by it because they have like a nasty ex. Um, so that's, that's one dangerous thing, you know. Another one is kind of like what I said where like, you can . . . I don't know if it counts as dangerous, but it can be harmful to yourself. Um, because, like I said, I'm still trying to build a relationship with

myself again. Because it's like if it's the wrong person that you are associating with, it

can feel really suffocating. Um, I don't know.

The researcher was curious to know more about the participant's perception of "feeling

suffocated," and whether the participant was describing the relationship or use of the apps, so the

participant was asked for further reflection. The participant reported that she meant using some

of the apps and, without prompting, explained:

Sometimes, if it's only long-distance and you're using apps like FaceTime or something,

sometimes, someone might feel like you should only self-pleasure with them on the

phone. Or you can't see each other in real life, so that's the only way that you should ever

do anything with them. And that can . . . that's how it can feel suffocating.

The researcher surmised that the participant was relating some of the use of apps to feeling

pressure in a relationship; the participant reinforced this idea.

The researcher was curious to know if the participant's behaviors had changed as a result

of using apps, and if they had changed, how. The participant acknowledged they had and

described her experience:

Okay, yeah, it has changed the way that I am, these apps. I'm trying to . . . some of them

directly and some of them indirectly. Um, because you know, like . . . like I said a million

times. I had a relationship that wasn't positive with that because now I can't really do

anything by myself without feeling guilty. Without, I cry, not to get too deep, but like, I

get really emotional because I feel like I'm doing something wrong.

The participant sounded sad when describing this, and the researcher felt the desire to take the

time to validate and comfort the participant. The researcher paid attention to the difficulty in

navigating the interview at this point because the researcher was aware it was not a counseling

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session but did not want to ignore the feelings the participant seemed to be experiencing. The researcher responded with, "That sounds like it was or has been pretty traumatizing for you," before moving onto the next question (which was "Was that your first experience using these apps for that purpose," as the researcher was curious about whether this experience had shaped the rest of the participant's experiences). Upon further reflection, it may have helped to spend more time in the moment with the participant, as she was disclosing heavy information. The researcher realized that the opportunity was lost due to the researcher being uncomfortable in the situation.

The participant responded that it was not the first time, but "I did feel a pressure to send photos and that." She stated:

wanted them to like me, and I wanted them to, um, continue being interested in me. And, you know, it didn't . . . They never told me to do it, to um like hurt myself. But I would restrict my eating so I would look good enough for this person.

The participant also made sure to mention that her current relationship was healthy, noting, "My boyfriend not is really understanding."

At this point, the participant seemed to be more comfortable, and so the researcher asked whether the experience previously described changed how the participant used the apps with her current partner. The participant responded, "Yeah, definitely." She then went on to describe how:

So, um, I don't do it as often with my current partner anymore. I use them less for that purpose. Um, and usually actually, it's only over the phone, if anything. It's not like . . . So, FaceTime has like an audio function, so we usually only use the audio. There isn't this expectation that I put up my phone and he see everything and that, you know. I actually do; if I do try to do anything, I use my Google or my Internet app for, um, like

pornographic stuff sometimes. Because in my previous relationship, I wasn't allowed to use it at all—like, at all. Um, so now there's more freedom with that. But it's tough because now I have more freedom, but I don't feel comfortable even doing it. So, I use them less, but I have the ability to use them more.

The researcher attempted to validate this by stating, "That makes sense again because of the experience. Even though you have the ability to do it, it's still again working through the process of being comfortable doing it," to which the participant responded, "Yeah, yeah exactly."

At this point, the researcher was curious to know how the participant had found out about mobile applications and the use of the Internet for sexual purposes. The participant discussed it not being a purposeful decision, but stumbling across some information after using Tumblr:

I feel like it was kind of gradual. Um, kind of like on accident, I guess. Because there used to be this old website called Tumblr, and I used it a lot. And then like, sometimes randomly, there would be stuff like that, and I'd be like "I didn't know that stuff was online!" (laughing) Which I guess sparked my curiosity. Um, so it wasn't like, it wasn't like I was looking for it. It just kind of happened, and then I looked more into it.

The researcher was interested in whether other people's opinions factor into use. The participant answered, "Um, well, I'm pretty, um, private about my sex life, whether it's in-person or online. So, I don't, I don't really get any direct opinions from people." However, she then discussed how indirect opinions influence her, "But in regard to other people's opinions, with like by myself. I've been trying to actually use online, certain websites less because I've seen that it can be harmful in that people are trying to pull away from it." When asked what she meant by "it can be harmful in that people are trying to pull away from it," the participant clarified

saying, "Yeah. I've been seeing other people pull away from Pornhub, for example. That's a really big one. So that affects how often I use it."

The interview naturally transitioned into asking the participant if there were any values that influenced her decisions whether to use the apps. She discussed values that factored into deciding not to use the apps, stating:

Well, um, I was never raised religiously personally. But my parents were kind of conservative in a way. Um, it wasn't conservative because of religion. They were just conservative when it came specifically to sexuality and stuff like that. Um, so that kind of makes me feel a way a little bit, makes me feel a little guilty. But, I mean, so that's where I draw away. And kind of what I said before with the uh, with people saying we should pull away from that because of the harmful effects it can have on the . . . the harmful effects it can have on women because of the industry. That's ruined it, um 'cause you know obviously, the guilt hasn't overtaken me enough to stop. But sometimes after I'm like, ugh . . . I feel like bad about this, but . . .

With prompting, she then touched base on values that influenced using the apps. She responded that the values that influenced using the apps were "just like my own," and further reflected:

Because I, I'm in a different generation than my parents, I see things a little bit differently, I guess. So, like I, my generation doesn't necessarily think sex as something that you should punish or something that you should educate more. So, I feel like okay, everyone else does it. And not just in a peer pressure way, but in an "Oh okay, this isn't weird. This isn't like inappropriate." You know?

At this point, because there seemed to be the idea of compartmentalizing behaviors from parents across many of the interviews, the researcher was curious to know if this was something participant 5 felt the need to do. So, participant 3 was asked, "So, with your parents, um having brought up more conservatively . . . is this something that you would be comfortable discussing with them, or is this something that you kind of compartmentalize and don't talk about with them?" The participant responded, "Yeah, I don't talk about it with them at all," and then went on to describe an experience with her mother:

> I think my mom once brought up the fact that . . . 'cause I use birth control. She brought up the fact that, like, I should continue taking my birth control. But that's the closest we've ever talked about something like that.

She noted that she had never even really had "the talk" with her parents; she was just given a book.

The researcher was curious to know more about the participant's experience actually learning about sex and sexually related matters, and so the participant was asked about this aspect. She discussed sex education in school and the Internet as sources of information:

> Um, I mean . . . we kind of got like a sex education-ish in school. Um, and like I said that I used that website and just like haphazardly came across it and just like, "Oh." And it actually, I would say, influenced my personal sexuality because I identify as bisexual because like . . . I was like, maybe in eighth grade, and I saw someone say like, "What even is that?" And then I was like, "Wait, you can like girls?" So that's like um, even though I didn't use that Tumblr website for sexual purposes, it did educate me a little bit so . . .

Upon rereading of the transcript, the researcher noted a missed opportunity to inquire more about how the participant believed the Internet had influenced her personal sexuality, having skimmed over that statement and moved to the next question. Because the participant mentioned using Tumblr, she was asked about the things she found "relating to sex on Tumblr." The participant noted blogs and following people's blogs and again being surprised that "people talk about this stuff online." As the interview came to a close, the participant was asked if there was anything else about her experiences that should be discussed that was not touched upon. She again spoke of the negative relationship experience she had:

Um, I mean, other than what I spoke about regarding knowing exactly when . . . I don't, I don't ever want to call what I experienced abuse because I don't know if it counts as that. But I know that it wasn't right. And I feel like a lot of people don't consider that aspect. And it's like even though it isn't physical, you can still like experience mental trauma, um, so that's really all.

The experience seemed to be a significant theme of the participants throughout the interview.

The researcher asked the follow-up question, "How did you or what about the situation triggered in your head, 'this isn't right?'" and the participant described her realization:

Well, it kind of took me a little bit after, so after to like realize that maybe it wasn't right. Because it was just very restrictive. Like I said, I couldn't watch anything by myself. Specifically, I wasn't allowed to penetrate myself at all by myself, ever. And um, so I guess to me I was . . . at first, I was like, "Oh okay." It kind of made sense to me because, you know, I was thinking that people only have sex with like the person they're dating so I should only . . . but then like, it's didn't really . . . After a while, it was like this isn't fun. And it felt like, it was almost like daily, too. And like, um, I was younger than him,

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so I was, it was um, I don't know. But after a while, I was like, "I don't like this." And it sucks because I was like, "You know, I really think we can start doing things by ourselves. I don't think it's healthy to restrict each other." And then at some point, he told me that he was jealous of um . . . and I don't even understand how the logic works, but he was jealous if I had like a sex toy. Like, what? But I don't know. But yeah, I guess I was really . . . After a while, I was like, "This isn't fun anymore. This is just like . . ." It feels like a chore. That's what it is. Sorry. This is turning into like a therapy session. (laughing) But um, after a while, it just felt like a chore. I was definitely only doing it for him, and I think that's what affects me now. Because I can't, like, to me it's just . . . It should be this relationship with myself. But I don't have that intimate relationship with myself anymore because it was just . . . It turned into something that was like a chore.

Because the researcher was again cognizant of not wanting the interview to be a counseling session and the participant mentioned that in her description, the researcher simply validated the process of trying to relearn and rebuild after that experience and thanked the participant for sharing that experience before asking what interested the participant in participating. The participant noted the negative experience she described and wanting to "help give insight and kind of tell you what I told you." She stated, "It can be way more complicated than someone in-person treating you badly sexually."

At this point, the researcher decided to ask for clarification on the participant's current long-distance relationship. The participant responded that her current relationship had not started out long-distance, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, they were forced to leave college early to go home and choose to utilize technology to maintain the relationship. She acknowledged

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switching from an in-person relationship to a long-distance relationship, and utilizing technology to do so, had triggered some thoughts and old feelings about the negative experience.

After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect on the interview and continue field notes. The researcher spent a lengthy period reflecting on the difficulty maintaining appropriate boundaries during the interview in an attempt to ensure it was an interview and not a counseling session. The researcher decided to try to be more cognizant of this in future interviews, if necessary.

The description above provides a review of the discussion with the fifth participant and the themes being studied. Table 6 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been excluded.

Table 6

Participant Five Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of applications	Sexual exploration	I personally generally sometimes just Google Internet pornographic material, you know.
		I use my Google or my Internet app for, um, like pornographic stuff sometimes.
		So, like I, my generation doesn't necessarily think sex as something that you should punish or something that you should educate more, so I feel like, okay, everyone else does it.
		And then like, sometimes randomly, there would be stuff like that, and I'd be like "I didn't know that stuff was online!" (laughing)
		So, I guess I saw people like, I was really into certain television shows and then to like have something sexual. It was like, "What? That's not how I want to see these characters." (laughing) But I was like, wait, people talk about this stuff online?
	Searching for romantic relationships	But I did meet my first long-distance, well actually my first two long-distance relationships on um, online.
2. Motivations	Connection	Instagram was to connect with people and like, you know, look at photos.
		Like I said, right now, I'm in a relationship that has become long-distance because of circumstances, and I think that can really help strengthen our connection.
3. Benefits and risks	It's empowering	To feel good. Um, I'm actually am trying to rebuild a relationship with my body because of the, what I described before about previous relationships.
		It's really helpful in my current relationship where I feel structured and strengthened by my partner.
	Impedes deeper connections	And I think that it can be beneficial, um, to connect people and to help people connect to each other, like sexually, without having to actually interact.

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
	You're more vulnerable	Like, I think some people don't realize that it's digitally, and sometimes it can really affect you mentally too.
		And then the effects with other people are that you're not really realizing if you're . . . It's difficult because it's over the phone. And it's more like peer pressure than, um, than anything like sexual assault.
		But um, you can feel really pressured by it without even realizing it, especially if it's not casual and it's a relationship that turned into a sexual relationship that involves online sex.
		Because it's like if it's the wrong person that you are associating with, it can feel really suffocating.
		I had a relationship that wasn't positive with that because now I can't really do anything by myself without feeling guilty.
		I don't know if you've heard about it, but like (inaudible) where um, like the . . . someone can have their face put on someone else's body and it looks real. And that's really dangerous because you don't know. There are random women get affected by it because they have like a nasty ex.
		I don't think there's anything wrong with it. But I think that it can go too far sometimes. People can get addictions to porn or get interested in like, things that are kind of appear harmful to women
		And it's like even though it isn't physical, you can still like, experience mental trauma, um, so that's really all.
	Conflicting family values	Yeah, I don't talk about it with them at all.
		So, I've just never really discussed anything like that with my parents.
		Um, it wasn't conservative because of religion. They were just conservative when it came specifically to sexuality and stuff like that. Um, so that kind of makes me feel a way a little bit, makes me feel a little guilty.

Interview 6

Participant 6 was an 18-year-old female who identified as White. At the time of the

interview, the participant had completed one year of college and was working part-time. She

reported using mobile applications for sexual purposes between three and five years. The interview was conducted via phone and followed the same process as the first five interviews. The interview lasted approximately 35 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted about 45 minutes. Participant 6 was open during the interview process. The researcher remained confident in completing the interview process and obtaining the information.

