‘Doing Love’ Online: Performative Gender and the Urban Everyday

by

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Abstract

While much has been said about the role of online dating in transforming the nature of intimate relationships and love in Canada and beyond (Bauman, 2003; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Brym and Lenton, 2001) there has been no systematic study of the pursuit of hetero-romantic love online as a practice of both the everyday and of gendered selfing. In January 2007, I began an eight-month investigation into the everyday practices of urban professionals online dating in Vancouver, Canada to study what role new media play in producing particular kinds of gendered selves through the pursuit of love online.

By engaging with critical readings of feminist theories to explore the ways love has evolved as a theoretical concept and an enduring, increasingly technologically-mediated social practice, I forward the concept of 'doing love' as a contemporary way individuals perform gender online. I argue that the pursuit of hetero-romantic love, that is, 'doing love' online, is a contemporary gendered selfing project that is both individualized and routinized as part of a larger gendered discursive field that seeks to position heterosexuality, as tied to hetero-romantic love, as natural, necessary, and inevitable. Gendered selfing, through the pursuit of hetero-romantic love, requires coherence and approval by others and is in this sense policed. I demonstrate how this policing is apparent in the online dating practices of my participants which include filtering, fat phobia and fat authenticity, the management of inappropriate aphrodisia, and contingent constructions of properly made 'homes' as the outcome or triumph of heterosexual online dating pursuits.

Gender emerges in this study as a by-product of the regulatory force of constitutive hetero-romantic love pursuits that necessitate appropriately gendered bodies and being deemed suitable for heterosexual coupling. By exploring love as a performative and orienting force that is uniquely articulated through the performance of gender online, this study enriches understandings of gendered practices of selfing, as realized through engagement with new media. It thus illustrates the enduring and persistent nature of gender as an organizing, and at times oppressive, force in our everyday lives.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Table of Contents iii
Acknowledgements v
Dedication vi
Chapter One. 'Doing' Love Online: Performative Gender and the Urban Everyday 1
Chapter Two. Literature Review 10
2.1. 'Doing Love' as a Technologically-Mediated Project of the Self 10
2.2. Online Dating – The Story So Far 11
2.3. Debates in the Online Dating Literature 13
2.4. Role of the Self and the Everyday in Online Dating Scenarios 16
2.5. Gaps in the Online Dating Literature 19
2.6. Cyberselfing 21
2.7. 'Doing Love' as an Aspect of Cyberselfing 23
2.8. Feminist Theories of Love 25
2.9. The Evolution of Feminist Love Theorizing 28
2.10. Rethinking Love 35
2.11. Conclusions 38
Chapter Three. Methodology 40
3.1. Introduction 40
3.2. Why Ethnography? 40
3.3. Research 44
3.4. Ethnographic Field 'Site' 46
3.5. Participants 50
3.6. Researcher Positionality and Ethics 55
3.7. More on My Positionality 59
3.8. Implicating the Researcher in Research about 'Intimate' Topics 61
3.9. Embodying the Thin 'Ideal' 64
Chapter Four. Online Dating As Practices of Everyday Life 66
4.1. Introduction 66
4.2. Let Me Take You on an Online Date 71
4.3. A 'Typical' Online Date 72
4.3.1. Task #1: Creating a Profile 72
4.3.2. Task #2: Initial Contact 75
4.3.3. Task #3: Selecting/Filtering 78
4.3.4. Task #4: First Date 81

4.4. Conclusions 87
Chapter Five. The Struggle for Authenticity in Online Dating Practices 89
5.1. Introduction 89
5.2. Framing the Self 90
5.3. Projects of the Self 93
5.4. Categorizing the 'Other' 94
5.5. Filtering Fragmented Selves 99
5.6. Contingent Authenticities 107
Chapter Six. Managing 'Excess' Online 110
6.1. Introduction 110
6.2. Daniel's Story 112
6.3. Multiple Excesses as Inappropriate 'Aphrodisia' 114
6.4. Abject Pleasures and the Quest for Appropriately Gendered Selves 117
6.5. Gendered Stereotypes: Reformatted to Fit Your Screen 119
6.6. Reversal of Fortune: How Women Re-Gender Online Dating 123
Chapter Seven. Homing In on 'Happy Endings' 126
7.1. Introduction 126
7.2. More than Multi-dating: The Evolution of a Harem 128
7.3. Escaping Slut: Nicola's Struggle Through Desire 133
7.4. Stigmatized Sexuality 138
7.5. Domestic Desire as Anathema 140
Chapter Eight. Conclusions 146
8.1. Doing Love as Part of the Performative Urban Everyday 146
8.2. Doing Gender/'Doing Love' 146
8.3. The Effects of Biomedia on Love 154
8.4. What's Love Got to Do With It? 156
8.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research 158
8.6. Final Thoughts 160
References 162
Appendix A. Example of Newspaper/Website Ads 170
Appendix B. Interview Schedule 171
Appendix C. The Social Geography of Popular Vancouver Online Dating Websites 173
Appendix D. Participant Demographics 176
Appendix E. Ethics Approval 178

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Chapter One. 'Doing' Love Online: Performative Gender and the Urban Everyday

"We must purge ourselves of the divine and prepare to enter fully into the flesh. We must purge ourselves of the natural and prepare to enter fully into what we ourselves have built, the man-made, the artificial, the artifice, the construct, the trick, the joke, the song.
Yes, she murmurs. The flesh, the living flesh.
What is apparent is what there is. The hidden world is a lie"

Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, 1999

We live in a world not only **structured** but **saturated** by technology and gender.

Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert, *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life*, 1997

The machine is not an **it** to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment.

Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 1991

Once considered the province of the hopelessly nerdy, online dating has gone mainstream. In 2006, the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a non-profit 'fact tank' that reports on internet trends affecting the lives of Americans, reported that some 31% of American adults say they know someone who has used a dating website and 15% of American adults – about 30 million people – say they know someone who has been in a long term relationship or married someone he or she met online (Madden and Lenhart, 2006). In 2001, Brym and Lenton (2001) reported that online dating in Canada was "going mainstream" (46). They explain that "going mainstream" implies growth in numbers and suggests that online dating attracts "regular

people," or at the very least, people who use the internet[1] regularly (ibid. 49). These statistics about online dating are perhaps a far cry from the days when online dating was (and perhaps still is) pop-culturally understood as the last bastion of hope for so-called computer geeks and hermits. Online dating has evolved in the past ten years in popular conceptualizations from a stigmatized solitary pursuit to a new and presumably widely accepted, form of meeting potential dates and mates from a pool of people one would not, according to my research participants, "have otherwise met." Academic investigations into online dating centre largely on chronicling the phenomenon as new, different, playful, innovative, and at times problematic (see Daneback, 2006; Whitty, 2004; and Whitty & Carr, 2006). Some projects focus specifically on the successes and failures of this emergent form of technologically-mediated relationship formation as well as the emotion-work and levels of commitment involved in this seemingly "new" dating form (see Ben-Ze'ev, 2004 and Baker, 2005). Some projections about the future possibilities for meeting, mating, and dating in this technologically-mediated manner consider online dating as a signal of the "birth of a new society" (Brym and Lenton, 2001: 5), but one that should be heeded cautiously because in this new "liquid modern" world, the unsatisfied computer dater can "always press delete," meaning that connections, romance, and love are all the more "fragile" and fleeting (Bauman, 2003: xxi).