The interview began by gauging participant 6's thoughts on technology related to intimacy, sexuality, and relationships. She stated, "I feel that, um, technology plays a big role, especially in this . . . like especially right now because of this coronavirus." She began to discuss her thoughts relating to the pandemic:

> I would say that, you know, if there wasn't a pandemic going on, maybe it wouldn't play such a huge role. But due to the pandemic, I would say that technology is kind of a huge part in the intimate field right now because you might not want to meet random people right now or anything. It's not okay. . . .

The researcher asked for further reflection on how technology plays a role. Participant 6 answered:

> Yeah, yeah, so . . . I mean, you can't, like you know, you're not trying to go meet people right now because you're not trying to get like, COVID. (laughing) But um, you can like video chat people, um, and things. And that's like a close second, especially in life, compared to meeting in person. Like, oh, let's just FaceTime and Skype or something, you know?

Based on her answer, the researcher wondered whether technology had been helpful for the participant in meeting people for romantic or dating relationships. The participant simply

answered, "Yes." The researcher prompted her to elaborate further on that answer, and she responded:

> Um, I've met like most people online I've usually met off of dating apps. Um, like Tinder or Bumble or something. And I would say that if it wasn't for those apps, you know I usually would not be able to . . . I would definitely not have met like some of the people I've met. And you know, I have some friends that are just friends just from those apps, too, you know?

Without prompting, she added, "Um, but romantically, would say for sure like, most people I've dated have been from like dating apps."

The researcher was curious to know more about the use of apps for general and sexual purposes. The participant responded, "So Tinder, I would say I strictly use Tinder to hook up. Um, I don't use Tinder, like, to try to date people because I think Tinder is more of a hookup scene. She then further reflected on her use of other apps, including Bumble and an app called FetLife. She stated:

> Um, I use Bumble to, like meet actual people and make connections because I feel like there's so much restriction, and you know, there's a lot you have to answer on Bumble. And like, there's so much information, like people's height, their political views. All of that is just kind of like thrown out there, and that to me is like important, you know. I wanna know like . . . I wanna know if someone's like . . . I'm not trying to be with someone who has a completely different view than me or something. So, I definitely use Bumble for that. I also have another app, FetLife.

The researcher was curious to know more about the use of FetLife, as it was an app the researcher had not heard of before. Participant 6 explained the app: "Okay, So FetLife is like a

kinky app for like people with like, kinks and stuff. Um, and I have that app just to get more knowledge from things and such . . . " She mentioned, "And there's a lot of knowledgeable people in the kink realm. So, I just kind of use that for knowledge." The researcher attempted to clarify that it was an app used for fetishes and things like that. The participant answered, "Yeah, like different fetishes and things like that." Without prompting, she further elaborated: "Um, yeah, there's all kinds of, I mean there's some like, you know . . . Sometimes, people are really extreme on that app though, and I'm not here for that. (laughing) But it's okay."

Participant 6 was asked to describe any other use of apps that she had not already discussed. She answered, "I would say I definitely like, sext a lot of people from FetLife or, like, have like video chat things with people from FetLife. Bumble, I'm more trying to get like relationship connection." The researcher attempted to understand if the FetLife app provided opportunities for video chat. The participant responded that it did not, "Um, not really. Um, I have Skype and use Skype to call people." The researcher attempted to clarify the connection between FetLife and video chat and asked, "So you meet people through the FetLife app and then use Skype to video chat?" The participant simply responded, "I do." After rereading the transcript, the researcher noticed that the participant could have been asked to further reflect on the transition between meeting people on FetLife and deciding to video chat. However, the participant continued on without prompting:

> Yeah. I've very . . . I don't like, I don't want people to like hunt me down or something
>
> crazy. I never give people my actual phone number or anything . . . unless it's from
>
> Bumble because it's a little bit different.

The researcher was curious to know if it was different due to different motives for different apps, and the participant noted that it was. Because the participant had discussed

precautions she took, it seemed appropriate to ask if she thought there were any dangers that might be associated with using these apps. The participant responded, "Um, I definitely worry about, like, people finding out, like where I am. Like for some reason, I'm kind of like, afraid of that. I don't know." She further reflected:

Because people get weirdly attached, and things and that's just not . . . not it. I also worry about, like, getting like super stalked or like . . . I've blocked people, and then they'll make like all kinds of other accounts and like . . . try to like find me. You know? Which is not . . . not, not it. (laughing) Um, so that's, it's not always great, sure. But, um, yeah, I definitely . . . I definitely worry about like . . . Sometimes, I worry about like, oh if I send inappropriate photos, for example. I'm like, "Oh what if this person like, sells my photos online, or like sends them to all of their friends and things?" So, I definitely worry about things, but nothing bad like that has happened yet, so . . .

The researcher then asked about other precautions the participant took when using the apps. However, after reflecting on the transcript, it may have been beneficial to ask the participant if her approach or use would change if something bad happened. In response to other precautions, the participant noted that she did not use her real name on FetLife, choosing to use an "alternative" one instead. She reported that she used the same name every time and stated:

That's just because there's people from all over the U.S. and stuff, and like, there's sometimes people from like Europe and things, and I'm not trying to give out my real name to people all over the world (laughing).

The participant was then asked to reflect on the process of using the app. She stated:

So, I have like an age range of like, no one above 30. Um, but sometimes, but people older can still message me, and some people pay, for like, premiumness and whatever.

And like they, and people, anyone can message me. But I can't message everyone

because I don't pay. Um, which is fine. I don't care. Um, and, okay . . . it's kind of

like . . . it's based off of I don't know, like I guess who's online last. It's kind of ranked

up top by like who's online. And then, people can just message you. And then I don't talk

to everyone, you know, because if people are too extreme, I can't do that. (laughing)

The researcher was curious to know how the participant had discovered and started using apps

for sexual purposes. The participant described beginning to use the apps at age 18:

I will say as soon as I turned 18, I was on like Bumble and Tinder. Um, FetLife is a story.

(laughing) Um, see, I'm just like . . . I don't know. See, I have like a lot of just like kinks

and things that I'm into, and I've been like super kink shamed by partners and things in

the past. And, I don't know . . . I was like looking up stuff on the app store, and then I

just like found, like FetLife, and I was like, "Oh, cool." And then I downloaded it.

She continued:

So yeah, I just kind of found . . . I just kind of like stumbled upon it because I was trying

to find like-minded people. You know? 'Cause not everyone's . . . not everyone's super

kinky, and I get that. Like that's cool, but you know it's nice to have like-minded

individuals.

Having learned more about the use of apps and the behaviors of the participant, the

researcher was interested in learning more about the participant's motivations for using the apps.

She again described different motivations for different apps:

Sometimes, I'm just bored, and I just want to talk to people, especially right now because

of COVID. You know? I'm just alone in my house doing nothing. I just want to talk to

people. Um, I would say that, Bumble I'm trying to find an actual connection with

someone. So, I guess that's my motivation is to find an actual connection with someone. Um, I don't know. And then I would say FetLife is more for attention and like, I'm learning more stuff and like a lot of people give me attention on that app, and that's kind of nice. Um, yeah. Uh, I don't use Tinder like really. But if I go on Tinder, I'm going to hook up with someone.

The researcher clarified that Tinder was used strictly for hooking up, and the participant reported that it was. The participant was asked to further reflect on any gratification she received from using the apps. She sounded adamant when answering, "Yeah, I get to talk to people who don't think I'm crazy for being into the things that I'm into. That's really nice, you know." She discussed further:

Like people are super non-judgmental, and things and that's just nice to talk about anything. Um, and I don't know. Fetlife is kind of cool 'cause I'm meeting people who are like everywhere. So, like, I guess like that kind of like . . . hmmm . . . I don't know what like. It's kind of like fun, I guess. It's like, "Oh, I'm talking to someone from California."

A brief discussion about meeting people that one might not normally meet ensued. The participant stated:

Yeah. Like some people are just like so different. Now I mean, there's some . . . some people are like doctors of whatever. And then there's some people . . . There's some people that are like just doing random jobs, you know. . . .

The researcher commented that it "does kind of expand your options for meeting people with different jobs and probably people with different backgrounds, different socioeconomic status . . ." to which the participant responded, "I'm trying to have all kinds of connections one

day." After some conversation on what the participant planned to do after graduating college, the interview resumed with the participant being asked her thoughts on what was good about the apps and what was bad about the apps. She stated:

I would say that they're good because, you know, like you get to meet people and that's cool. And like you're expanding your social circle, and you get to like, meet all kinds of people from everywhere, which is nice.

She then reflected on the bad, stating, "Um, I would say it's bad because some people are really, um, rude . . . or toxic." She furthered reflected:

And, especially on FetLife a lot of people . . . like you have to be careful because like some people are really abusive, you know? And it's just not like, it's not a vibe. Like I'm not trying to talk to anyone who's like super you know . . . I don't know. But also, you have to be careful because you can't just trust everyone. You know, you have to kind of take it with a grain of salt. Um, and some people like . . . especially like a lot of girls, they're like "Oh" . . . Like they believe every word that's being said to them, and it's like see but, think about it, you know? Um, I would say be careful because a lot of people lie and just want to seem like better than they are, and you know. You're like selling yourself online.

The participant clarified that she meant it was necessary to assess and gauge the situation, to which the participant responded, "Yeah." The conversation circled back around to the FetLife app, with the participant being asked her thoughts on the relation between the "fetishes" and being rude or mean. The participant responded, "So, kind of." She then further reflected:

Um, because like dominant people, like you know like, some people take it to the next extreme, and it's like, "Dude, like you, don't even know me. We haven't even had a

conversation." Like you can't just . . . Like you can't just come into my DMs [direct messaging] and expect me to be like your slave and shit. Like that's not . . . That's not it. Like you can't just like be super rude also is a thing. Sometimes like, they want to be rude to you. And it's like, no. So yes, it is kind of like part of the fetish, I guess, but also just rude. . . .

The researcher questioned whether the participant had experienced any negative consequences as a result of using the apps. The participant discussed her mental state, saying:

Um, I would say, sometimes I mentally feel shitty. (laughing) Because it's like, oh my gosh, like I have to meet people off the map. Like I can't just meet people in person. So, I guess like sometimes I mentally feel bad, but I think that's just me.

She mentioned not feeling as if she's experienced negative consequences, but again emphasized:

but I would say like, sometimes I mentally feel like shit because of . . . because of it. Because I'm like, oh I'm like, I have to meet online. Like why can't I just meet people in person, you know? Or something like that. Like, it's like, oh, and then it's like . . . then you have this thing. . . . It's like, if I do get with someone, it's like we basically have to tell people like, oh, we met online.

The participant sounded as though meeting online was a point of contention, so the researcher asked if the participant believed a stigma existed, to which the participant responded, "Yeah. There's a really awful stigma attached to that." The researcher questioned if the participant believed the stigma depended on what app was used to meet people, and the participant stated, "Yeah, exactly. Like if you tell someone you met on Christian Mingle, it's like, "Oh cool." If you tell someone you met on Tinder, they're like, "Oh." It's like, "Geez." At this point, the researcher was interested in understanding why the participant believed the stigma

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existed. The participant first answered, "I would say because Tinder is very hook upy. So, it's like for someone to actually meet a connection, I feel it's more like a jealousy thing than it is, like a stigma." The researcher then clarified the question as being a stigma in general to meeting people online. The participant responded that she had not ever really thought about it. However, without prompting, she continued:

> Um, people are just so against, like . . . People are against online but also all here for it. You know? It's like, the Internet and stuff is very essential. Like everyone uses it. But it still comes down at the end of the day that the Internet's not everything. It's like, well yeah, I get that, but I feel like just because of that overall feeling, you know. It's like what's better, a textbook or the Internet. You know? People want to say the textbook, which is fine. But, at the end of the day, it's like, well, we met online. That's not the end of the world. We still have to have a real connection like everyone else, you know. It's not like we . . . and I think another thing is it's because you don't really know them because you met them online. It's like I've had way better conversations with people I've met online than people I've met in person. So that's all I gotta say. (laughing)

Without prompting, she further reflected:

> Especially you know like the older, like the older generations and stuff are really against online specifically. You know? So, I feel like that could even affect it. I know if I tell my grandparents like, "Oh, I met this person online," they're going to be so like, "Bleh." Versus if I tell them like, "Oh, I met them at the college." They'll be like, "Oh, that's so nice." (laughing) Like, what?

Upon reflection, the researcher noted there was a chance to ask the participant if she had any experiences facing the stigma, but it was missed. The researcher instead continued on with

the next question of positive occurrences as a result of the app. The participant discussed the friendships she had made with people as a result of using the apps and again emphasized meeting people she might not normally meet in person:

I have all kinds of friends, you know. I have friends that I've been friends with for a like a year now, like we're still just friends. We just came to that conclusion, like, "Oh, we're not compatible relationship-wise, but we can be great friends." Um, I mean, that's great. I love having friends, you know, um, but um, especially being able to meet like different people and people from different places. So, it's kind of nice having friends in like vast places.

The researcher acknowledged the access to people that one might not necessarily have, and the participant agreed, "Yeah. I definitely would not be friends with some of the people I'm friends with if it were not for dating apps."

At this point, the researcher was curious to know what values influenced choosing whether to use the apps. The participant discussed honesty as being one of the values. She reflected:

Um, I'm a very honest person, like I don't lie ever. I don't lie to my parents and like, nothing, like I don't lie at all. So, I would say, sometimes I don't use FetLife because I know people lie. (laughing) And I just can't put up with it sometimes. It's like, it's just annoying. Um, it drives me crazy. But then Bumble, I feel like people are way more honest on Bumble. Um, so that's kind of like . . . it's nice. So, like I see a lot of guys meet people who actually care on Bumble, which is cool. . . .

The interview transitioned to whether other people's opinions factored into choosing to use the apps, and the participant responded that they do not. She stated:

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No. I don't really care what other people think. It's taken me a long time to come to this

part, so . . . to come to this conclusion in my life. But, um, I-I don't really care what other

people think. You know? Like I have all kinds of people who judge me for having

FetLife, like, all kinds.

The researcher attempted to clarify the people who she felt judged by, and the participant

responded, "Yeah, friends and family. Super judged, you know? And it's like I don't care. It's

my life, and I'm over 18, so I can make my own decisions. . . ."

The participant was then asked if her sexual behaviors had changed as a result of using

the apps. The participant noted a positive effect, and reflected:

For sure. (laughing) Um, I would say I was way more like, um, I don't know. I feel like

before I was way more . . . just kind of generally like submissive with things in general.

And I feel like now, I'm very much like a switch and I can just . . . I don't know. I feel

like I can switch it up, and I feel like I have a great time in the bedroom now, whereas

before, eh, maybe not so much.

The participant was asked if there was anything about the participant's experiences that

should be known that was not addressed, and the participant responded there was nothing. The

participant was then asked about her interest in participating in the study and stated:

Um, I've never done a study. And I was like, I want to do a study. (laughing) And I

remembered, like um, my psych teacher talking about studies and stuff last semester. I

was like, I want to do a study. And plus, I'm a very sexual person and things, and I was

like, I'm perfect for this. I will answer anything that she needs to know. (laughing)

Although the researcher had asked the final question, a conversation ensued about the

level of comfortability some people have in discussing sex and sexually related topics. The

participant reported that she had an open relationship with her mom (regarding sex) and believed this contributed to being willing to openly discuss the topic with others.

After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect on the interview and continue field notes. The researcher also spent some time researching the FetLife app the participant had mentioned to understand more about it.

The description above provides a review of the sixth participant's discussion and the themes being studied. Table 7 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been excluded.

Table 7

Participant Six Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of applications	Sexual exploration	Um, and I have that app just to get more knowledge from things and such. Because I don't, I feel like I don't know enough. (laughing) And there's a lot of knowledge people in the kink realm. So, I just kind of use that for knowledge. Like, I'm learning more stuff. . . . So, yeah, I just kind of found . . . I just kind of like stumbled upon it because I was trying to find like-minded people, you know.
	Casual sex	So, Tinder, I would say I strictly use Tinder to hook up. But if I go on Tinder, I'm going to hook up with someone.
	Searching for romantic relationships	but romantically, I would say for sure like, most people I've dated have been from like dating apps. Um, I use Bumble to like, meet actual people and make connections because I feel like there's so much restriction, and you know there's a lot you have to answer on Bumble. And like, there's so much information, like people's height, their political views. All of that is just kind of like thrown out there, and that to me is like important, you know. I wanna know like . . . I wanna know if someone's like . . . I'm not trying to be with someone who has a completely different view than me or something. Bumble, I'm more trying to get like relationship connection.
	Developing friendships	And you know I have some friends that are just friends just from those apps, too. You know? I have all kinds of friends, you know. I have friends that I've been friends with for a like a year now, like we're still just friends.
2. Motivations	"It's convenient"	I mean, you can't, like you know, you're not trying to go meet people right now because you're not trying to get like, COVID. (laughing) But um, you can like video chat people, um, and things.

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
	Connection	Sometimes, I'm just bored, and I just want to talk to people, especially right now because of COVID, you know. I'm just alone in my house doing nothing. I just want to talk to people.
		So, I guess that's my motivation is to find an actual connection with someone.
		And that's, that's like a close second, especially in like, compared to meeting in person. Like, oh, let's just FaceTime and Skype or something. You know?
	Seeking attention	I would say FetLife is more for attention
		like a lot of people give me attention on that app, and that's kind of nice.
3. Benefits and risks	It's empowering	Um, I would say I was way more like, um, I don't know. I feel like before I was way more . . . just kind of generally like submissive with things in general. And I feel like now, I'm very much like a switch and I can just . . . I don't know. I feel like I can switch it up, and I feel like I have a great time in the bedroom now, whereas before, eh, maybe not so much.
		Like I have all kinds of people who judge me for having FetLife, like, all kinds. And it's like I don't care. It's my life, and I've over 18, so I can make my own decisions, like . . . you know seriously.
	Impedes deeper connections	You're like selling yourself online.

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
	You're more vulnerable	I would say it's bad because some people are really, um, rude . . . or toxic.
		I would say be careful because a lot of people lie and just want to seem like better than they are, and you know.
		And, especially on FetLife a lot of people . . . like you have to be careful because like some people are really abusive. You know?
		But also, you have to be careful because you can't just trust everyone.
		I also worry about, like, getting like super stalked or like . . . I've blocked people, and then they'll make like all kinds of other accounts and like . . . try to like find me, you know?
		I definitely worry about, like, people finding out, like where I am.
		Sometimes, I worry about like oh if I send inappropriate photos, for example. I'm like, oh what if this person like, sells my photos online, or like sends them to all of their friends and things.
	"The mask can come off."	'Cause not everyone's . . . not everyone's super kinky, and I get that. Like that's cool, but you know it's nice to have like-minded individuals.
		Yeah, I get to talk to people who don't think I'm crazy for being into the things that I'm into. That's really nice, you know. Like people are super non-judgmental, and things and that's just nice to talk about anything.
	Conflicting family values	I know if I tell my grandparents like, oh, I met this person online, they're going to be so like, bleh versus if I tell them like oh, I met them at the college. They'll be like, oh, that's so nice. (laughing)
	Breaks down barriers	And I would say that if it wasn't for those apps, you know, I usually would not be able to . . . I would definitely not have met like some of the people I've met.
		Fetlife is kind of cool 'cause I'm meeting people who are like everywhere.
		And like you're expanding your social circle, and you get to like, meet all kinds of people from everywhere, which is nice.
		especially being able to meet like different people and people from different places.

Interview 7

Participant 7 was a 19-year-old male who identified as White. At the time of the interview, the participant had completed one year of college. He reported using mobile applications for sexual purposes between one and three years. The interview was conducted via phone and followed the same process as the first six interviews. The interview lasted approximately 33 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information lasted about 40 minutes. Participant 7 seemed open at the beginning of the process. However, there were times during the interview that he sounded noticeably uncomfortable. Despite this, the researcher remained confident in completing the interview process.

The interview began by asking the participant his thoughts on technology related to intimacy, sexuality, and relationships. The participant answered, "Um, well, I'm a little bit of a progressive person, so I, so I usually think that um, technology, in general, helps people more than it hurts people." He continued, discussing his thoughts on how it can be helpful for people who have difficulty with in-person interactions:

> So, in respect to um, like intimacy and things of that nature, um, there are people, who um . . . they have a hard time, uh in person, getting to know someone. Like . . . like an app like Tinder, you can find people you want to date or um, be in an . . . I don't know, like a more casual relationship with a lot more easily than you might be able to, um, like otherwise, for some people because some people are a little more, like closed off.

The researcher was curious to know if technology and apps have helped the participant meet people for romantic and dating purposes, based on his response to the first question. The participant responded that they have been. He stated, "Um, yes because, I mean, earlier this year, I met someone through like a dating app." Without prompting, he reflected, "I'm-I'm typically

one of those people who like, has a hard time in person like, trying to get into a romantic relationship. So, I would say yes, in general." After rereading the transcript, the researcher noticed there was an opportunity to have the participant talk more about what is difficult for him during in-person interactions and how using apps and technology mitigates that. Instead of asking the participant to reflect further, the researcher transitioned to the next question, asking the participant mobile applications he uses in general and mobile applications he uses for sexual purposes. He responded, listing the following applications: Tinder, Hinge, and Grindr. He stated:

> And um, I only ever really use Grindr for any kind of explicitly sexual purpose because that's just . . . it's more oriented towards that. But, at the same time, I tell people I'm interested in a relationship if that's what they want.

> The researcher asked the participant if he made it known he was interested in a relationship on Grindr, as well (to clarify), and the participant acknowledged he did but stated, "but less than the other apps because like . . . its reputation." After reflecting on the interview, the researcher noted that it would have been beneficial to ask the participant his beliefs on Grindr's reputation. Instead, the researcher asked the participant to discuss his use of Hinge and Tinder more, as the participant had mentioned using these apps more to pursue a relationship. The participant described his use:

> Um, well, recently I found the Hinge app is a little better if you're looking for a relationship because um, Tinder can be kind of . . . Tinder is like a middle ground. Like half the people are looking for, uh, like casual relationships, and then half the people are looking for a serious relationship. But on Hinge, there's uh photos, and then there's answers to question prompts like, um, "What is your perfect date?" or something like that. And you have to choose one of the things that they answer to. And then, you find

someone who you're emotionally compatible with as opposed to just like, swiping right on a person's picture because they look nice.

With prompting, he noted that he heard of Hinge through a YouTuber who was making fun of Tinder. When asked, he reported using Hinge recently, Grindr for the past year, and Tinder for about two years. He stated:

Um, I only started using Grindr in the past year because it's an app that has, like . . . like your location and then you see the people around you. So, I kind of got Grindr when I was in college because I assumed that there might be more gay individuals or bisexual individuals on campus than there would be in my middle of nowhere small town.

To clarify, the researcher asked about Tinder also being geo-based; the participant acknowledged it was, but stated, "It's mostly straight people on there.

The researcher asked the participant to reflect and describe more about his use of the apps. The participant responded, "Um, I actually haven't been successful in any of those things, except for what I told you." He furthered reflected:

I got into a relationship through Tinder, but um, other than that, I haven't really been successful using . . . with using them for sexual purposes or for relationships. So, um, there's been a couple times where I've wanted to (inaudible). I like, I don't know. I, it's hard to explain. So, I, I don't want to like . . . I haven't been wanting to just hook up with people. It's just, I don't know . . . I've been wanting to meet people and just like experiment. It's . . . so I guess I am trying to hook up, but at the same time, I'm also kind of pushing people away because I'm-I'm not sure what I want. So that contributes to me not really meeting any of those people on any of these dating apps.

As the participant began discussing his motivations for using the apps in the previous question, he was asked to further reflect and provide information about motivations. He stated, "Um, mostly just to meet up with people," and he further discussed his difficulty with in-person interactions and how the apps helped mitigate his apprehensiveness:

Like, it's just a lot harder to . . . I don't know, talk to people about things in person, because like there's always that risk that (inaudible) . . . So, I've had my fair share of times where like I've asked someone if they want to go on a date or something and then they want to hook up. It's just that tension is kind of broken down when you can like . . . when someone already obviously like so they just like (inaudible), or they text you back. An app is . . . like there's not any kind of uh, there's no need to be apprehensive in the conversation. So, like . . . so um, so I'm not very confident with these things, so it's just a lot easier for me I think because I know that there's already attraction instead of like needing to read their body signals or something.

The researcher clarified that it helped to break down barriers that the participant might experience with in-person interactions, and the participant agreed.

The participant was then asked whether other people's opinions factored into whether he chose to use the apps. He responded, "At first it did because like, I'm-I'm pansexual, so I swing all different ways." He further reflected, stating:

So, like, uh, like at first, I didn't like Grindr because it's almost like explicitly a hookup app. And I was pretty much only looking for a relationship. And I was also kind of uncomfortable with having people see me use Grindr and people saw it on my phone. But after a while, I like didn't really care that much because like . . . I mean, who are they to say, like if I want to like, uh find someone on Grindr or something like that, you know?

The researcher was interested to know what changed the participant's outlook on other people's opinions and the participant noted that going to college had an effect on him. "Because, um, I kind of got here and I was looking around, and I was like . . . yeah there's a lot, there's a lot more accepting people here." Without prompting, he continued to reflect:

There's a lot, probably a lot more gay people here or just like, non-straight people in general. And I was like, I probably actually, instead of like . . . so like, in my little area, there's probably like two people . . . two gay people per square mile, per like four square miles. So, like if I were to use Grindr here, I really wouldn't be able to find anybody to like, date or meet up with or anything like that. But like in college, it's like a . . . like a large congregation of gay people. (laughing)

He then began reflecting on his use of Tinder:

And um, in terms of Tinder, I was kind of apprehensive for using that for a while too. But at the same time, like, I just kind of got over it, because I was . . . I realized that it might just be easier to find uh, people through Tinder just because it . . . I don't know. Like, I can't tell when people are interested in me. So, like, if they give me the very obvious hint that they like swipe right on me then, then I can recognize that easier, I guess.

Since the participant had noted having difficulty with in-person interactions several times, the researcher attempted to understand how the apps helped interactions become easier for the participant. He discussed only having one serious relationship in his life before beginning to use the Tinder app and how the apps helped with the initial barrier of determining a person's interest. He continued:

And um, the one I had over the school year, I noticed that it was a lot easier to um, like interact with the person that I was going on a date with, just because that barrier kind of

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had been broken down. So, I . . . it was a lot easier to interact with them. Like, in most times, I'm not, I'm not like, socially inept. Only in like, that first step where I can't really tell like, people's uh, people's body language and their like, emotional speak, like in terms of um, how people show interest in other people. Like, that's challenging for me. But after that point, I can talk reasonably well. And I can like, interact with them and have interesting conversations without needing any like, support or anything like that. Like some people need like trusted friends around in order to have good conversations and stuff like that. So, just um, having that first step kind of um, taking care of . . . It just made the whole experience kind of better.