While love has been considered in the study of online dating, there has been no systematic study of the pursuit of love by way of online dating as a practice of both the everyday and of gendered selfing. In January 2007, I began an eight-month-long investigation into the

[1] The 'i' in internet is not capitalized throughout this analysis in order to acknowledge recent scholarship that attends to the internet (which is now even recognized by some as 'internets' or 'interwebs') as not one monolithic space or an entity that influences its users through sheer exposure (Baym et al., 2004: 300), but rather promotes a vision of the internet that privileges its use. Baym et al. (2004) suggest that it is the pursuit of 'social and cultural goals' by and through the internet that should provide the "starting point for analysis rather than totalizing measures of all Internet use" (ibid. 301).

everyday practices of urban professionals online dating in Vancouver, Canada in order study what role new media play in producing particular kinds of gendered selves through the pursuit of love online and relatedly, what this can tell us about the contemporary meanings of love as a useful theoretical concept within feminism and an enduring social practice. Beginning with Life on the Screen: Identity and the Age of the Internet (1995) by sociologist Sherri Turkle, the question of how machines enable us to think about our identities and ourselves in different ways has attracted the attention of social scientists (Matlow, 2000: 167). Because computers extend the perimeters of our normal day-to-day lives across a whole range of social relations and cultural practices (ibid.), it is crucial to study new media in the context of lived experience. Love emerges as the prevalent social practice/motivational goal that guides the heterosexual dating practices of the forty participants included in this study. Out of my forty heterosexually-identified participants, ninety-five percent (thirty-eight individuals) were motivated to online date to find their "soul-mate" or life-long marriageable partner. While at first glance, online daters looking for love may not seem out of the ordinary, it is significant that a study about online dating generally (defined as meeting for a variety of relational purposes through the internet) attracted all heterosexually-identified people with the common goal of meeting a soul-mate (especially when the call for participants was far more general as illustrated by Appendix A). Further, the ways discourses of love, or significant partnering, were outlined by my participants had a great deal to do with the desire for intelligibly gendered performances of self (and other) that were uniquely articulated because of the mediated nature of online dating. Online dating requires careful attention to selfing in dating scenarios – practices that are often left unspoken or taken-for-granted – such as how one presents a coherent and desirable heterosexual identity for others and what one looks for as desirous in the presentations and

performances of gendered identity in others. A look to the literature also indicates that the pursuit of monogamous, lasting love is not necessarily understood to be the goal/outcome/motivation for online dating. As previously mentioned, online dating is articulated largely as new, experimental, playful, and, at times, threatening to patterns of marriage and cohabitation more generally (Bauman, 2003; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004: 235-6). For example, sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman (2003) and philosophers such as Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (2004) warn us that if we fail to "integrate cyberspace successfully into our romantic relationships…it will cost us dearly" (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004: 248). Similarly, news reportage on online dating (and now increasingly on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook as they become more popular and widely used) warns us about the sinister possibilities of these online connections amidst lurking con artists and sex predators.[2] These popular culture and academic constructions of online dating as potentially threatening to human sociality de-center love as the goal and situate love seekers online as potentially misguided and/or naïve.

In contrast to ideas about love being threatened or as the obvious goal or outcome of online dating, this study situates the pursuit of heterosexual love online as embedded in practices of the self that contribute to the constitution of intelligibly gendered, racialized, classed, and aged subjects. This kind of everyday, often mundane search for love provides a unique window onto selfing practices that are largely left unspoken, taken-for-granted, and thereby granted the status of 'natural' acts by stable subjects. Discourses of love that emerge are largely couched in the "pragmatics of desire" (Constable, 2003: 133), meaning that the identified (and purportedly different) desires of both men and women in my study coalesce around the quest for love.

[2] The Canadian newsmagazine W-Five (a CTV production) produced an episode entitled "Risky Business" (2007) which purportedly looks at the "[m]illions of Canadians use Internet-dating sites to look for love. Some find their mates; some find disappointment. And some find something far more dangerous - con artists and sex predators lurking in the shadows of cyberspace" (http://www.mcintyre.ca/details.cfm?ID=14028 found on February 15, 2009).

However this love is aimed at and reserved for particular kinds of properly gendered subjects which, in practices of online dating, "(re)produce and (re)inscribe certain structures of gendered power and inequality" (ibid. 144). The pursuit of love online is not seen as a benign or benevolent human motivation but rather one way through which emotions such as love can be seen as performative and orienting (Ahmed, 2004). Orientation in Ahmed's usage is about posing the question of "the 'orientation' of 'sexual orientation' as a phenomenological question" (2006: 1); that is, seeing sexual orientation as a "matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with" (ibid.). Men and women in my study perform particular kinds of masculinity and femininity in online spaces that will best position them as desirable heterosexual subjects. This selfing (and concomitant othering) is heavily policed and monitored, both by the online dating interfaces employed, and by the other online daters who ignore, reject, and at times humiliate those improperly gendered daters they might happen to meet. In this way, online dating practices exist in what Ahmed calls "affective economies" which orient some objects toward and against each other (2004: 15). These "affective economies" are not neutral, and as I will demonstrate, circulate in online spaces in particularly poignant ways that have the underlying effect of "straightening" (2006: 92). Ahmed explains that,

> Spaces and bodies become straight as an effect of repetition. That is, the repetition of actions, which tend toward some objects, shapes the "surface" of spaces. Spaces become straight, which allows straight bodies to extend beyond them, such that the vertical axis appears in line with the axis of the body…the repetition of actions (as tending toward certain objects) shapes the contours of the body. Our body takes the shape of this repetition; *we get stuck in certain alignments as of effect of this work*…Spaces as well as bodies are the effects of such straightening devices (2006: 92).

Further, Ahmed examines how the objects of emotions (people, places, things) – in the case of online daters: gendered subjects, dating sites, and new media communications technologies – can

be ‘ideals’ that motivate bodies to take certain shape through their approximate (and I would suggest, appropriate) resemblance to such ideals (ibid.).

With this in mind, I situate this study of online dating in the ‘doings’ of love – that is, the practices of online dating as the pursuit of heterosexual love that is performative and orienting. This works embeds the pursuit of love online in the context of everyday technologically-mediated life that produces particular kinds of gendered selves. These selves are not the result of extant sexed and gendered socio-cultural identities. Rather, these seemingly stable gendered identities are the result of these constitutive performative acts of love; making them ‘love doings’ that articulate the boundaries of ‘love beings.’ I situate my work in Ahmed’s (2004) distinction between love-as-having and love-as-being (126). Ahmed examines the between self-love and object-love in her exploration of the cultural politics of love which includes multicultural love, a love of difference that seeks to create a national ideal that others fail (ibid. 126). While this study is not specifically about the nation as such, Ahmed’s ideas notion of love as both ‘having’ and ‘being’ are significant to the cultural politics of online dating practices in Vancouver. In the hetero-romantic love projects of my participants, practices emerge that consolidate coherent and intelligible heteronormative identifications deemed desirable in the affective economies of online dating sites. Quoting Butler, Ahmed (2006) explains that heterosexual genders “form themselves through the renunciation of the *possibility* of homosexuality, as a foreclosure *which produces a field of heterosexual objects* at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love” (Butler cited in Ahmed [2006]: 87, emphasis added by Ahmed). Ahmed explains that this demonstrates the extent to which the “nearness” of love objects is not causal or neutral but rather that compulsory heterosexuality produces a “field of heterosexual objects” by the very requirement that the subject “give up” the possibility of other love objects (ibid. 87).

To love and be loved in this formulation is here about "fulfilling one's fantasy image of 'who would like to be' through who one 'has' (Ahmed, 2004: 124). What one has here refers to love objects with similar powerful identifications that are prized most by their approximation of hegemonic ideals (of heterosexual and whiteness in Ahmed's example). According to Ahmed (2004), "the need for approval of a love object from someone with whom one already identifies shows how value 'can be bestowed' only through others, such that the 'bond' of love lends me to others" (124).

Ahmed's complication of the forcible "directions" of love opens up space for thinking about how certain 'love doings,' in this case, online dating practices, facilitate certain individuals toward and against each other in heteronormatively gendered ways. I want to further Ahmed's understanding of love as an orienting and performative force by understanding love as a doing that orients certain gendered subjects toward and away from each other by and through the use of certain technologies, in this case, the new media technologies of the internet. In this way, I see the pursuit of online love as consisting of constitutive performative acts of gender (Butler, 1990) that provide a window onto how individuals self in contemporary society. This is a different conceptualization of the role of love in the lives of individuals, especially by way of feminist theories of love which will be explored further in the next chapter. Love in this way is not understood as the property of individuals (to either wield, accept, reject, or give), but as social and cultural practices which Ahmed (2004), and many other sociologists and anthropologists (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990; White, 1993: 29; Rosaldo, 1984: 138, 141; Hochschild, 1983: 5; Kemper, 1978: 1; Katz, 1999: 2; Williams, 2001: 73; Collins, 1990: 27 cited in Ahmed), have noted. Ahmed (2004) further calls our attention to a reconfiguration of the subjects and objects of love by suggesting that, instead of residing in "beings," affective economies are produced as

effects of the circulation of objects, producing their very possibilities for being (8). Selfing, as noted above, through loving identifications, bonds, or orientations requires coherence and approval by others however – it is in this sense policed. This policing becomes apparent in the online dating practices of urban professionals in Vancouver through practices of filtering, fat phobia and fat authenticity, the management of inappropriate aphrodisia, and contingent constructions of properly made "homes" as the outcome or triumph of heterosexual online dating pursuits – all important components of this analysis of online dating. Love produces ideal objects (or affection and use) and the restriction (policing) of these ideal objects necessarily involves a process of identification or selfing (ibid. 124).