The participant was asked about any values that influenced choosing whether to use the apps. He responded that he did not think there were any, stating:

Um, I don't think so because um, I mean . . . um, my household and uh, just pretty much everywhere I've been, there hasn't been any kind of stigma against anything that I like have chosen to do. Like, my . . . my family is pretty okay with me just doing my own thing. And they don't really care if I like, do whatever, if I have casual relationships or anything like that. Or like who I date, like the person I met over . . . last semester was a non-binary person that they didn't really care. So, I do, I don't think there's any values that severely affects my ability to use these apps.

The researcher noted after rereading the transcript that asking the participant if any personal values influenced him might have been beneficial. However, at the time of the question, the researcher was hesitant to taint his answer in any way, and the researcher chose to reflect back on a statement the participant had made earlier regarding other people's opinions and opening up more when he went to college. The participant answered:

Well, I, I think the thing is, at that point, I was an adult because these are mostly adult apps. I can't really use like Grindr if I don't . . . like when I was like 17 or 16, I couldn't use it to find like a 16-year-old person I could like date or anything like that. Or, like it was . . . near the end of my high school career when I was like 17 or 18, then I could actually find people my age on there to like date and get together with. So, there was that, and at the same time, uh, I live in a very small town, and there is that thing where people kind of know who are you, and at the same time it was kind of a conservative town and while I didn't really care what like, anybody, like any opinions people have about me, there, like if someone were to see I have Tinder or Grindr on my phone, I probably would've been like socially stigmatized for that. Just in terms of people, um not talking to me or . . . I don't know, kind of being put off by that.

The researcher was curious to know what the participant thought was good or bad about the apps. The participant again emphasized apps making it easier for him than initial in-person interactions and described his experiences:

Um, I've already said that um, it kind of breaks down that um, kind of . . . I don't know how to say it. It's not always a bad thing that there's kind of tension between people that kind of prevents them from uh, kind of asking if the other person wants to get into a relationship. Because then you kind of develop more of a friendship with them and be kind of um, uh . . . Over time, you learn that like, the person might like you. But, at the same time, that kind of barrier can be uh, too much for certain people in that um, it's just . . . like for me. I have, I have a um, an anxiety disorder, so that barrier is usually overpowering in that no amount of getting to know a person would um, convince me that the risk of asking them if they want to go on a date or something would be worth, like

sacrificing whatever friendship I have like developed with them. So, for certain people who have, like, um, above-average levels of anxiety or something like that, it can be useful and good in that it um, it helps alleviate that a little bit.

He then reflected back on his statement, "It's not always a bad thing that there's kind of tension between people that kind of . . ." again noting that the tension might help to facilitate a deeper connection that is not always available through the use of the apps. He stated:

And that's what, like I said earlier, at the same time, that kind of barrier can also be a good thing in that um, you develop a closer relationship with them via staying friends for a while. So, you kind of like, miss that kind of development through a dating app because there's kind of . . . You're skipping a whole friendship part and just kind of jumping into dating them.

The participant was asked about any dangers that might be associated with using the applications. He discussed the need to be careful when using the apps, stating:

Uh, yeah. Like um, you got be careful. Um, I'm sure that there's predators on like dating apps and stuff like that. Like, it's just not even a question like if someone knows that they can use like a dating app and like catfish someone by like using a fake picture or something and like kid—, like not kidnapping them, but like abducting them or something like that, then I'm 100% sure that that's something that happened. But, it's just like you got to be careful about that stuff. . . . It's just a risk that you take by using one of these apps. And you just need to, um, be smart about how you use them.

With prompting, he continued:

Yeah, and usually like um, so like in like the example of me . . . with like me being in college. There's very low risk of, like, being abducted by somebody on a college campus

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because like there's people around all the time. And like there's very public places that you can like go to have a date or something. And like, um, if you were in like a major city, you can suggest to be in like a very public place you know on a date or something. It's not like a person has to come over your apartment or your dorm the first time you meet them.

The researcher was curious to know if what he mentioned were some of the precautions he took himself, and the participant responded that they were, although it was not a purposeful decision to take these precautions. It was just his "instinct." He described a date:

I mean, I wasn't thinking about it at the time, but yes. That's just my instinct to like go someplace public like as a first date. Like, I, like my quote-unquote, first date with that person earlier this year was like in the dining hall on campus. And then, like after that, I invited them to my dorm like to watch like, some movie or something. And like, it's just like past that point, as long as you can trust them that like just from talking to them, I could tell that they weren't being malicious or anything like that. Like, after that point, you can just do whatever. And like, um, I think my first date with uh, like the previous person I was with was uh, also in a very public place. So, I think that's just like a instinct that I have to just do that. Just to make sure that they're not like . . . I don't know, messing with me or something.

He was asked whether there was a timeframe he utilized in making the decision to meet someone from one of the apps. He responded, "Mmm, not really." He then reflected further:

I just kind of like talk with them for a while and then if it goes well . . . at that point, then I'll like, go on a date. Cause it's-it's a lot better to like talk to someone in person. Like, I, like again, it's not really the talking to someone that's an issue. It's the recognizing that

someone can possibly be having feelings for you. That's the issue. So after-after that point, when I like match with someone, then it's pretty much do you want to meet up at like the dining hall? Or do you wanna um, see like a movie or something?

The researcher then asked the participant if his sexual behaviors have changed as a result of using the apps; he stated he didn't think so. He also reported not feeling like he had experienced any negative consequences from the apps and that there was nothing else he wanted the researcher to know based on his experiences. When asked about gratifications, he stated, "Um, I mean . . . it's kind of always nice to know that there's people that are like swiping right on you or something. It's just always nice to like be seen as attractive."

When asked about his interest in participating, the participant noted the following:

Um, mostly just because I, um, I fit the criteria. I-I, like I'll be honest, I saw the $20 Wal-Mart card thing, and I was like, okay . . . can I like, um . . . am I eligible for this? So, I was like, all right, yeah, I am eligible because um, over the next year I'm going to be doing like a student's union, and I already have some Wal-Mart cards, and I was planning on doing some sort of charity thing with them. So, I was like, oh can I get some more money so I can, so I can get some more food for anybody who might need it or something.

Before the end of the interview, the researcher clarified that the incentive for the interview would be $15, in order to ensure the participant understood. After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect and continue field notes. Although the participant was open when answering questions, there were moments when he sounded uncomfortable. In addition, when transcribing, there were moments when part of the participant's response was inaudible, making it difficult for the researcher to type all of the participant's responses.

The description above provides a review of the seventh participant's discussion and the themes being studied. Table 8 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the phenomena being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been excluded.

Table 8

Participant 7 Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of Applications	Sexual exploration	It's just, I don't know . . . I've been wanting to meet people and just like experiment. It's . . . so I guess I am trying to hook up, but at the same time, I'm also kind of pushing people away because I'm-I'm not sure what I want.
	Casual sex	And um, I only ever really use Grindr for any kind of explicitly sexual purpose because that's just . . . it's more oriented towards that.
		So, like, uh, like at first, I didn't like Grindr because it's almost like explicitly a hookup app.
	Searching for Romantic Relationships	But, at the same time, I tell people I'm interested in a relationship if that's what they want.
		And I was pretty much only looking for a relationship.
2. Motivations	"It's convenient"	Um, I only started using Grindr in the past year because it's an app that has, like . . . like your location and then you see the people around you.
	Connection	Um, mostly to just meet up with people.
		So, I kind of got Grindr when I was in college because I assumed that there might be more gay individuals or bisexual individuals on campus than there would be in my middle of nowhere small town.
	Seeking attention	Um, I mean . . . it's kind of always nice to know that there's people that are like swiping right on you or something. It's just always nice to like be seen as attractive.
3. Benefits and risks	It's empowering	But after a while, I like, didn't really care that much because like . . . I mean, who are they to say, like if I want to like, uh find someone on Grindr or something like that, you know?

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
	Impedes deeper connections	. . . or um, be in an . . . I don't know, like a more casual relationship with a lot more easily than you might be able to, um, like otherwise.
		So, I've had my fair share of times where like I've asked someone if they want to go on a date or something and then they want to hook up.
		But on Hinge, there's uh photos, and then there's answers to question prompts like, um, "What is your perfect date?" or something like that. And you have to choose one of the things that they answer to. And then, you find someone who you're emotionally compatible with as opposed to just like, swiping right on a person's picture because they look nice.
		So, you kind of like, miss that kind of development through a dating app because there's kind of . . .
		you're skipping a whole friendship part and just kind of jumping into dating them.
	You're more vulnerable	Um, I'm sure that there's predators on like dating apps and stuff like that.
		It's just a risk that you take by using one of these apps. And you just need to, um, be smart about how you use them.
	"The mask can come off"	So, there was that, and at the same time, uh I live in a very small town, and there is that thing where people kind of know who are you, and at the same time, it was kind of a conservative town and while I didn't really care what like, anybody, like any opinions people have about me, there, like if someone were to see I have Tinder or Grindr on my phone, I probably would've been like socially stigmatized for that. Just in terms of people, um not talking to me or . . . I don't know, kind of being put off by that.

Breaks down barriers	So, I kind of got Grindr when I was in college because I assumed that there might be more gay individuals or bisexual individuals on campus than there would be in my middle of nowhere small town. I have, I have a um, an anxiety disorder, so that barrier is usually overpowering in that no amount of getting to know a person would um, convince me that the risk of asking them if they want to go on a date or something would be worth, like sacrificing whatever friendship I have like, developed with them. So, for certain people who have, like, um, above-average levels of anxiety or something like that, it can be useful and good in that it um, it helps alleviate that a little bit.
	So, in respect to um, like intimacy and things of that nature, um there are people, who um . . . they have a hard time, uh, in person getting to know someone. Because, like, uh . . . but um, I'm-I'm typically one of those people who like, has a hard time in person like, trying to get into a romantic relationship.
	It's just that tension is kind of broken down when you can like . . . when someone already obviously like, so they just like (inaudible), or they text you back. An app is . . . like there's not any kind of uh, there's no need to be apprehensive in the conversation.
	So, like . . . so um, so I'm not very confident with these things, so it's just a lot easier for me I think because I know that there's already attraction instead of like needing to read their body signals or something.
	But at the same time, like, I just kind of got over it, because I was . . . I realized that it might just be easier to find uh, people through Tinder just because it . . . I don't know, like I can't tell when people are interested in me. So, like, if they give me the very obvious hint that they like swipe right on me then, then I can recognize that easier, I guess.
	Only in like that first step where I can't really tell like people's uh, people's body language and their like emotional speak, like in terms of um, how people show interest in other people. Like, that's challenging for me. But after that point, I can talk reasonably well. And I can like, interact with them and have interesting conversations without needing any like, support or anything like that. Like some

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
		people need like trusted friends around in order to have good conversations and stuff like that. So, just um, having that first step kind of um, taken care of . . . it just made the whole experience kind of better.

Interview 8

Participant 8 was a 23-year-old female who identified as White. At the time of the interview, the participant had completed some graduate school. She reported using mobile applications for sexual purposes between one and three years. The interview was conducted via phone and followed the same process as the first seven interviews. The interview lasted approximately 31 minutes; the entire process, including introductions and review of consent information, lasted about 42 minutes. Participant 8 was open and transparent during the interview process.

The interview started by asking participant 8 her thoughts on technology related to intimacy, sexuality, and relationships. She answered:

Um, I guess I think that when it first started coming out and people were using it for like dating and such, it was a little bit weird to me because I didn't . . . I thought trying to find relationships solely based on like online communication was a little weird.

She reflected further, stating:

I thought that you couldn't really get a good relationship, based on like, no face-to-face interaction, just all online. But um, I guess like, over the years, I keep hearing more and more about like, a lot of successful relationships have been starting online. Um, and so, I guess as far as like, relationship goes, it's becoming more and more normal. And it doesn't have that weird of a stigma anymore. Um, I personally, like don't really like

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using online dating apps or anything like that. I just, like, it's never been something I was comfortable with. I like meeting people more face-to-face, but there are a lot of people who I know have a lot of like, social anxiety that prefer to use it for that kind of platform. So, I guess it just kind of depends on like, what you're looking for and how you're looking to meet people.

The researcher realized after reviewing transcripts that there was a missed opportunity for asking the participant to further reflect on what made her uncomfortable when it came to meeting people on apps. Even though the participant mentioned not being comfortable using apps to meet people, the researcher did ask if they had helpful for her meeting people for dating or romantic relationships. However, the researcher did note that it may not relate to the participant and framed the questions differently, asking, "But in any circumstance have you used apps to help meet people, or to meet people at all for romantic or dating relationships?" The participant responded, "I've never used apps." She continued discussing playing around with Tinder and Snapchat. She stated:

> I have, like, I know of the apps. And like I've done the whole, like playing with Tinder and stuff with my friends and whatnot. And like, I know how they work and whatnot, but I've personally never used them to meet anyone. Other than like, I guess in like high school, I would use Snapchat a lot to like, communicate with like, new people that I didn't know. But it wasn't for specifically relationship purposes.