Doing love online means that gendered selves are both consolidated and constrained through the use of new media technologies in the twenty-first century. Expanding our vision of love beyond love as a human goal, a naïve pursuit, or the "natural" outcome of online endeavours to find a soul-mate necessitates thinking about love doings as constitutive of love beings, both in practice and in theory. I understand and complicate love doings in the following central ways in this thesis. After a review of the literature that deals with feminist formulations of love and a chapter that deals with methodological decision-making in Chapters Two and Three, Chapter Four explores how love doings online contribute to the constitution of intelligibly gendered subjects in the "matrix of intelligibility" that Butler articulates (1990: 24). This chapter deals with online dating as a set of everyday practices or tasks; that is, it illustrates how online dating emerges as a knowable set of processes that are common to the online daters who participated in this study and the people they met and dated by using the internet. By embedding online dating practices in the everyday lives of urban professionals in Vancouver this study seeks to centralize how gendered selves emerge by and through the acts of pursuing love through new

media technologies in often mundane, quotidian ways. Chapter Five begins my three part exploration into love doings that emerge from these everyday practices of online dating. Love doings as constitutive acts of gendered selves is highlighted here through an examination of women's practices of fat authenticity in online dating situations. These practices exemplify a strategy or technique of the self (Foucault, 1985) that resists the normalizing practices of filtering and fat phobia which they experience in their heterosexual dating encounters, both online and off. Fat authenticity, as subjectification (ibid.) emerges as both enabling and disabling for women who negotiate the boundaries of their bodies online. Chapter Six looks at how men negotiate certain kinds of emotional labour when online dating. By retrieving gendered and sexualized stereotypes of women they seek to date or have sex with, men have to negotiate their own "inappropriate aphrodisia," in order to successfully construct themselves as properly gendered heterosexual life partners. Chapter Seven considers subversions by women who seek to deploy strategies of differently defined sexuality that are digitally enabled in ways that offer the possibilities for both reinscribing and re-gendering aspects of online dating. Chapter Eight concludes with considerations of this study's limitations, contributions, and possibilities for future research into love doings both online and off.

Chapter Two. Literature Review

2.1. 'Doing Love' as a Technologically-Mediated Project of the Self

Technology and gender collide in many interesting and provocative ways in contemporary culture. This thesis is concerned with illustrating one of these contemporary collisions through an investigation of how the search for hetero-romantic love online serves to link everyday practices of new media use with everyday practices of gendered selfing. In making the connection between media use and projects of the self, this thesis serves as an illustrative example of the ways heteronormative gender is "done" in contemporary society and how it is maintained as an enduring and intelligible social identity. This study aligns with ongoing investigations into the interrelationship between gender and technology and seeks to analyze "the interrelations of gender and technology by asking how the terms of gender – that is, the means by which we conceptualize masculinity and femininity – are embodied in technologies, and, conversely, how technologies influence our notions of gender" (Terry and Calvert, 1997: 6). Because everyday practices of the self can be located within both engagements with technologies and engagements with gendered practices of love-seeking, online dating as a contemporary social practice that combines these two aspects of everyday self-making stands as a unique window onto the practices by which gender is both made invisible and central in the twenty-first century.

This literature review seeks to situate 'love doings,' that is, the performative practices by and through which individuals align with powerful modes of identification in order to connect themselves with the objects of their hetero-romantic desire, as practices of the self that are intimately connected to the interrelated projects of selfing online and selfing by way of love. My research is both exploratory and interpretive. It is exploratory insofar as little research exists

about the contemporary practice of online dating, especially in Canada. I explore online dating as a relatively novel phenomenon and identify the key characteristics of online dating as it is currently practiced, thereby shedding light on a phenomenon about which little is known. I go beyond exploration and into interpretation however, by attempting to understand two interrelated sociological processes: the processes of gendered selfing that occurs in online dating and the concomitant constructions of hetero-romantic love as a motivational goal and gendered ideal. These two processes work in concert by and through online dater's engagements with internet technologies to produce intelligibly heteronormatively gendered selves through the search for love online.

2.2. Online Dating – The Story So Far

Focused attention on online dating from social scientists and philosophers began in a concerted way around 2004 (with the notable Canadian exception of Brym and Lenton's 2001 Love Online: A Report on Digital Dating in Canada which will be discussed in more detail in what follows), signalled by philosopher Aaron Ben-Ze'ev's work on emotions and the internet entitled Love Online: Emotions and the Internet (2004). In this early piece, Ben-Ze'ev argues that the "appearance of computer-mediated communication has introduced a new type of discourse and consequently a new type of personal relationship has developed" (2004: 1). Ben-Ze'ev's assertion sets up online dating as exemplifying a new direction for discourse and social action. It illustrates the framework and direction for later work on online dating that subsequently emerged. That is, two predominant scholarly discourses about online dating emerged as the result of this thinking that 1) online communication and interaction means that lives and selves are being fundamentally upended; and 2) online dating necessitates a new and

different understanding of romantic relationships – not only how they are formed – but rather what goals, outcomes, and formulations intimate relationships emerge through online dating.

It is by now apparent that online dating has indeed transformed the lives of many who have used the dating sites available. Statistics alone demonstrate the extent to which people are going online to seek hetero-romantic love. As Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) cite, in 2003, at least 29 million Americans (two out of five singles) used an online dating service (Gershberg, 2004); in 2004, on average, there were 40 million unique visitors to online dating sites each month in the U.S. (CBC News, 2004 as cited in Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, 2006: np). The relevance of Ben-Ze'ev's assertion that online dating or, more generally, the search for hetero-romantic love online is increasing was certainly sound at the time of his writing. However, Ben-Ze'ev's notion that a new kind of personal relationship was forming is an activation of the dystopian new media discourse that, according to Lister et al. (2003), is "usually used in discussions about new media that see developments in technology as primarily malign" (386). This characterization is particularly evident in Ben-Ze'ev's discussion about the future possibilities of relationship formation in cyberspace. He contends that the "test of the Internet will be whether it can complement ordinary social activities, or whether it will merely replace them with less valuable activities...Society faces a great challenge if it is to integrate cyberspace successfully into our romantic relationships. It also faces great danger, for, if we fail to meet that challenge, it will cost us dearly" (2004: 248). These dire warnings are evidence of the discursive understandings of the internet that characterized the moment in which Ben-Ze'ev was writing. This dystopian discourse centered on the fundamental binary of online/offline which is related to the embodiment/disembodied debates of the late 1980s and 1990s.

2.3. Debates in the Online Dating Literature

Ben-Ze'ev's reference to online relationships is specific to relationships that are formed and largely stay online. This early type of computer-mediated communication – which of course still exists today – does not characterize the online dating practices of contemporary online daters. The kinds of relationships Ben-Ze'ev describes are defined as "cyberlove relationships" which are "romantic relationships consisting mainly of computer-mediated communication...the partner is physically remote and is to a certain extent anonymous" (2004: 4). This formulation of the quest for hetero-romantic love takes for granted the binary division between offline and online. People engaging in cyberlove (and cybersex) in this formulation get to "make [history] exactly as they please" because cyberspace is "similar to fictional space in the sense that in both cases the flight into virtual reality is not so much a denial of reality as a form of exploring and playing with it" (ibid. 3). Cyberspace here constitutes a "space" apart, a kind of "self-enclosed cyberian apartness" (Miller and Slater, 2000: 7) and this formulation buttresses the assumption that online activity is not a part of everyday social life and action. This offline/online distinction embeds online action in a "fantasy" (Arvidsson, 2006) realm of virtuality. This discourse of new media removes online interaction from embodied social practice and is embedded in a discourse of disembodied identity play or "incorporeal interaction" (Dery, 1994: 3) that sees engagement in cyberspace as an opportunity to play with and transform identities. In these ways then, distinct boundaries between offline and online engagement resulted in imaginings of the self as mutable, ever-changing, and dynamic, de-linked from 'real-world' boundaries and belongings. They failed to recognize the fundamental power of the body as both "a physical form and a discursive configuration apprehending the physical" (Campbell, 2006: 6). Further, as Campbell argues, "it is this discursive configuring that accompanies individuals into these virtual environments and

shapes online interaction" (ibid. 6). This formulation of cyberspace and the relationships and identities that are born out of this kind of online engagement therefore attends to a discourse that delinks the "places" and "practices" of new media. Miller and Slater (2000) argue in contrast that "these spaces are important as part of everyday life, not apart from it" (7).

Ben-Ze'ev was following a theoretical trajectory in what Lister et al. (2003) argue is a traditional trope in new media studies that begins with theories of the "virtual age" as promising to transform the everyday, or to take us to realms far distant from the everyday (248). These approaches are characterized by their tendency to define themselves in opposition to the embodied and material: identity versus corporeality, the virtual versus the real, and play versus consumption (ibid. 248). This work was forged by Sherri Turkle (1996) and Alluquere Rosanne Stone (1995) to name a few; these theorists understood the internet as part of a new virtual age that heralded a time when one could manipulate identity through role-play and online engagement with others. Turkle for example explains that the "self is not only decentered but multiplied without limit" online and that cyberspace gives people the "unparalleled opportunity to play with one's identity and to 'try out' new ones" (1996: 356). This understanding of online selfing informs Ben-Ze'ev's ideas about what the "virtual age" has to offer in terms of a utopian versus dystopian understanding of the possibilities for bodies, beings, and belongings in cyberspace. Informed by this virtual age discourse Ben-Ze'ev set the stage for investigations into the nature of online relationships formation. Because of its entrenchment into the offline/online binary however, his understanding falls short of an explanation about what happens when online daters choose to meet.

The psychological and sociological literature on online dating picks up at the very spot that Ben-Ze'ev leaves off by thematically exploring notions of deception and authenticity in

online dating scenarios. This deception theme, while cognizant of the shortcomings of the "virtual age" theories that expounded limitless identity play and disembodied "cyberian apartness," demonstrates the extent to which online dating scholars approached the internet as "space" primarily characterized by anonymity. Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) are noteworthy here in that their work reflects an understanding of the "complex ways in which online and offline experience, or the real and virtual, bleed into each other" (Campbell, 2006: 12). Their acknowledgement that "the goal of many online dating participants is an intimate relationship" means that the authors anticipate how online activity will affect offline outcomes. This is why they understand the online dater as "more motivated to engage in authentic self discourses" (Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, 2006: np). This understanding challenges "virtual age" discourses which tend toward disembodiment and disavowal of the engagement between the "online" and the "off." Curiously they still attend to deception discourses which belies a confusion about the necessity for honesty in identity construction online. This emphasis on the 'truth' of one's self is a significant theme in more recent online dating literature that seeks to determine the extent to which online daters deceitfully or inaccurately self-present (Lucid, 2009). This theme of deception speaks to the extent that ideas about selfing are constructed in the literature as distinct projects offline and on. This in turn affects ideas about the malleability of self-making due to the sharp distinction between what happens in "real life" and "in cyberspace" – debates continue despite critiques of this kind of thinking. Kendall (2006) for example argues that discourses of identity transcendence and disembodiment are positions of privilege that situate and reinscribe the unmarked white, heterosexual, middle- to upper-class male as the "typical" online user.

2.4. Role of the Self and the Everyday in Online Dating Scenarios

My study attends to ways self/identity construction online is intimately connected to the everyday identities and realities of individuals' everyday lives. Like Campbell (2004), I am informed by both poststructuralist and feminist thought and my understanding of the body as central to engagements online acts as a critique of earlier work that sought to delink the material from the discursive. Like Campbell (2006), I understand the body as both of physical presence (bodies occupy physical space and have materiality) and discursive configuration or performance (bodies also occupy discursive space and have expressive significance) (12). This interest in bodies as aspects of selves dissuades me from interest in the deception discourse because the deception discourse takes us away from the material realities of everyday lives that online dating is deeply entrenched in. My work does however find relevance to the authenticity discourse because of what I have found to be the veracity and power of identifications online. Instead of seeing cyberspace as a space apart, I align with discourses of online dating that understand these practices as an intimate part of the everyday. These discourses of embodied materiality build on work by Miller and Slater (2000) who situate cyberspace and everyday space as deeply implicated in one another – "continuous with and embedded in other social spaces" and the identities and realities constructed therein (4).

Baker (2005), Whitty (2004), and Whitty and Carr (2006) lead the online dating scholarship that seeks to embed online dating in the everyday practices of online dating interface users. These scholars take seriously the notion that online and offline "realities" are intimately connected, primarily because online dating, in its current shape and form, moves from online "anonymous" meetings – similar to newspaper personals – to offline "dates." So then what do we mean when we say "online dating"? And how can these practices be understood as not only

embedded in the everyday lives of the users of this particular technology but also as constitutive of gendered selves in these everyday practices? Whitty et al. (2007) explain that earlier popular ways for singles to meet/find potential romantic partners online was through MUDs and MOOs (Multi-User Dungeons and object-oriented MUDs) (2). While these spaces were purely for play, soon "many of the players were playing another game – the game of love! [sic]" (ibid. 2). This form of online romance, along with chat rooms and newsgroups, was not originally designed or programmed for online matchmaking. Rather, online dating sites designed specifically for romance developed in the early 1990s, soon after the release of the first commercial web browser by Tim Berners-Lee (Whitty and Carr, 2006: 3). At this time individuals "began to embrace technology as a means of communication as well as a way to initiate and develop relationships" (ibid. 3). Because much of the interactive elements of the internet involved identity play (such as MUDs and MOOs mentioned above), it is perhaps unsurprising that theories at this time sought to delink physical identifications from "virtual reality" because these games encouraged users to "appear as characters and communicate with other characters online" (ibid. 2).

Theories of cyberspace at this time reflected the kind of identity – more specifically gender – play that was occurring in these online spaces. DeVoss (2007) explains how gender choices in MUD/MOO systems often offered (and still do) options such as neuter, male, female, either, plural and so forth (22). But DeVoss is careful to note that despite this gender play in some online spaces, the adoption of a different gender does little to change the actual gendered representations and realities of everyday life (ibid. 22). On the contrary, "rather than freeing us from gender codes, gender play often further solidifies gender, and reproduces gender codes by dramatising our attachment to them" (ibid.).

Further, when two people are motivated to find love online and use the internet to make concrete "real life" dates in hopes of finding a soul-mate or marriageable partner, then "true-to-life" or "authentic" identities or selves are the most favourable. Because individuals who use online dating sites are not engaging in "play" of any kind as was the practice in MUDs and MOOs, the amount of room for discrepancies in identity are minimal in online dating scenarios. Daneback (2006) explains in her investigation of love and sexuality on the internet that "if individuals would meet offline at some point [any identity manipulations] would be quite easily revealed" (36). She goes on to explain that any "manipulation or distortion of other parts of the personal fronts on the internet does not differ from how this is done offline, where one can control the information given to audiences" (ibid. 36). Ultimately, when the discourses of online dating moved from online "cyberlove" (to use Ben-Ze'ev's word) in the early part of the twenty-first century, to interactional engagements of the offline and the online "worlds," identities became more stable (largely because there appeared to be 'real world' implications to online actions), if not critically interrogated, in the online dating literature.

In his exploration of the online embodied experiences of gay men, Campbell (2006) insists that the body not only be understood as requisite for online interaction, but critically interrogated as a constitutive element of such interaction. Exploring the significance of the body in the online IRC (internet relay chat) channels for gay men, he points to how the body operates in this seemingly 'disembodied' space. Campbell's work illustrates that even though the body in these channels must be rendered into text, more specifically "stats" (physical characteristics such as height, weight, eye and hair colour) and should be easily mutable, there is considerable policing of these bodies as they are presented online (2006: 124). He explains that the "body

performed online through stats and various qualitative descriptors is desirable only as long as it is understood as corresponding to an actual physical body" (ibid. 124, emphasis in original).

Campbell's analysis takes the online dating literature further by asking for the body itself, as it is presented online, to be critically interrogated for its significant meanings and deployment. Rather than accepting that individuals may not be deceptive in their identifications due to "real world" or face-to-face interaction, he asks that we investigate how the "somatic remains always already present in online social relations" (ibid. 145). He further pushes researchers of online activity to explore the user's performative engagement with this "discursive apprehension of the physical" to understand the ways that "interactants [online] effectively integrate the body into their online activities" (ibid).

The purpose of my research is to demonstrate the ways that, even while not engaging in a offline/online dichotomy that allows for malleable selves online, online dating researchers have thus far failed to answer Campbell's call to understand the operation of discursive constructions of the body beyond the simple "stats" that online daters provide on their profiles. This failure leads to the lack of a sustained gender critique in the extant online dating literature, beyond research documenting what male and female online daters do different in their quest for hetero-romantic love online.

2.5. Gaps in the Online Dating Literature

No sustained feminist poststructural analysis of online dating exists to date. Gender is treated as a variable in extant research into online dating. This approach is best characterized by the early work of Brym and Lenton (2001) who documented the percentage of the Canadian

population who had tried online dating. The extent of their soci-demographic summary with regard to gender (and other identity variables) is as follows:

> The people who most often use online dating sites without intending to establish face-to-face relationships are women, people under the age of 30, and people who are single, married, and living common law. Those who most often use online dating sites to find sexual partners are men, people under the age of 25 or over the age of 59, people who are married or living common-law, Anglophone Quebecers, and gay men. Those who most often use online dating sites to find dates and establish a long-term relationship are single, married or divorced, and 30 years of age and older. Finally, those who most often use online dating services to find a marriage partner are single, widowed or divorced, and 30 years of age and older.