The researcher felt a twinge of frustration at this point because it seemed like the participant actually did not meet the criteria for the study. However, when asked what applications she uses, the participant did begin to discuss her use of Tumblr for sexual purposes. She stated, "But for sexual purposes, I would say the only mobile app I've used is Tumblr." The

researcher asked the participant to discuss her use of Tumblr for sexual purposes. She reflected on her use:

> Um, yeah, so on Tumblr there were . . . well I guess there probably still is . . . but just like a whole bunch of like, blogs or accounts that would post the word sexual in the graphic content. And I'm not a huge fan of like actual porn from websites. It's just kind of like a weird thing to watch to me. So, I prefer like, just like the little GIFs or whatever that those sexual blogs would post. And that would be more of an appeal to me than actual porn videos.

Although there was an opportunity to ask the participant more about the appeal of Tumblr and her feelings on porn, the researcher made a note to return to this later and asked the participant how she found out about Tumblr and the sexual content. The participant discussed originally using Tumblr for comedic purposes, but becoming aware of the sexual content the more she used the app. When asked, she discussed what she felt was good about the apps, reflecting:

> Um, I think it does give a little bit more of like a spectrum of types of, like special content that people can find. Like I said before, I don't particularly like porn, and so I think having something that's kind of separate from that whole atmosphere is better if you're not into that. And so, it's just another type of outlet that people who can find content that they're looking for . . . that's a little bit more comfortable for them to watch.

Participant 8 was then asked about anything bad about the app. Participant 8 responded:

> Um, I do think it's a lot, it can be sketchy when, like especially on Tumblr . . . like it's not advertised as like a sexual app and there a lot of like, young people on there. And so, I think Tumblr recently has put content warnings on those types of blogs and those types

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of accounts. But I guess people can like bypass those relatively quickly, and so even though it may not be advertised as a sexual type of platform, there still is that. So, I guess it could be harmful in that respect if you have exposure to a young audience that isn't necessarily looking for that.

The researcher clarified that there may not be anything to keep the younger audience from getting on and engaging in some of the content, and the participant answered, "As far as I know, I don't think so." Without prompting, she continued:

But again, like, I don't know if there's different parental blockers that like, parents can put on someone's account. But I remember when, like the last few times I used it, like um, if I would go into like a sexual blog, all it really said was that this account may like, include um, sexual content or inappropriate content or something like that. All I really had to do was click okay, and then you would just get right into it. And so, I don't know if, um, Tumblr has added anymore safety precautions since then, though.

The researcher was curious to know if the participant thought there would be any dangers associated with using the apps. The participant discussed "general predatory dangers," noting:

Um, I mean, I guess maybe just like the general, just predatory dangers. Like anyone in the world can like, go onto these accounts and like, try to use them for, I don't know predatory like, pedophile users. Because I don't . . . I mean, I can't imagine that every single account on there is posting people with, above 18 and you know, all that jazz. (laughing)

When asked, the participant described her own gratification from using the apps, noting their convenience. She denied any negative consequences as a result of her behaviors. In regard to positivity, she stated:

Um, I guess it was just easier to use. Like, I feel, like having, or I guess a lot of the times when I would hear of people, like trying to search for porn on websites and whatnot, like they always got hyper-worried that like, people would look in their search history and all that kinds of stuff. But like I was never worried about that because I never went to websites, and I would just like, be following these accounts on my Tumblr, and I kept my Tumblr account private.

Being that the participant had previously mentioned she stopped using the apps about one year ago but had stated she had not experienced any negative repercussions, the researcher was curious to know what contributed to the participant's decision to stop using the apps. The participant answered, "Um, I would say that the last time I used Tumblr for any type of sexual purposes was probably, maybe a few months ago. I would say I used it more routinely, like a few years ago." She mentioned the decline in use was due to being a long-term relationship. She stated:

Because I've been in a long-term relationship for about three years now, and so, I don't like, look for porn as often as I did when I was single. And so, every now and then when I do—I do use it—I use Tumblr for it, but it's like, pretty spaced out now, and so it's not as often.

The researcher was curious to know if the participant's sexual behaviors had changed as a result of using the apps, and the participant described behaviors changing a little bit again due to being single and now being in a relationship. She reflected, stating:

So, I'm . . . back when I was single, I would kind of like follow any and all blogs that had like sexual content. But since like, I've been in a long-term relationship with my boyfriend for a while and I am bisexual and so when I do look for porn now, I usually

look for lesbian porn instead of just any porn because I already have a guy, but I need

some sort of girl content at some point. (laughing) So that's like pretty much, I guess

that's the only thing that's like, changed is now I maybe search for more focused content

instead of just anything.

The researcher clarified that the participant had changed the focus of what she was looking up,

and the participant answered, "Yeah, pretty much."

The researcher asked about values that influenced choosing whether to use the apps. The

participant asked for clarification, so the researcher mentioned that may include family values,

personal values, things she had learned over time. The participant responded:

I think one of the reasons I specifically don't like porn very much is because it's a little

bit like . . . I don't know if this is the best terminology, but I think it's a little bit out there

as far as like the whole scenarios or stories that porn videos use.

Without prompting, she continued, reflecting on growing up:

And I did grow up in a pretty like, I wouldn't say conservative household, but like my

parents went to church and all that kind of stuff. So, I grew up like, pretty traditional, and

I guess that stuff, like it weirded me out a little bit. And so, that's why I did go . . . or I

ended up using Tumblr because it was a bit more, like subtle. . . .

The researcher was curious to know more about the participant's statement, "it weirded

me out a little bit," and decided it was a good time to ask for further reflection on the

participant's comfortability with porn. She answered:

I don't know if my religion ever came into play, like, when my parents went to church

and whatnot. And I was brought to church at a young age, but I haven't like really been

religious in a long, long time. I kind of grew out of that myself. I think just growing up in

a little bit more traditional household like, I don't know. . . . In porn, there's a lot of like role-playing and weird scenarios that just like go on that just all seemed really weird to me. And so, I think just the whole idea of like, having like a whole thing revolving around like two people going at it was just kind of a weird idea to me because I grew up in so traditional. And like not all, a lot of things weren't that, I don't know . . . crazy in my house. (laughing) So, I think that's pretty much why I wanted something a little bit more subtle.

The researcher transitioned into whether other people's opinions factored into whether the participant chose to use the apps. The participant discussed this being a factor when she was younger. She described taking certain precautions when using Tumblr:

Like, when I was in high school, I started using Tumblr more for sexual content. Like, I didn't tell people. I wasn't open about it. But after I've gotten older, I've been a little bit more open with my sexuality and like, I'll . . . I don't advertise it, but I don't mind telling people that I've used Tumblr. Um, but I guess when I was younger and like I would do anything on Tumblr. . . . Like, that's why I would keep my Tumblr private, just so people wouldn't see like who I was following . . . and to not have people see that I was following these types of accounts.

Because the participant had mentioned some conflicting value ideology and comfortability, the researcher was curious to know why the participant continued to use the apps. Identifying information was removed from the participant's answer. The participant responded:

Um, I guess . . . it is quick, and that is gratifying. Like, you can just open the app and like search for it. I have a relatively busy lifestyle because I'm also a graduate student at ***,

so like just having something like if you need it in the moment or just open it up and it's there is gratifying.

A conversation ensued about the role of gender factoring into whether one chooses to use the apps for sexual behaviors. The participant described her thoughts on women using certain apps versus men using certain apps. She stated:

I would say that like, I've met more women than men in my life who have used Tumblr for porn than I have men. Um, but and so, I guess I have like . . . in my own mind just a stereotype that more guys watch regular porn and more women watch what I watch, but I'm really not positive on that because I would say that there's an equal amount of like, types of porn on Tumblr that like a whole bunch of guys would enjoy, too. And so, I don't know if that's just like my own stereotype in my mind of if that's actually a thing.

She continued to reflect on her own use, stating:

Yeah, and I was . . . and I think that's one of the main reasons like, why I initially like, didn't like porn because a lot of it seemed like it was geared towards men . . . like the types of videos that were posted and like how they were being presented. And I wasn't too fond of that. So, I always thought that like it was a bit weird or like . . . to be watching it as a woman where it seemed like men would be the only people getting any type of gratification out of it.

The participant was asked to reflect more on using mobile applications for sexual purposes. She discussed it being "a relatively normal thing," even though people do not talk about it a lot and keep it private. The participant was asked if there was anything else the researcher should know about the respondent's experiences that was not discussing yet. She answered:

I guess the . . . I guess the only thing that like I would like to mention is that when I have, like had different relationships with people in the past . . . like I've had mixed reaction I guess to, of my partners to the fact that I like look for porn on Tumblr. Like most of the girlfriends that I've had, like have either done it or used Tumblr for that reason before or just watched regular porn videos, so that was a pretty mixed reaction. But all the guys that I've dated did think it was like a bit weird, so they were more comfortable using like just regular, like Pornhub and stuff like that, so I don't know if that's like more a demographic thing, but that would be the only thing that I've noticed.

The researcher asked for clarification and further reflection, and the participant responded:

I guess they thought, I mean, because I guess most of the time when people think of Tumblr like, they just think of the funny content that's on there, and you're not familiar with the other types of accounts that exist. You wouldn't like, expect that people would use it for that purpose. Um and so . . . the guys I have dated that knew of Tumblr and have used it before, um, were just like kind of shocked when I told them that I use it for porn and they were like, "Why don't you just use Pornhub?" And I'm like, "'Cause there's weird shit on there." (laughing) So that was pretty much like the general reaction I would get from them. (laughing)

At this point, the researcher circled back around to a topic that should have been followed up on when the participant was discussing it. The researcher was curious to know more about how the participant navigated the use of apps for sexual purposes having been raised in a conservative household. The participant responded, "I don't think I've ever like, discussed much of like, my sexual or personal activity with my family because, like, as I've become like very

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non-religious myself. My family still is pretty religious, and they still go to church. Um, and so

we do have like, a different set of values. I'm pretty open like in general with like a lot of my

acquaintances and like my friends and whatnot. So, I'm not too sheltered in that way. But I

definitely don't want to like, make my family uncomfortable. (laughing)

The researcher clarified that this would not be something she would discuss when she was

around her family, and the participant responded, "Yeah, not really."

The participant was asked about her interest in participating in the study, and she

answered:

> Oh, I had, um, a friend . . . a roommate really, who was a psychology student in my
>
> undergrad, and I just remember she would always like kind of complain to me whenever
>
> she had to do these kind of studies because of the lack of participants. So, whenever I see
>
> these things come around, I always try to like participate in them because I remember
>
> how much of a struggle it was for her. (laughing) Um, but I-I don't know. I felt like it
>
> was more like a young demographic type participation study, and I figured that if you
>
> needed the help, I have some stuff to say." (laughing)

After the interview, the researcher took time to reflect on the interview and continue field

notes. The participant was open, and after some initial frustration with the trajectory of the

interview, the researcher thought the interview flowed well, and the necessary information on the

participant's experiences was obtained. However, the researcher did also note that the researcher

felt slightly distracted and the interview seemed rushed.

The description above provides a review of the eighth participant's discussion and the

themes studied. Table 9 provides a review of the significant phrases relating to the phenomena

being studied. Any information that was not relevant to the phenomena has been excluded.

Table 9

Participant 8 Significant Statements

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
1. Use of Applications	Sexual exploration	I usually look for lesbian porn instead of just any porn because I already have a guy, but I need some sort of girl content at some point. So, I prefer like, just like the little GIFs or whatever that those sexual blogs would post. And that would be more or an appeal to me than actual porn videos.
	Searching for romantic relationships	But um, I guess like over the years, I keep hearing more and more about like a lot of successful relationships have been starting online. Um, and so, I guess as far as like, relationship goes, it's becoming more and more normal.
2. Motivations	"It's convenient"	Like, you can just open the app and like search for it. I have a relatively busy lifestyle because I'm also a graduate student at ***, so like, just having something like if you need it in the moment or just open it up and it's there is gratifying. I guess it was just easier to use. So, I prefer like, just like the little GIFs or whatever that those sexual blogs would post. And that would be more or an appeal to me than actual porn videos. And so, that's why I did go . . . or I ended up using Tumblr because it was a bit more, like subtle. . . .
3. Benefits and risks	It's empowering	But after I've gotten older, I've been a little bit more open with my sexuality and like, I'll . . . I don't advertise it, but I don't mind telling people that I've used Tumblr.
	You're more vulnerable	Like, anyone in the world can like, go onto these accounts and like try to use them for, I don't know predatory like, pedophile users. And so, I can imagine that sometimes it can get a little sketchy when nobody knows exactly where all this content is coming from.

Analytical Categories	Themes	Significant Statements
	Conflicting family values	And I did grow up in a pretty like, I wouldn't say conservative household, but like my parents went to church and all that kind of stuff. So, I grew up like, pretty traditional, and I guess that stuff, like it weirded me out a little bit.
		I don't think I've ever like discussed much of like my sexual or personal activity with my family. Because, like, as I've become like very non-religious myself, my family still is pretty religious, and they still go to church. Um, and so we do have like a different set of values.
		But I definitely don't want to like make my family uncomfortable.
	Breaks down barriers	I like meeting people more face-to-face, but there are a lot of people who I know have a lot of like, social anxiety that prefer to use it for that kind of platform.