This information about the self gives views of the subject as stable and identities as fixed and knowable. This conceptualization of the subject characterizes other in-depth research literature on online dating. Whitty and Carr (2006) for example report their findings in a similar manner, identifying the ways men and women respectively misrepresent themselves (men at a higher rate than women). These authors attend to gendered preferences. For example, they document that more men than women placed importance on looks and also that men (47%) were much more likely than women (27%) to place importance on body size (130-1). These examples are obvious gendered phenomena that have not yet been critically examined. Gender here is left as a "stat" much as it is in online dating profiles, instead of being interrogated as a critically important aspect of selfing by and through new media technologies such as the internet. Baker (2005) similarly reports her findings on the outcomes of identity on meeting/matching online in an equally unproblematic way. When explicating what qualities attract people to each other online she fails to interrogate why men self-disclose more than women, beyond suggesting that if "socialization allows freer divulging of personal facts [and the use of the word 'fact' here is significant] for females than for males, perhaps the online world provides a safe place for men to share information, thoughts, and feelings with their partners" (83).

Through these uncritical looks at gender it is apparent that the shift has been from an idea of the malleability of the self to a reification of concrete immutable and stable identities that are not critically interrogated or deconstructed but understood as "personal facts." My work seeks to explore the embodied nature of online dating in a way that attends to the practices involved in the pursuit of hetero-romantic love as not only grounded in the everyday, but as buttressing and helping to construct the illusion of social "facts" such as gender through the pursuit of hetero-normative love. In other words, categories of identity that emerge by and through practices of online dating cannot be taken for granted but should be explored as an byproduct of such everyday practices.

2.6. Cyberselfing

How the pursuit of love online is an integral part of the everyday performance of self can be best situated by the work of Goffman who understands how intimately performances, or presentations of self, are tied to legitimating the self and the "generalized other" (Mead, 1934). The self in Goffman's (1959) formulation is a "dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented" (253). In the case of online dating, this scene is one of interface that compels a certain kind of self-construction, what Laura Robinson (2007) calls "cyberselfing." Cyberselfing is a dynamic process that is compelled by the online dater's everyday life. Cyberselfing is crucial to understanding both the practices of everyday engagement with the internet and the translation of "self" – or what is commonly referred to simply as "identity" – online, in hopes of attracting an appropriate potential date/mate. Robinson maintains that the cyberself is "formed and negotiated in the same manner as the offline self" and that online, the "'I' and the 'me' still inform each other, albeit in a different medium using different expressions 'given' and 'given

off'" (2007: 94). Goffman uses the terms "given" and "given off" in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) to make the argument that an individual negotiates impression management through these two expressions of self. "Given" expressions are intentional, planned, strategic, whereas expressions that are "given off" are automatic, spontaneous, and often non-verbal. Robinson is in favour of applying Goffmanian interactional cueing and giving attention to both the "front" and "backstage" in online environments because, as has been well documented in recent online dating literature, the inevitability of meeting face-to-face is just around the corner after initial online contact has been made (Whitty and Carr, 2006: 135). While borrowing heavily from the Goffmanian formulation of dramaturgy, I find it equally important to critically investigate the performative nature of identities in order to set the stage for a further complication of what it means to be a meaningful, intelligible, and heterosexually desirable being (that is, online dater) in various online dating-related interfaces.

Both Goffman and Butler can be productively employed here to understand how ontologically "appropriate" selves emerge in a network governed by rules, codes of conduct, and power relations similarly involved in any given social arrangement, with some notable exceptions that will be explored. As Goffman states, in analyzing the self we are, and must be, "drawn from its possessor…for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of a collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments" (1959: 253). Goffman's assertion that the seeming malleability of selfing (the hanging of self onto a peg) is indeed underpinned by the mechanisms of social power (the bolts of social establishments that hold the peg in place) that inform it is crucial to the Butlerian project of not confusing performativity with performance, or pretense with power. Rather, Butler

asks us not to see gender, the key component of self that is read off one's outer appearance, as a self-invention or something that can be simply read off the surface (1999: xxvii). Butler and Goffman come together here to nuance the boundaries of the self's intelligibility and offer a framework for exploring the regulated self that online daters are compelled to construct.

When interviewing online daters it becomes clear that cybserselfing is not only closely related to ideas about what makes up their fundamental character, but also to what is significant for the generalized other. This means paying close attention, as one does in life, to the boundaries of heterosexuality desirability and the politics of intelligibility. With recognition of the interrelationship between the beingness or selfing required for identification and approval as loving subjects, it becomes apparent how the having or obtaining of ideal love objects can secure the identifications they grow out of. Feminist theories of love, beginning with the work of de Beauvoir (1974), wrestle with what Ahmed (2004) calls "love as being" (love as an indicative of a pre-existing self) in ways that fail to recognize the interrelationship between everyday practices of loving, or pursuing love, and the gendered identifications that result. Emphasis on the category of Woman as a stable subject positions disallows consideration of how the category of Woman (and Man) is but one byproduct of the pursuit of love and the negotiation of love objects both "real" and artifactual. The following section will consider feminist theories of love as reifying the very boundaries of being they are trying to complicate.

2.7. 'Doing Love' as an Aspect of Cyberselfing

'Doing love' is a concept that aligns with West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender." West and Zimmerman suggest that "doing gender" involves a "complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits

as expressions of masculine or feminine 'natures'" (1987: 126). The very 'everydayness' of gender by way of "doings," or constitutive acts to use Butler's language (1990), naturalizes the bodies, identities, and beings we understand to organize our world and the possibilities for love and comings together within it. Gender is understood to be "done" in routine, methodical, and recurrent ways by men and women whose "competence as members of society is hostage to its production" (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126). Heterosexual – or hetero-romantic – love can be seen as one such way gender can be shown to be performed adequately and accurately in the "doings" of everyday life. Love is undoubtedly gendered and disproportionately cast heteronormatively in the global north. In their study of hetero-romantic love in Disney films Martin and Kazyak (2009) for example, point to the ways heteronormativity not only normalizes heterosexuality but also positions hetero-romantic love as magical, exceptional, and transformative (323). Heteronormativity as linked to hetero-romantic love works then to define more than normative sexuality but extends into defining normative ways of life more generally (Jackson, 2006). Love doings in this way are largely individualized and routinized but are part of a larger gendered discursive field that seeks to position heterosexuality (as tied to hetero-romantic love) as natural and biologically necessary for procreation (Lancaster, 2003).

In my study of online dating practices among urban professionals in Vancouver, Canada, hetero-romantic love, defined here as the heteronormatively gendered and sexualized desire for a life partner of the opposite sex, emerged as the primary motivation for online daters. This "goal" for online dating is perhaps not surprising when we consider the kinds of promises online dating sites make to those who patronize their services (the popular dating site eHarmony.com currently boasts that, on average, 236 of their members marry daily for example). The pursuit of hetero-romantic love through the new media technology of the internet is ultimately about various kinds

of “doings” that are related to two kinds of online dating practices. First are the everyday, often mundane and work-oriented tasks involved in technologically-mediated relationship-formation that have come to be popularly understood as online dating. The second set of practices are identifactory and are involved in this pursuit by requiring individuals to identify both what/who they are as well as clearly articulate their desires in a partner. These inter-related practices of everyday life as tied to the pursuit of hetero-romantic love are kinds of ‘love doings’ that are both gendered and heteronormative. These practices of everyday life are similarly practices of the self, where seemingly stable subjects seek each other out in the pursuit of desirous love. If understood in this way, hetero-romantic love is constructed as being in a “realm of freedom and choice, a realm where chemistry can flourish and love can be sparked and discovered” (Martin and Kazyak, 2009: 327) instead of in the realm of everyday selfing practices that are implicated in the seemingly benign and “natural” search for love. This examination of love doings will align with these two sets of practices: online dating (or technologically mediated practices) and identifactory practices (self), with love by seeing them as embedded in processes and practices of self that are aligned specifically with the gendered desire for hetero-romantic coupling, and ultimately, marriage or life-long intimate coupling.