Cross-Case Analysis

Table 10 provides a summary of the cross-case analysis and the similar themes described by each participant. It is important to note that although all eight participants described similar thoughts and views during the interviews, not all themes were represented in each individual interview. After data analysis of the eighth interview was completed, it was determined that saturation had been reached due to the lack of new themes emerging from the information. Themes are discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

Table 10

Cross-Case Analysis and Themes

Analytical Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Use of applications								
Theme 1: Sexual exploration	X		X		X	X	X	X
Theme 2: Casual sex	X	X		X		X	X	
Theme 3: Searching for romantic relationships	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Theme 4: Developing friendships	X			X		X		
Motivations								
Theme 5: It's convenient	X	X		X		X	X	X
Theme 6: Connection	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Theme 7: Seeking attention		X		X		X	X	
Benefits and risks								
Theme 8: Facilitates risk-taking	X	X		X				
Theme 9: It's empowering	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theme 10: Impedes deeper connections	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Theme 11: You're more vulnerable	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Theme 12: The mask can come off	X					X	X	
Theme 13: Conflicting family values	X	X	X		X	X		X
Theme 14: Breaks down barriers	X	X		X		X	X	X

Summary

Chapter IV provides an overview of the data explicated from all eight participants. The interview data were reviewed in narrative form and supported with statements from each participant. The significant statements were accumulated, analyzed to develop themes, and then related to the three research questions that formed the study. The researcher's field notes, observations, thoughts, and feelings during each interview were also described. Tables were included for a visual representation of significant statements and how each statement related to each theme. The chapter ends with a cross-case analysis of themes and related significant statements representing the similarities among the participants' statements.

Chapter V: Discussion

The prevalence of mobile Internet access is quickly altering the way people navigate their lives, including their romantic and sexual relationships (Gesselman et al., 2020). Because of the increasing use of mobile "sextech," defined as "the use of innovative technology designed to enhance sexuality through knowledge, connections, archival data, etc.," more attention is being devoted to the impact of technology on sexuality, sexual behavior, and the associated personal and relational consequences (Gesselman et al., 2020, p. 2). Therefore, this study's objective was to investigate how young adults used mobile applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors and the motivations, benefits, and risks of such behavior.

One interesting finding of the study was the fact that all participants reported feeling empowered by the use of mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes in one way or another. While the interest in technology and sexual behaviors has increased, most of the research to date only highlights the likely negative consequences of sextech use (Gesselman et al., 2020). In addition, having counseled individuals who suffer from the consequences of extreme technology use and sexual behaviors (such as sex and pornography addiction), the researcher had to challenge personal and professional biases to "hear" the participants' positive experiences relating to feeling empowered.

The eight interviews in this study depicted various perspectives and experiences relating to mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. However, after the thematic analysis of the data collected, 14 themes emerged relating to the research questions. Chapter V discusses how the themes relate to the research questions. In addition, the implications relating to the counseling field, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research are also discussed.

As a result of the 8 semi-structured interviews, 14 themes emerged. All themes were developed using a thematic analysis of the participants' experiences and beliefs. This section discusses each of the themes as they relate to the research questions.

Research Question 1

"How do young adults use mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes?" The first question was posed to understand how young adults use the applications available to engage in online and offline sexual activities. Overall, four themes emerged as a result of the participants' discussions. The four themes were: sexual exploration, casual sex, searching for romantic relationships, and developing friendships.

Theme 1: Sexual Exploration

The theme of sexual exploration was common among participants, with six out of eight identifying it. The participants discussed sexual exploration using phrases such as, "I'd watch a lot to get to know myself sexually," "I have that app to get more knowledge from things and such," and "like, I'm learning more stuff" to describe the use for educating themselves and acquiring new information. In addition, participants indicated that curiosity factored in to using the apps. This was described using phrases such as, "I'm more fascinated by it than anything," "But I was like wait, people talk about this stuff online," "sometimes, it's like I'm fascinated and curious by this," and "just for pure curiosity." Lack of knowledge was also discussed, with one participant actually stating, "Because I don't, I feel like I don't know enough," when discussing her use. This view is similar to the information stated by Gesselman et al. (2020) and listed above.

Sexual exploration for a specific reason was also referenced, highlighting participants' desire to acquire knowledge relating to a specific realm and relating to Gesselman et al. (2020),

which acknowledged, "seeking sexual information online indicates that the searcher has a need or desire for additional knowledge about a specific aspect of sexuality" (p. 4). Participants described behaviors such as, "just Google Internet pornographic material, you know," "games, technology, toys," "to look up videos and new things, and "there's a lot of knowledge people in the kink realm." The use of a search for a specific type of porn was noted by one participant, who stated, "I usually look for lesbian porn instead of just any porn," who identified as bisexual because "I already have a guy, but I need some sort of girl content at some point."

Theme 2: Casual Sex

Five out of eight participants reported using mobile applications to find sexual partners. This theme was consistent with Sumter et al. (2016) that found that one reason (of six) for using the mobile application Tinder was to engage in an uncommitted sexual relationship (Sumter et al., 2016). The theme also aligned with Gesselman et. al (2020) that found 21.8% of (global) participants reported using mobile applications to find sexual partners. Participants in the present work sought to connect with sexual partners and used phrases such as, "It just makes hooking up easier," "It was like a lot of hooking up," "I only ever really use Grindr for any kind of explicitly sexual purpose," and "I'm going to hook up with someone" to describe their behaviors.

Participants also discussed the perception that certain mobile applications were geared toward casual sex, regardless of how the app was originally intended to be used. The statements implied that the participants believed the nature of specific apps was only sexual. To describe these thoughts, participants stated things such as, "I think most people are just like yeah, we use Tinder for hookups, and that's it," "it's more oriented towards that," and "because it's almost like explicitly a hookup app." Phrases were consistent with the prevalent view among

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individuals that some apps primarily function to facilitate hookups and casual sex (La Rose et. al, 2019; Corriero & Tong, 2015).

Theme 3: Searching for Romantic Relationships

According to Arnett (2000), one of the most important goals of young adulthood is establishing a committed romantic relationship, which aligns with the third theme of this study, as searching for romantic relationships was identified by seven of the eight participants. When describing the search for a partner they could connect with on a deeper level, they mentioned things such as, "I'm more trying to get like relationship connection," "I was pretty much only looking for a relationship," "Like I'm looking for a relationship," "I met another guy who, like I dated," and "did meet my first long-distance, well actually my first two long-distance relationships on um, online." One participant also noted that forming romantic relationships online was becoming more normalized, stating, "I guess as far as like relationship goes, it's becoming more and more normal." Again, this theme was consistent with a study completed by Sumter et al. in 2016 that found that one reason (of six) for using the mobile application Tinder was to engage in a loving relationship (Sumter et al., 2016). Interestingly enough, that study found that this was a stronger motivator than engaging in casual sex.

Some participants again discussed the perception that certain mobile applications were geared toward a specific outcome. This time, the outcome was meeting someone to develop a romantic relationship. The two mobile applications that participants thought were oriented toward developing that type of relationship were Bumble and Hinge. Participants used statements such as, "That's where Hinge comes into place," and "I use Bumble to, like meet actual people and make connections," to describe their perceptions.

Theme 4: Developing Friendships

Developing friendships was the fourth theme that emerged among three of the eight participants, although it became clear in some instances that friendships seemed to transpire as a result of not being romantically attracted to each other. Participants indicated this experience by using phrases such as, "So, I've met guys on Tinder and Bumble who I'm just friends with," "I've met, but we're just like friend," "know I have some friends that are just friends just from those apps too," "like we're still just friends," "just like a friendship kind of thing," and "I've actually just made a couple regular friends off of like dating apps if whatever didn't work out." As previously mentioned, it became apparent in some instances that some friendships developed as a result of the relationship not working out romantically or sexually. Regardless of the development of the friendship, participants remained friends and maintained a platonic relationship with the other person. Although a comprehensive literature review was conducted, the researcher found limited information related to this theme, leading to the researcher's belief that this could be a possible focus of future research.

Implications for Practice

Understanding how individuals use mobile applications for sexual purposes helped to understand the motivations for using the apps, which was the basis of research question two. The participants described reasons for using the applications and their experiences with the apps that contributed to continued use, and perceptions of how different apps were utilized. Although the increasing popularity of the Internet and use of smartphone applications have revolutionized pathways of socialization and established new ways of connecting with potential romantic and/or sexual partners, research has highlighted the adverse outcomes and negative consequences of using the apps for online and offline sexual purposes (Castro & Ramon Barrada, 2020;

Gesselman et al., 2020). Despite the risk of these consequences, individuals continue to utilize the mobile applications. Clinicians can work with clients to help determine steps to decrease the possibility of negative consequences. In addition, clinicians can assist clients in making decisions on how to use the applications in a way that facilitates attainment of each client's goal when using.

Clinicians must attempt to understand the reasons underlying a client's behaviors so that behaviors or concerns the client has wanted to change or address can be the focus. Clinicians can help clients identify behaviors they want to change or address, as well as techniques for accomplishing this change, while maintaining the ability to meet the needs and desires a client in this age group exhibits. Because of the continued and increasing use of these applications, clinicians need to be aware of the reasons to use the applications, despite the adverse outcomes that can happen to effectively work with clients, who fall in the age range of this population, without pushing their own views onto the client. In addition, the lack of awareness and understanding by a clinician could affect a potential client's willingness to seek counseling services for any reason and can negatively interfere with the development of a strong, positive counseling relationship. Therefore, clinicians should be encouraged to be aware of their own thoughts and challenge any biases regarding the use of applications for online and offline sexual behaviors (given the ways individuals described using the applications above).

Research Question 2

What motivates young adults to use mobile applications for sexual purposes? This study suggests that the reason for using the applications relates to the personal motivations of the user. Because of this, research question two sought to highlight the motivations behind the use of mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. The researcher would like to note that

although participants spoke of various motivations, leading to three primary themes, the one theme that emerged most often was the desire to connect with other individuals.

Theme 5: It's Convenient

Prior research has discussed the convenience of using mobile smartphone applications to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors due to the smartphone's accessible capabilities and geolocation features (LeFebvre, 2017). Mobile applications often provide low cost, easy access, various activities, and anonymity to young adults looking to engage in online or offline sexual purposes (Barrada et al., 2019). Convenience was a theme echoed by six of the eight participants who stated things such as, "It was just easier to use," "You can just open the app and search for it," "just open it up and it's there," "It's helpful to have a place where it's all brought together," "Using technology is more convenient," "easier to use the apps," "It's way more convenient to just meet people," "It definitely opens like a lot of doors that weren't really available before" and "It's more convenient." One participant spoke specifically on the convenience of using apps due to the coronavirus pandemic: "I mean you can't like, you know, you're not trying to go meet people right now because you're not trying to get like, COVID. But um, you can like video chat people, um, and things."

Geolocation features are especially convenient and accessible because they use location services to find potential sexual partners who are nearby (Choi et al., 2016). The increased convenience of location-based applications was echoed by one participant: "It's an app that has, like . . . like your location and then you see the people around you" He discussed specifically beginning to use the app because of the GPS features that provide the convenience of connecting with people who are geographically close in proximity to him.

In addition, participants discussed hectic lifestyles as factors that contribute to the convenience of using the applications, "I have a relatively busy lifestyle," "It's not very convenient for someone to just go out and meet someone," and "That whole hustle and constantly on the go type of lifestyle, it's easier to use apps," with one participant stating in detail, "because of the fact that like we're constantly husting, running around, working on ourselves, and then like, working on our craft, so then we don't have time to actually go out and meet someone." Participants' experiences using the apps and their descriptions of convenience reflect prior research in which mobile applications were often described as quick, effortless, and user-friendly, contributing to common use among young adults (LeFebvre, 2017; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017).

Theme 6: Connection

Seven of the eight participants demonstrated their desire to connect with others throughout the interviews. Smartphones have always been seen as a way to connect with other people, and billions of individuals now use the increased convenience of mobile apps to connect (LeFebvre, 2017; Tan et al., 2017). Using mobile applications as a way to connect with other people was a theme discussed by most of the participants throughout the course of the study. The participants used phrases such as "I just want to talk to people," "if I use the app, it's to like, talk to people," "Yeah it was just to talk to people," "Like, I'll find people and we'll talk," and "Instagram was to connect with people," when discussing their desire to interact with other people.

Mobile applications have also been useful for connecting individuals who are unable to be together in person. In Gesselman et al.'s (2020) global study of 130,885 participants, staying connected with a sexual partner when seeing each other in person was not an option was one of

the top three common reasons for using the apps, with 5% of participants reporting this reason. This was echoed by one participant, "I'm in a relationship that has become long-distance because of circumstances, and I think that can really help strengthen our connection."

An extensive literature review discovered research that discusses youth as a period of romantic and sexual exploration, with individuals especially seeking to establish long-term relationships. Online media, such as mobile applications, can help achieve the goal of finding a romantic partner and fulfill the developmental needs of developing friendships and maintaining social connections (Sumter et al., 2016). Participants used phrases such as "My motivation is human connectedness," "I think I value human connectedness and intimacy," "There is the possibility to develop an emotional connection with somebody," and "I guess that's my motivation is to find an actual connection with someone." One participant described his use to maintain connections with friends, "We'll actually just play in a group together," demonstrating the relation to prior research.

One participant discussing the coronavirus pandemic used the phrase, "And that's, that's like a close second, especially in like, compared to meeting in person. Like, oh let's just FaceTime and Skype or something, you know?," indicating that connection was important to her even when external barriers were preventing that from happening. The theme of connection may also correlate to the theme of convenience, as some participants overwhelmingly spoke of the desire for connection, but the inability to do so because of busyness, hectic lifestyles, barriers, etc.; utilizing the applications decrease these barriers. The relationship between the two may be an area of future research.

Theme 7: Seeking Attention

The third and final theme relating to research question two was seeking attention. Four of eight participants expressed their desire for attention when using the apps by using phrases such as "Fetlife is more for attention," and "A lot of people give me attention on that app." Participants also discussed the validation they often felt when using the apps with phrases such as, "It makes me feel good just seeing how many matches I have," "I wanted people to validate me," and "It's just always nice to be seen as attractive." Although a comprehensive literature review was completed, there appeared to be a lack of research relating to individuals using these mobile applications to seek attention and feel validated.

Implications for Practice

Throughout the course of the study, it became clear that one huge underlying motivation for continued use of the apps was connection, even when the motivation was fulfilled in different ways and even when external barriers may hinder that from happening. Studies have shown that social and psychosocial needs change and that as individuals grow older, casual sex and the desire to find a long-term partner increase (Sumter et al., 2016). Although individual needs change as a person grows older, this study highlighted that interpersonal relationships remain important, and the prevalent themes among the participants especially highlight the desire for connection in a convenient manner. In addition, the participants' descriptions of motivations for using the apps to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors appear to relate to the first research question of how the apps are used.

As mentioned earlier, clinicians need to be aware of the motivations influencing a person's behavior to effectively address client concerns of online and offline sexual behavior in the counseling setting. Clinicians can use this information to help clients facilitate problem-

solving if problems relating to use of the applications emerges. In addition, clinicians can work

with clients to ensure healthy decision-making skills relating to motivations influencing use and

behaviors. Counselors working with the young adult population should understand how

motivations and certain behaviors relate to the developmental needs of this population; the

information from this study can also be discussed in counselor education program classes

including child and adolescent courses and sexuality courses as a way to assist novice clinicians

in understanding the relationship between developmental needs and sexual desires and behaviors.

The themes that emerged in research question two suggest the inherent need for connection

among this age group and the importance of alleviating the barriers to achieve this goal.

Clinicians can use the information to work with clients to identify any barriers hindering

connection with others and problem-solve solutions to mitigate these barriers.

Research Question 3

What are the benefits and risks of using mobile applications for sexual purposes?

Research question three sought to highlight the benefits and risks of using mobile applications.

Previous research has illustrated the risks of using apps for online and offline sexual purposes.

However, research illustrating the benefits of using apps is limited. The researcher hoped to

identify more benefits to use, given the popularity of applications.

Theme 8: Facilitates Risk-taking

Three of eight participants indicated increased risky behaviors as a result of using the

apps. Research has suggested that people who use the Internet for sexual purposes tend to be

more willing to take risks (Choi et al., 2016). Participants made statements such as, "I was being

really reckless," "I wasn't being safe whatsoever," "I put myself in sketchy situations . . ." and

"sending nudes." One participant noted, "I definitely take a lot more risks within this than I do in

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my regular life," and discussed being "more riskier in these situations than I would anywhere else in life." Another participant discussed risky behaviors as a teenager interacting with adults: "It was still super cool to be talking to an adult. . . ."

Theme 9: It's Empowering

One benefit that emerged from all participants was feeling empowered as a result of the apps. Participants described, "wanted to reclaim my sexuality," "I'm a very bold woman and would definitely message guys first," "I feel like I can have a great time in the bedroom now. . . ." "This feels good," "enjoyment out of it," "It's really helpful in my current relationship," and "trying to rebuild a relationship with my body." The statements indicated various ways of using apps to engage in online and offline sexual behaviors to feel good about themselves or their bodies and strengthen their relationships.

Participants also discussed the change in perceptions about using the apps and other people's opinions on using such apps. Participants used phrases such as, "I don't mind telling people that I've used Tumblr," "I have all kinds of people who judge me . . . and it's like I don't care," "I mean who are they to say, like if I want to find someone . . ." "So, okay if you're going to judge me for like hooking up with somebody, I don't like you anyway," and "I can do whatever the hell I want." The perceptions of (the participants involved in the study) using the apps appeared to change from being hesitant or uncomfortable when using the apps to not caring about what others think and being more comfortable with their use of apps for online and offline sexual purposes.

Theme 10: Impedes Deeper Connections

Brubaker et. al (2014) found that one of the reasons individuals stopped using the app, Grindr, was due to the inability to establish meaningful relational connections. Interestingly

enough, a theme that aligns with previous research also emerged during this study, as all six participants who discussed connection as a motivator also discussed the idea that apps hinder deeper connections. Because participants had previously discussed the desire to connect with others, discussion of the apps impeding deeper connections appeared to be in direct contrast to previous statements. Participants stated, "Y'all don't know each other like that," "It sets up for not great starts for relationships," "They're disposable, and you can move on to the next one," "doesn't really allow for a lot of emotional connection," "The talking phase lasts the entire time," "You're skipping a whole friendship part," and "selling yourself online," when discussing some of the negatives they feel are a part of using the apps. Some of the statements align with research that shows some users of apps may be "less open to commitment" (Anzani et al., 2018, p. e63). In addition, Corriero & Tong (2015) discussed the idea of Uncertainty Reduction Theory in relation to online interactions. Uncertainty Reduction Theory was developed to describe initial interactions between strangers and although apps provide new ways for people to interact online, they also add another level of complexity to interpersonal interactions that may contribute to concern in disclosing personal thoughts and feelings, leading to a decrease in these types of vulnerable interactions (Corriero & Tong, 2015). As one of the themes that emerged specifically related to participants feeling more vulnerable when using apps, the researcher believes the idea of Uncertainty Reduction Theory correlates to this dissertation study. While participants do desire to connect with other individuals, there appears to be some (possibly unconscious) ambivalence that hinders the development of a deeper connection.

Participants also used phrases such as, "use it because I'm bored," "It's just when I'm bored," "I don't take it very seriously," "Then they want to hook up," "You think of women as objects," objectification of people," and "help people connect to each other, like sexually without

having to actually interact," giving the appearance that a part of the barrier to forming deeper

connections or relationships is a transactional mindset by some users and the objectification of

women that has become normalized in pornography and online video games (Guggisberg, 2020).

Theme 11: You're More Vulnerable

Seven of the eight participants also suggested that there is a certain level of vulnerability

associated with using the apps. Participants acknowledged, "It can really affect you mentally too,

"experience mental trauma," "It can get a little sketchy," "Some people are really toxic," fear of

being "super stalked," "a risk you take," "being groomed," "meeting a complete stranger," and

"don't know who you're talking to." Statements indicated users may be susceptible to certain

dangers that one may not be susceptible to otherwise, and studies have shown that online

interactions might miss information that only face-to-face interactions reveal (Anzani et al.,

2018), increasing vulnerability.

Some participants also discussed the precautions they take when using the apps, such as

meeting individuals in public places or making sure friends know the location or have

information on the person. Of those participants who did mention precautions they take, it

appeared that the decision to take certain steps to ensure safety as much as possible resulted from

not only their experiences but also maturing. There is a lack of research in this area, indicating

the need for further exploration and study.

Theme 12: The Mask Can Come Off

Three of eight participants indicated that the apps allow users to be themselves instead of

putting up a façade when getting to know someone or even engage in online or offline sexual

behaviors. Phrases such as "It's nice to have like-minded individuals," "easier to be yourself,"

and the fact that it provides opportunities for people to "be themselves." Another participant

described, "I get to talk to people who don't think I'm crazy for being into the things that I'm into," while another described growing up in a "conservative" town and being "socially stigmatized," if people found out he was using the apps. The participants who identified this theme described the benefit of being themselves when using the apps. Theme twelve aligns with the previously mentioned "disinhibition effect" that deduces that individuals are more uninhibited during online interactions. Individuals have reported feeling more like their true selves and flourishing online even though they are typically shy in-person (Suler, 2016).

Theme 13: Conflicting Family Values

Six of the eight participants suggested that personal use of the apps resulted in conflicting value systems with their families. Participants noted, "not something my mama would agree to," "just hide the fact that I do use these apps," "parents aren't too fond of it," "have a different set of values," "don't want to . . . make my family uncomfortable." Participants also noted "feeling guilty" and "wrestling internally" when describing personal struggles of using the apps, knowing it conflicts with their parents' or family's values systems.

Some participants described compartmentalizing when interacting with family, "There are things you just don't talk about," "only talk about XYZ," and "no way I would discuss this."

Some of the participants verbalized "still doing it," even knowing their family's views on the matter, and the "guilt" from their knowledge "not being enough to quit," which appears to relate to the theme of empowerment. Participants who identified this theme noted growing up in religious or conservative families in which sex was not discussed in detail, if at all. As they grew older, the change in value systems began to discover who they were as a person, and in some cases, left home, appears to contribute to the need to compartmentalize their use when they are home or interacting with their families. Theme fourteen appears to correlate with previous

research that discusses the fact that individuals in this age group are often free from parental control and experiencing a greater sense of personal freedom as they form their own identities (Hartotyo & Abraham, 2015). Individuals in this age group often experience changes in values and worldviews as a result of their continued cognitive development. Although individuals may enter this time period with values learned from family/parental values in childhood and adolescence, they subsequently find themselves challenging those values, and questioning, examining, and considering alternatives. The continued examination often leads to values or worldviews other than the ones they learned growing up (Arnett, 2000).

Theme 14: Breaks Down Barriers

Six of eight participants indicated that use of the apps provided opportunities to minimize barriers that might normally be present. Some participants acknowledged barriers with face-to-face interactions due to "above-average levels of anxiety," "hard time in person," "not very confident," "social anxiety," "some people are socially awkward," and "alleviating nerves." Prior to online sites and mobile applications, relationship initiation relied on face-to-face interaction (LeFebvre, 2017), and it appears participants considered the ability to initiate potential connections online a positive. As one participant described, "Only in like that first step where I can't really tell like people's uh, people's body language and their like emotional speak, like in terms of um, how people show interest in other people. Like, that's challenging for me."

Participants also indicated that it allowed them to meet new people they might not normally meet due to certain barriers. Participants described, "meeting people everywhere," "meet different people from different places," and "expanding your social circle." As another participant described, "It allows you to meet people outside of your own social circle, in multiple dimensions, so socioeconomic, race, ethnicity, age."

Implications for Practice

The final seven themes of the study emerged after analyzing the data related to research question three. As a result of the participants' descriptions of experiences, the researcher discovered that although there appear to be several benefits related to using the apps, the risks still appear to outnumber the benefits. The information appears to align with current research that emphasizes such risks (Gesselman et al., 2020) and the lack of research on the associated benefits. Regardless of the perception of risks outnumbering the benefits in this particular study, the researcher believes that use of mobile applications for online and offline sexual behaviors should not automatically be assumed bad. This researcher believes that clinicians should not instinctively discourage use, but instead work with clients to facilitate a healthy, positive use based on each client's needs, thoughts, personality, and individuality.

One predominant theme participants indicated was the feeling of empowerment as a result of using the apps, including getting to know themselves sexually, strengthening their offline relationships, and lessening their hesitancy to engage in certain things due to others' opinions. The above information can be used to assist clinicians in working with clients to facilitate that sense of empowerment and increased self-worth (whether it be by utilizing the apps or other ways) during a developmental time period where individuals are experiencing a variety of changes in life. To help facilitate empowerment, clinicians can work with clients to become self-aware and define their personal needs, desires, and wants, as well as help them continue (or begin to) develop and focus on goals related to the above-mentioned things. In addition, clinicians can help clients to identify or clarify core values and principles and develop a list of what's most important for them. Clients can be also encouraged to assert themselves based on their values to promote empowerment.

To help promote increased self-esteem, clinicians can help clients be aware of their feelings of self-worth, as well as identify where those feelings come from, and challenge any perceptions that lead to negative self-worth. Based on the above-mentioned list of values and principle, clinicians can help clients determine if or when they are engaging in behaviors that are contrary to their values, as individuals may feel bad about themselves when acting out of line of value systems and, if necessary, assist clients in identifying and engaging in behaviors that are congruent to value systems. Clients can be provided psychoeducation on the complexities of navigating young adulthood, as well as, encouraged to engage in positive self-talk and show themselves self-compassion during this transition period.

Other benefits included being able to "be yourself" and minimizing barriers that may be present in other situations. On the other side, participants also indicated increased risk-taking, specifically when using the apps, difficulty forming deeper relationships, vulnerability, and value systems that conflict with family value systems. In addition, although participants did not verbalize fear of disappointing their families, the researcher wonders if this is an underlying concern that relates to the theme of conflicting family values, and further exploring this idea may be interesting.

Given that all of the participants who reported conflicting family values noted growing up in a conservative or religious household, the information discussed can help prepare clinicians to support clients in this age group who are experiencing a change in value systems or engaging in behaviors that are not congruent with family values. Changes experienced during this period can often be overwhelming and clinicians can provide psychoeducation to clients to increase knowledge on those transitions that happen during the young adult time period. Arnett (2000) noted that while there is a desire to achieve independence, individuals also desire to maintain

connection to family. As the contradictory values systems can be confusing and difficult to navigate, clinicians can help clients distinguish their personal (core) values from values that have been ingrained in them growing up.

Providing clinicians with the knowledge of benefits and risks of using these apps will also equip them with the necessary information and tools to address some of the concerns surrounding the use of the apps while attempting to highlight the benefits when working with families who may not understand using apps for online or offline sexual purposes. In addition, understanding the risks associated with using the apps could help to determine, develop, and coordinate prevention methods to help mitigate risks. Clinicians can work with young adult clients to develop ways to keep themselves safe while using the apps and while engaging in online and offline sexual behaviors; risk reduction behavioral interventions can be utilized to help decrease risky behaviors.