2.8. Feminist Theories of Love

The feminist love literature tells a story of love that takes seriously the way in which love is a meaningful and powerful gendered force in the everyday lives of individuals and communities. However, according to Ostrov-Weisser (2001), not since the mid-1970s has there been so much focused examination of love as a political issue (111), and I would argue, an important and overlooked practice of everyday life. Online dating points to the ways that the

pursuit of love has the ability to adapt to changing technological realities. It has been successfully and accurately tied to previous "love technologies" such as love letters, and love over the telegraph (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004). Online dating brings together two everyday processes of selfing: selfing by and through internet technologies and selfing by and through heteronormative love pursuits. The first set of processes have a far-reaching and complicated theoretical trajectory that positions users of technology as everything from technologically-determined subjects of capitalism (Marx, 1895) to "disembodied" cyborgs of the future (Haraway, 1987; Stone, 1996; Turkle, 1995). The second set of processes – selfing by and through hetero-normative love pursuits – have variously positioned women as slaves (de Beauvoir, 1957), dupes (Greer, 1974), givers (Miles, 2007), and complex intersubjective beings (Irigaray, 1996).

Gorton (2009) asserts that feminist theories of love and affect is a field generally concerned with three central issues: 1) the place of emotion in the public sphere; 2) the way this intrusion of emotion has refigured the mantra "the personal is political"; and 3) the debate about how feelings work toward a social good (334). These themes/issues are important to understanding love doings online as central to the construction of contemporary gendered selves. First, recent studies of online dating have overlooked the central place of love in online dating pursuits, and those earlier works that did attend to love (such as Ben-Ze'ev's and Brym and Lenton's studies) did so in a decidedly uncritical fashion. Despite online dating's predication on the pursuit of hetero-normative love and the popularity of this pursuit in everyday life and popular culture, no examination of the role of this form of love-seeking in public life from a decidedly critically feminist poststructuralist perspective exists.

Secondly, because feminist configurations of the personal as political have undergone critiques in recent years (hooks, 1984; Danuta Walters, 1996) as a limited and privileged

conceptual strategy, love as a topic has largely fallen out of favour with feminists. Most extant work on love attends to a narrowly heteronormative focus that at times serves to reify differences between men and women (for examples see de Beauvoir, 1952 Greer, 1970) – that is, it attends to the private lives of a particular kind of gendered subject, rather than seek to explore love as a performative and orienting force. Finally, interest in love has recently re-emerged for feminists who, along with other social scientists and scientists more generally, have embraced what has been called the "affective turn" (Gorton, 2009: 333). This renewed interest and attention to love means that debates about the "uses" of love have been reopened; critical new insights inspired by new empirical data on topics of love, such as online dating, are waiting to emerge.

According to feminist love and romance scholar Susan Ostrov-Weisser (2001), love as a political issue for feminists has not been systematically examined since the mid-1970s (111). She states that "while there are volumes of literary and historical descriptions of romance in print, much of the philosophical and psychological musings about the nature of love as an individual expression of a timeless universal phenomenon, there has been shockingly little systematized thought regarding the ideology of romantic love as it is experienced by women since second-wave feminism in the 1970s" (ibid. 1). Before the second wave of feminism, the terms of studying romantic love were set by historical views that put reason above passion, which was viewed as a weakness leading to sexual error and subordination (Wollstonecraft, 1796; Goldman, 1934). This modern binary sets romantic love up as a distraction for women and a fundamental cause of their oppression, thereby setting the tone for much of the modern feminist debate over the implications of hetero-romantic experience for women (Ostrov-Weisser, 2001), as women, and as feminist scholars of the everyday. The dichotomous theme of men as rational, and therefore rightful knowers (and whose knowledge is not obfuscated by passion), and women as

confused or “duped” (Greer, 1970) by love and thereby disabled from making critical advances in the field of knowledge about love, characterizes much of the extant literature on love for feminists. This binary distinction is reproduced in later feminist musings on love and serves in large part to reify the differences between men and women, setting up romantic love as a heterosexual preoccupation. Systematic study from a critical feminist poststructuralist lens is only just beginning with the work of Irigaray (1996) and other cultural studies theorists that see love as not only a gendered aspect of selfing or the process of subjectification but also as performative and orienting (Butler, 1993; Ahmed, 2004).

2.9. The Evolution of Feminist Love Theorizing

Much of the second-wave feminist theorizing about love recognizes that the “nature of love, its spiritual, emotional and physical origins are never considered in the white, male point of view” (Maracle, 1996). Feminists during the second-wave acknowledged inattention to love as a topic of scholarly investigation and sought to situate love as both a subject of import to women and a means of explaining women’s subordinate status in most of the global north. Given the lack of theoretical work on love as both an important social engagement and a concept for thinking about gender in everyday life and in the formation of gendered selves, feminists in this era responded in strikingly different ways to its political import, as either “champions, reformers, or revilers of romantic love” (Ostrov-Weisser, 2001: 2). Ostrov-Weisser suggests that feminists remain conflicted about the meaning and impact of romantic love as a “subject that is not simply theoretical, but affects the lives of women everywhere in their everyday relations with men” (ibid. 2). Even Ostrov-Weisser’s provocative suggestion that romantic love affects both the

theoretical and practical understandings between men and women belies the extent to which feminists have, and continue to, understand romantic love in heteronormative terms.

The discourses about love in feminist theorizing about love can be characterized according to either the debates about the unequal access and relationship men and women have to true or authentic understandings of love (i.e., the reason versus passion debates initiated by first-wave feminists) or discussions of the possibilities for theorizing love as a transformative concept to initiate different understandings of subjectivities and possibilities for social change in the world. Both debates seek to problematize love as a "normal, 'natural' and largely unquestioned" (ibid. 2) organizing force in society but take a very different ontological approaches to the "subjects" of the love they investigate and explore. The reason versus passion discourse has a rational human subject as its model for humanity and serves to reify differences between men and women. Starting with the work of de Beauvoir (1952), second-wave feminists urged women to "renounce love wholesale as a form of false consciousness leading to inevitable domination" (ibid. 2). Gender here was theorized as a condition of heterosexuality which, as a socio-cultural identity, leads women to the folly of love. Love, for women, "is to relinquish everything for the benefit of the master" who, "even on their knees before a mistress, [will still want] to take possession of her" (de Beauvoir, [1952] 2001: 113). Love here is understood as a power relationship which affects the lives of women as gendered subjects of femininity – a condition thought less rational than that of being masculine and male. Echoing de Beauvoir's contention that love for women "requires of woman profound self-abandonment," Greer (1971) compels women to understand that the "cheap ideology of being in love [is] the essential persuasion to take an irrational and self-destructive step" (Greer, [1971] 2001: 128-9). Love was conceptualized through the 1970s in feminist discourse as largely "irrational," debilitating, and

obsession-inducing for women (Atkinson, 1974; Firestone, 1970) thereby further buttressing the contention that love existed on the "non-rational," that is, female or feminine, pole of the binary distinction between men and women.

Feminists during this period unwittingly adopted the modern discourse of love as lesser (or emotionality as lesser than rationality) and as primarily defining both the identity and experience of womanhood. Atkinson (1974) explains that love is "woman's pitiful deluded attempt to attain the human: by fusing, she hopes to blur the male/female dichotomy, and that a new division of human class might prove more equitable. She counts on the illusion she has spun for herself in order to be able to accept the fusion, to be transferred to the whole and, thus, that the new man will be garbed now equally in her original illusion" (cited in Ostrov-Weisser, 2001: 141). Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970) is perhaps the most famous and controversial work to problematize intimate relationships under patriarchy. Although specifically focused on sexuality, and a critique of the literary representations of it from what she saw as the sexist and patriarchal view in the work of Lawrence, Miller, and Mailer, Millett focuses on women's relationships with men under patriarchy as problematic due to women's status as "marginal citizens" based on their infantilized subordinate status as women. By making direct links between women's status in society and their intimate relationships, Millett was one of the first feminists to suggest that intimate relationships were overtly political. She suggests that sexual politics or patriarchy constitute "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (Millett, 1970: 23). Sexual lives and relationships are understood here to be controlled and managed by men. Millett suggests that in this dominate/subordinate relationship the "concept of romantic love affords a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically)

pardoned for sexual activity" (ibid. 37). Love here is imagined as an attempt to bridge the purportedly unbridgeable binary between the sexes. Woman here is constructed not only as man's lesser counterpart, undoubtedly the "second sex," but also veiled in a misrecognition of self as woman who seeks, but ultimately fails, to become a full human subject, in the quest for love. While I do not want to suggest that feminists during this period simply "got it wrong" in their approach to the study of love, I do want to complicate early feminist understandings that attempted to grapple with the very real and pressing question of what do with "romance" as a sometimes singularly constructed outcome or "goal" of a young woman's (or any woman's) life. As Ostrov-Weisser (2001) points out, "feminism has made women aware that they tend to define themselves in terms of men, emphasizing the need to learn independence, to emphasize work and friendship over being 'adored'" (5). In the same vein, the *kinds* of feminism examined here are somewhat disparate ranging from liberal (de Beauvoir) to very radical approaches (Firestone) to dealing with love as a threat to women's personal autonomy. While I recognize the very different theoretical trajectories (and historical and cultural settings – not to mention the historically-situated significance of challenging "common-sense" ideas about love, marriage, and the family) of these works, I nonetheless attempt to organize these works into a generally unified discourse that sought to problematize love as harmful to women as a unified and universally recognizable category of experience.

The other discourse of love in feminist theory that emerges around the early 1980s is a discourse of love that sees different potentialities and purposes of love. Goodison (1983) argues that the Left and the women's movement have given "falling in love" very bad press (48). She suggests that instead of thinking of love conceptually as "individualistic, objectifying" and escapist, we might "gain more access to using its power rather than becoming its victim" (ibid.

48). Goodison's work stands as a slight shift in feminist theorizing about love that does not take the reason/passion binary for granted and wants instead to turn feminist attention to the embodied experience of love to understand how and why we engage in it and how it can politically useful. She explains that "our ignorance of the body is so immense that I can only mention certain aspects of our experience which need to be discussed and understood at much great depth" (ibid. 55). She attempts to deepen the feminist understanding of love through an embodied account that "has some resonances in our everyday experiences" (ibid. 55-56). The project takes a step back from other investigations that seek to situate love in such a way as to explain the seemingly fundamental binary division between men and women and male and female experiences of the everyday world.

By calling on the body as grounded in everyday experience, Goodison shifts attention from extant beings and toward a more intersubjective account of love that attends to how "energy fields" instead of existing identities can be explored to "provide a language for certain aspects of the [love] experience which other theories ignore" (ibid. 58-9). Finally, Goodison suggests that the first step to understanding love "may be to accept and know our own experience better, and to move outwards from there" (66). This shift from beings to 'doings' demonstrates how gendered understandings of love have shifted from being possessions of stably gendered beings to embodied acts of doing which serve to buttress the identity categories that make up the currency of love. Grosz (1994) sees this emphasis on the body as a step away from the earlier formulations by feminist theorists who adhered to the "egalitarian category" of understanding the body as "fundamentally alien to cultural and intellectual achievement" (16). This shift to "social constructionism" allows feminists to align with the work of Spinoza, according to Grosz, and stop imagining the Cartesian dualism as the basis for beings and identities as male and female

(ibid. 12). Spinoza, according to Grosz, unsettles the prevailing distinctions between nature and culture, essence and social construction and leads feminists to see the body as as series of processes of becoming, rather than a fixed state of being (ibid. 12). This shift helps feminists see the body as both active and productive, although "not originary: its specificity is a function of its degrees and modes of organization, which are in turn the results or consequences of its ability to be affected by other bodies" (ibid. 12). This focus from beings to different orientations of becomings based on embodied doings presents the basis for an embodied understanding of love as everyday "doings."

Irigaray (1996) and Haraway (2003) both take up this shift in ontological positioning from stable being to more complicated doing that involves others, whether human, animal, or machine. In her call for the recognition of "significant otherness" as beyond the boundaries of human interaction and toward an understanding of "companion species," Haraway (2003) calls upon the imagery of hybridity that her now infamous earlier cyborg manifesto also attended to. Both manifestos share the similar desire to tell a story of "co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality" which fruitfully informs "liveable politics and ontologies in current life worlds" (4). Haraway asks us to consider how both of these images – of the cyborg and the companion species (embodied most powerfully by the dog for Haraway) – bring together the following: the human and non-human, the organic and the technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways (ibid. 4). She claims that her's is a story of biopower and biosociality, as well as technoscience (ibid. 5). What my study borrows from this biosocial exploration of companion species is the way that "companion species" as a theoretical concept, much like that of the cyborg, forces us to think

differently about embodiment, and in the case of this work, embodied love projects. When Haraway (2000) theorizes the cross-species relationship, which is, she explains "also mediated by our entire cultural apparatus, most certainly including these various kinds of enterprised-up relationships to biomedicine...reproductive technologies, and to pedagogical doctrines" (np), I see the cyborg reborn through a new way of thinking about love (not necessarily romantic love here) as not solely embodied by human as bounded beings. If dogs can be loved, and contribute to our understandings of ourselves as human – that is, become entangled with our identities as human – then the love of dogs can be theorized similarly to the love of the cyborg – an image of ourselves as not-fully human, but rather complicated and contaminated by the external, the outer, something beyond the male/female binary distinction of beingness.

Similarly, Bryson (2005) explores queer world-making with her notion of "virtually queer" which marks the "intersection between the performative and 'in progress' qualities of queer culture and its manifestations and permutations engendered by networked digital technologies (this intersection can be understood as a manifestation of the embodied cyborg) – understood as spaces and artifacts – as important meditative elements in the production of 'queer'" (85). This kind of theory marks a point at which the "final" recognition or identification is not only undesirable but unnecessary for subjectivities such as queer, which according to Bryson are "always-already virtual and much more about an endlessly deferred illusion of becoming than any authentic or finite quality of being" (85). Desire, therefore, plays an integral role in the conceptualization of this subjective opacity. Halberstam (1997) also displaces bodily boundaries while highlighting desire in her analysis of how film (as a medium and message) exposes the "apparent 'givenness' of gender is its technology" (186). Halberstam discusses the film Flaming Ears in which people have sex with furniture (lead character Volley rubs herself on

a cabinet whispering “Don’t move dear little furniture”) to demonstrate how gender is literally “a body technology, a relation between people and things, a group endeavour and a visual special effect” (191). Love and desire here figure into attempts to understand bodies and technologies because love is conceptualized as needing an “object.” When objects are unfinished, posthuman, non-human, and queer, new ontologies emerge that are more deeply embedded in “doings” rather than stable beings. Further, this shift in ontological understandings of bodies, desires, and loves means that in the search for love, intelligibility is more or less important dependent on the construct of love you ascribe to. This means that while different engagements with embodied boundaries are possible in technologically-mediated relationship formation, they are less likely when the quest for love is bounded by the terms of hetero-romantic love which understands humans as the stable subjects of love instead of considering the possibilities for love beyond the binary.

2.10. Rethinking Love

Loving beyond the binary is a concept introduced by Irigaray (1996) in her examination of intersubjective love. Irigaray’s understanding of intersubjective love is embodied by her insistence on discarding the traditional phrase “I love you” with “I love to you” (1996, emphasis added). She explains that “the ‘to’ here secures a space and a possible mediation between the ‘I’ and ‘you’, be they only silence. The ‘to’ is a guarantor of two different subjectivities or intentionalities, without reducing or sacrificing one to the other. The ‘to’ will provide a bridge to pass continually from ‘I’ to ‘you,’ from past to present to future , but also from nature to culture, from body to soul or spirit” (4). Love here is an embodied linguistic act that is performed between subjectivities, both constituting but not solidifying or demanding a subject and an object

of love. This understanding of love attends to multiple "beingness" which is constituted not simply by the act of loving but the act of speaking love as an exchange or a different way of being "together," not bounded as separate and closed entities. Irigaray explains that our "manner of reasoning, our manner of loving is often an appropriation...through a transformation into an object, an object of knowledge or of love, that we integrate into our world" (5). Irigaray encourages us to think otherwise about the relationship of our self to other through love, while Ahmed (2004) provides us a means for thinking through appropriation through love. Ahmed suggests that it is when we revise love-as-having and love-as-being, we can think beyond the need for difference between self and other. These emphasized differences serve to reify the categories and currencies of identity or selfhood that are unequally related in gendered power relations. I go further to suggest that a critical examination of 'love doings' as a project of the self in the online search for hetero-romantic love gives us a unique window onto not only the way gendered identities get solidified and reified as selves and others, us and them, but also how the reimaginings of love as companionate, cyborgian, intersubjective, performative and orienting alter the conditions and requirements of being gendered in contemporary technologically-mediated Canadian culture.