Limitations

Any research study comes with limitations. Although recruitment efforts were purposefully completed via email to different universities in Pennsylvania, social media posts, and providing flyers and information on the study to other clinicians, to facilitate a diverse sample, six of the eight participants were selected from the same university, and all eight participants were from Western Pennsylvania. Another limitation was the lack of diversity among participants. Six of the eight participants identified as White. Of the other two remaining participants, one identified as Black/African American and the other identified as White and Asian American. Even more prominently, six of the eight participants were female. The lack of diversity in the sample could mean the data are not representative of the population as a whole.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all interviews were completed electronically. Although two of the individuals completed the interview via an online, HIPAA-compliant, video platform, six participants chose to complete the interview via phone. Due to the somewhat sensitive nature of the topic being researched, the researcher surmised that potential participants may not be comfortable discussing their experiences via video. However, the barrier of not being able to see the participants made it difficult to assess nonverbal communication that may have been pertinent to fully grasping the participants' experiences. In addition, the barrier of completing all interviews electronically should be noted. While the electronic modalities provided the opportunity to interview participants safely (and as noted above, may have provided participants more comfortability), it is important to discuss the limitations of the lack of in-person interviews. These limitations include the reduced social cues, such as body language and nonverbal communication and the potential for reduced attention and concentration from the participants and the researcher.

Finally, because this was a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher could pose as a potential limitation. Although steps were taken to minimize the researcher's perspective on this phenomenon, it is important to note that descriptions and themes also had the potential to be influenced by the researcher's biases, interests, and perspective. Therefore, it is possible that the researcher's personal beliefs could have influenced the data. In addition, the primary researcher solely completed the data analysis process to code for theme development. As most qualitative studies incorporate more than one researcher to complete data analysis and coding, this could be another potential limitation. For example, there were times during the interview process when the researcher felt overwhelmed by the information presented by participants, which contributed to missed opportunities for participant clarification and the possibility of richer descriptions. In

addition, there were times the researcher's own background, knowledge, and values contributed to feeling uncomfortable with participant responses.

Implications for Future Research

This qualitative research study produced a variety of possibilities for potential research. First, the current literature illustrates a lack of research relating to the benefits or positives of using mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes. The current study indicated three themes relating to benefits and four themes relating to risks. Given the focus on risks associated with using the apps and the increasing use of these apps, it may be beneficial to conduct further research that explores the positive aspects or benefits of mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes, as most of the current literature offers an overwhelmingly negative one-sided view. Another area for further exploration is an individual's risk-benefit analysis regarding the use of apps. Risk-benefit analysis surmises that individuals accept a certain level of risk in life as crucial to achieving certain benefits; individuals compare the risk of a situation to its related benefits daily (Schactman, 1994). Given what appears to be implicit risk-benefit analysis with participants, additional investigation could be helpful. In addition, as all of the participants in this study indicated some sense of empowerment from using the apps, exploring the area of empowerment as it relates to using apps seems especially beneficial.

Two themes that arose from this study related to taking more risks and the dangers associated with using the apps. At least two of the participants discussed the precautions they took when using the apps. Due to the potential for danger, it could help to understand more about the precautions individuals take when using these apps. A simple, "What precautions do you take, if any?" could be posed to help to obtain more descriptions of the safety measures individuals put into place when using the apps for online or offline sexual purposes.

One other predominant theme that emerged from the participants relating to motivations was the desire for connection. However, when themes relating to risks began to emerge, a majority of the participants indicated that the apps impede deeper connections in some way. Given that the participants described wanting to connect with others, the use of apps to accomplish this goal seems conflicting. Further exploring what seems like contrary perspectives may be beneficial. A potential question to ask may be: "Given the desire to connect with other people, but the conflicting perspective that apps impede deeper connections, why do you continue to use the apps?"

It may also be informative to duplicate the study with a more diverse sample population, including participants from other geographic locations, racial and ethnic backgrounds, ages, identified gender, and various sexual identities/orientations. It should be noted that individuals were not asked for their sexual orientation. However, two of the eight participants verbalized identifying as bisexual and one participant identified as pansexual. Potential research questions may be: "Are experiences different between participants of different racial/ethnic, sexual identities/orientations, identified gender, or geographical locations?" and "Do experiences differ between various age groups?"

Finally, several of the participants vocalized beginning to use the apps in their adolescent years. It would be beneficial to explore this type of research with a younger population to see if any new themes or information emerge. As developmental needs and desires change as individuals grow older, it would be interesting to determine if motivations change as individuals age. There was some indication that sexual behaviors changed as individuals used the apps. However, it was not clear whether the change resulted from using the apps or individuals

becoming more mature. Future research could explore this aspect and whether the ways in which the apps are used changed from adolescence to young adulthood.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the experiences of young adults who use mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. This qualitative study also sought to understand the motivations for using the apps and the risks and benefits associated with use. The study utilized the young adult (18–25 years old) population to illustrate experiences lacking from current literature.

Data were collected from eight participates during individual, semi-structured interviews completed via phone or online due to the coronavirus pandemic. As a result of the analysis, 14 themes emerged that related to the three research questions. The participants described how they used mobile applications, including sexual exploration, casual sex, looking for a romantic partner, and inadvertently developing friendships. The participants identified motivations for using the apps, including convenience, connecting with others, and seeking attention. Finally, the participants discussed the risks and benefits of using the apps, highlighting more potential risks than benefits, which aligns with previous research highlighting the risks of online and offline sexual behaviors.

The study's findings especially illustrate the desire for connection among the participants, as they all described experiences related to connecting with others. The study also showed the need to fulfill that desire in a more "convenient" way, given the busy lives most of the participants discussed. The study provides information on why individuals in this age group may continue to use the apps despite the potential risks. The study also highlights two of the benefits of using the apps. Clinicians who are aware of the motivations of individuals who are using these

apps will be able to provide beneficial counseling techniques to address the needs, concerns, and desires of clients, especially when the risks of use outweigh the benefits.

The rich participant descriptions in this qualitative study provided valuable insight into this phenomenon, and the researcher is hopeful that this study will facilitate additional research that can contribute to the research already available and provide clinicians with information necessary to effectively navigate working with individuals in the young adult population who are using mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes.

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Appendix A-Interview Guide

1. What do you think of technology as it relates to sex, dating, and intimacy?

2. Has technology been helpful for you in meeting people for romantic or dating relationships?

3. What values influence choosing to use or not use mobile applications for sexual purposes?

4. Do other people's opinions factor into whether you choose to use these applications? If so, how?

5. Describe your use of mobile applications for sexual purposes.

6. What have been some of the negative consequences of utilizing these apps?

7. What have been some of the positive aspects of utilizing these apps?

8. What do you think is good about these types of apps, if anything?

9. What do you think is bad about these types of apps, if anything?

10. Have your sexual behaviors changed since using mobile applications, and how so?

11. Is there anything you think I should know about your experiences utilizing mobile apps for sexual purposes that I did not ask?

12. What interested you in participating in this study?

Appendix B-Recruitment Flyer

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
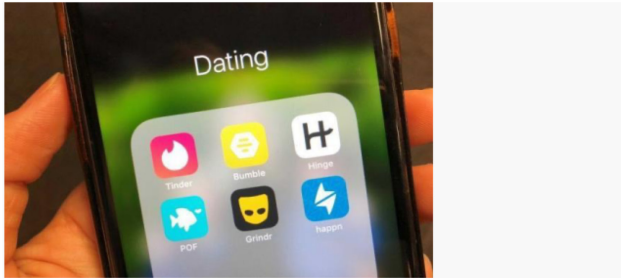
PARTICIPATION REQUESTED!

STUDY- TECHNOLOGY AND PLEASURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON USING MOBILE APPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE AND OFFLINE SEXUAL PURPOSES

Are you a male or female between the ages of 18 and 25?

Have you used mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes (such as viewing pornography or meeting partners online for sex) in the last five years?

If so, and you are comfortable talking about your experiences, you may qualify to participate in my dissertation research study. The research will be conducted via a 45 minute to 1-hour interview.

RESEARCHER INFO: GABRIELLA LOCKE, LPC, CRC, PHD CANDIDATE

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY- COUNSELOR EDUCATION & SUPERVISION PROGRAM

Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. If you are interested and want to participate, please contact me at locke@duq.edu or

All participants who complete the interview process will receive a $15 Wal-Mart, Amazon, or Target gift card.

Appendix C-Email Requesting Participants and Social Media Post

Email to Universities Requesting Participants

As a doctoral candidate in Duquesne University's Counselor Education and Supervision program, I am conducting a descriptive study to better understand how mobile applications are utilized for online and offline sexual purposes (such as viewing pornography, meeting partners online for sex, etc.). I am interested in this research with the hope that it will provide information regarding public health issues related to technology-facilitated sexual behavior, as well as assist mental health clinicians in navigating the world of cyberspace with clients in this age group. I am contacting you because you are listed as the [position] for [insert program name]. If possible, could you please distribute the flyer describing the study, its intent, and requirements for participation? Participants must be over the age of 18 years old and interviews can be done in person, via phone, or utilizing a HIPAA-compliant online platform. Thank you in advance for your assistance. This study has been approved by Duquesne's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Email to Participant Explaining Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study that seeks to investigate the experiences of individuals who have utilized mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. This is research is being conducted by a doctoral candidate to complete the dissertation process in a Counselor Education and Supervision program at Duquesne University. You are being asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Attached to this email you will find the informed consent document for the study that explains, in detail, the purpose of the study and other important details. If you are interested in participating, please review the consent form and contact the researcher (with the provided contact information) to schedule an interview. This study has been approved by Duquesne's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Social Media Post

I am currently recruiting participants for my dissertation study, which seeks to investigate the experiences of individuals who have utilized mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes (such as viewing pornography, meeting partners online for sex, etc.). Please review the flyer attached to this post. Interviews can be done in person, via phone, or online utilizing a HIPAA-compliant platform. Thank you in advance. This study has been approved by Duquesne's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Appendix D-Informed Consent

Duquesne University

600 FORBES AVENUE   PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:

Technology and Pleasure: A Qualitative Study on Using Mobile Applications for Online and Offline Purposes

INVESTIGATOR:
Gabriella E. Locke, LPC,
CRC Duquesne University
Doctoral Candidate
School of Education-Department of Counseling,
Psychology, and Special Education
lockeg@duq.edu

ADVISOR:
David Delmonico, Ph.D.
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and
Special Education delmonico@duq.edu;
(412) 396-4032

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
This study is being performed as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE:
You are being asked to participate in a research project that is investigating the experiences of males and females between the ages of

18 and 25 who utilize mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. In order to qualify for participation, you must: be between the ages of 18 and 25 and have actively used mobile applications for online or offline sexual purposes within the past five years.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

If you provide your consent to participate, you will be asked to: read and sign the informed consent, acknowledging your rights as a participant in this study. You will be asked to participate in an interview that is expected to last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked demographic questions (e.g., age, gender), as well as questions related to your use of mobile applications (e.g., How do you utilize mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes) for online and offline purposes. The interview will be held in person, or via phone, or online using Thera-Link (a video-conferencing software that has a high level of security to ensure your confidentiality). The interview will be audio recorded for later transcription. In addition, the researcher will be taking field notes during the interview. As a participant, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript and emerging themes for accuracy.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:
There is minimal risk associated with participating in this study. Some risks include feeling uncomfortable during the interview process as you are being asked to discuss your experiences using mobile applications for online and offline sexual purposes. Risks are not expected to exceed those that may be encountered in your daily life when discussing your sexuality. If you become uncomfortable at any time, you may end the interview immediately. The benefits of this study are to use your experiences to help us better understand how young adults use technology for sexual purposes and evaluate the risks and benefits of such use.

COMPENSATION:
Upon completion of the interview process, each participant will receive

a $15 Wal-Mart, Amazon, or Target gift card. The gift card will be distributed to you at the end of the interview process. If you choose to withdraw from the interview process before completion, you will not receive a gift card.
 There is no cost for you to participate in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible. All data that has identifiable information will be destroyed five years after the study is completed. Transcripts and field notes will be coded utilizing numerical combinations to ensure confidentiality. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Written materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic materials will be password protected. Flash drives, external memory devices, cloud storage, and recording devices will also be password protected. In addition, any publications or presentations about this research will only use data that is combined together with all subjects; therefore, no one will be able to determine how you responded. All electronic recordings will be destroyed immediately after the transcription process is completed. All written data will be destroyed five years after the study, aligning with HIPAA guidelines for document disposal.

Thera-Link online software uses methods that are in line with HIPAA standards in order to ensure the security and privacy of participant data. If Thera-Link is used for your interview, the researcher will schedule an online "appointment." In order to attend the appointment, the participant is provided with a code, allowing them to access the website.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:
You are under no obligation to start or continue this study. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence by notifying the researcher via email or telling them at any time before, during, or after the interview. If you choose to withdraw after you have engaged in the

interview, the researcher will not use or make any references to data from your interview. In addition, all information gathered from you as part of your study will be destroyed.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:
A summary of the results of this study will be provided to at no cost. You may request this summary by contacting the researchers and requesting it. The information provided to you will not be your individual responses, but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:
Any information collected that can identify you will not be used for future research studies, nor will it be provided to other researchers.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:
I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date