This study characterizes the pursuit of heterosexual love online as one way individuals engage with the technologies of everyday life to constitute and reconstitute themselves as intelligibly embodied subjects. In this way, I understand love not as a human need or psychological imperative. With Ahmed, I understand love as not the property of individual stable subjects but rather a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which takes shape as an effect of such bonding (Ahmed, 2004: 124). Affect here is conceived of as aligned with feelings and emotions; unlike other formulations that theorize affect as prepersonal and, to some extent,

unconscious or extra-linguistic (Massumi, 2002). This performative view of love borrows from Butler's understanding of repetitive acts as constitutive of gendered subjects who do not exist outside the "matrix of intelligibility" (Butler, 1990: 24). Particular kinds of beings are made possible in this matrix and those beings are constructed discursively as naturally attracted to each other through their difference from one another, e.g., the binary oppositions of male/female, masculine/feminine. Gendered identities, in modern conceptualizations of difference, are tied to a specific 'sex,' which sets up the conditions for compulsory heterosexuality (ibid. 26). In Butler's formulation,

> The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished though the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire (ibid. 31).

Through the study of the pursuit of heterosexual love online we can see how the enactments of heterosexual desire, in this case – the desire for monogamous heterosexual long-term loving relationships – necessitates the formulation of properly gendered subjects of love. These subjects are intelligible along heteronormatively gendered lines and must present "appropriately" and intelligibly gendered, racialized, and sexualized selves in order to fit appropriately into the specific ideals and logics of the pursuit of love online. Stable subjects known as masculine men and feminine women emerge in the pursuit of love through the online dating practices of urban professionals in Vancouver. These practices of the everyday are in many ways the practices of mundane quotidian selfing – the work of "constantly reinventing" oneself in the words of one participant, thirty year-old Victoria. This constant reinvention of oneself to potential dates and mates was not about creating a fiction, but about aligning oneself with powerful gendered modes

of being that constituted and reconstituted the dater as heterosexually desirable through their adherence to the matrix of intelligibility.

If we are to rethink love as part of the everyday articulation of beings and identities and made up of affective economies rather than rational choices as Ahmed (2004) suggests, then it is imperative to interrogate how the illusion of subjecthood is produced and maintained both theoretically and practically. I suggest, in this thesis, that online dating is an excellent practical example of how we can understand the pursuit of love as a constitutive force of gendered identities in contemporary life. I similarly suggest that love must be interrogated as it has emerged in feminist social theory as integral to our understandings of what beings, politics, and publics are possible, both practically and analytically. The majority of feminist writing on love considers the implications of loving for women, thus questioning whether love can be empowering for women or exists simply an exploitative aspect of patriarchal society that keeps women complicit, confined, and confused. When positioned this way, as a confrontation between women's possibilities for agency and women's continued subordination in society, it is apparent that the category of Woman is conceived from a modern binary formulation that pits men and women in necessary opposition that, as we have seen above, situates them as compatible and naturalizes loving as difference in the matrix of intelligibility.

2.11. Conclusions

My study demonstrates the extent to which love needs to be resituated in the context of beingness or projects of selfing in order to see how both men and women engage in the pursuit of love by work on themselves – that is techniques of the self in Foucauldian terms (1985). More intersubjective accounts of love need to emerge that complicate categories of being by

recognizing the ground upon which they are forged – that of fundamental, pre-discursive difference. One way of rethinking love's role in selfing projects would be to challenge the ontological ground of difference that seeks to naturalize heterosexual imperatives. My work also demonstrates possibilities for rearticulations of bodies, beings, and boundaries through imaginings of cyborgs and freaks – that is, identities beyond or "post" human (Hayles, 1999) that recognize the importance of technological mediation in our everyday lives as one such object of love that facilitates certain kinds of orientations towards and against others. Love here is then reconsidered as part and parcel of the enduring categories of gender beingness helping us interrogate how gendered selves continue to emerge in familiar forms, despite the advent of new modes of communication facilitated by the new media technologies of the internet and new possibilities for thinking our embodiments and identities.

Chapter Three. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Sitting across from Liza[3] the day she told me she wasn't going to online date anymore was hard. All the things I would have said to a close friend didn't feel right: "Stick with it! You'll find someone! He's out there – I promise." These words of encouragement felt self-interested. False. But what happened after the "formal interview" was surprising. We debated the value of love and marriage in a woman's life, each with our deeply entrenched convictions about hetero-romantic love as equal parts deeply problematic (her position) and potentially empowering (mine). This was the first time I had ever "argued" with a woman about love. And what was later shocking was the extent to which our positions reflected feminist discourses of love as oppressive versus empowering. What I didn't know then was Liza views were part of the foundation for thinking beyond this feminist love binary and looking through the complicated lens of love, as it is currently imagined, as potentially problematic and possibly empowering for everyone.

3.2. Why Ethnography?

This interaction with Liza, I suggest, would not have been possible without the framing of my study as ethnographic research with its desire to get "deeply" into the micopolitics of everyday life. Feminists have long argued for the sustained investigation into everyday life as a "problematic," where the everyday world "is taken to be various and differentiated matrices of experience – the place from within which the consciousness of the knower begins" (Smith, 1987:

[3] Liza was one of my "shadowed" participants who participated in a series of interviews as will be discussed in detail in this chapter as part of my formulation of interactive ethnographic methods into the nature and lifeworld experience of online daters in Vancouver. Liza's story is elaborated upon in Chapter Five.

88). In this formation, the everyday world is a place where knowledge is built and located. It makes the everyday world the "locus of a sociological problematic" (ibid. 89) instead of assuming the world is knowable beyond or 'outside' the world in which we are "located physically and socially" (ibid. 89). This is not to suggest that our experience in the social world stands as the 'evidence' for social action, differentiation, and consciousness. Rather experience in this definition is "not the origin of our explanation...but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced" (Scott, 1991: 779-80). It is therefore the purpose of this study to locate the experiences of online love seekers in the practices of everyday life in order to investigate how projects of gendered selfing are carried out by and through new media today. These experiential practices that are grounded in the everyday lend themselves well to an ethnographic investigation into the everyday. And as my interaction with Liza demonstrates, access to the everyday, that means the invitation into the intimate lifeworlds of participants, is the very starting point for making the everyday experience of culture meaningful through a feminist sociological lens.

As a sociologist trained in social anthropology, women's studies, and sociology I felt well-equipped to study new media practices on the ground, in practice, through the ethnographic method described most accurately in this case as "not a method, rather it is a theory of the research process" (Skeggs, 1995: 76). Skeggs (1995) explains that "whilst ethnography is a theory of the research process, ethnography itself is defined by its relationship to theoretical positions, hence feminist ethnography" (ibid. 76). Here Skeggs attempts to resituate ethnography as that which informs a context and a basis for a systematized methodological strategy instead of situating feminist ethnography along traditional anthropological lines which requires the study of the 'other,' active participation, and immersion in that 'other's' culture (ibid. 76). In more recent

years, feminist sociologists and anthropologists have re-envisioned the ethnographic project as one that imagines ethnography as a methodological strategy informed by feminist ontological, epistemological, and political more than an adherence to the tenets of immersion and othering (Constable, 2003). Feminist ethnography, according to Visweswaran (2003), "continually challenges the very notion of a canon" (90) by critically interrogating the need for an 'other' and acknowledging that ethnographic research can and should be located in the local and global, beginning with research that is grounded in the politics of identity in the field, at "home," and in the concrete lives of individuals (Viswesaran, 1994).

Researching online practices is also arguably best situated in the ethnographic project. My focus on practices attends to the feminist poststructural theoretical framework that guides my research because it acknowledges that subjects get constituted by and through the practices of everyday life as a product of discourse, which is both material and linguistic. This focus on practices attends to the way my feminist ontological understandings inform my use of feminist ethnography. In this way I seek to locate the internet and online practices in the context of people's everyday lives; that is, "within mundane social structures and relations" so that the internet, or 'cyberspace,' is not imagined as a 'space' of "self-enclosed cyberian apartness" (Miller and Slater, 2000: 5). This localization of the internet in everyday life requires an understanding of everyday life as an always already technologically-mediated reality, heavily laden with human-technological engagements which act as cultural extensions and vehicles for culture (McLuhan, 1967; Miller and Slater, 2000). This position is distinct from past conceptualizations of online engagements – or cyberspace, as it was previously referred to – as a separate distinct space where people "can finally make [their history] exactly as they please" (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004: 3).

Hine (2000) explains that since its inception, the internet has been conceived of in two central ways: as culture or as cultural artifact. Like much of the debate surrounding the reality or virtuality of cyberspace and the relations that take place therein, Hine argues that this debate leads us into false and misleading distinctions that reify and replay the real/virtual boundary. If accepted unproblematically, this direction "may obscure the processes through which the boundary itself is constructed" (Hine, 2000: 39). Instead, Hine makes an argument for a heuristic distinction between these two camps that takes both aspects into account and explores the connections between them (ibid. 39). This approach allows researchers to treat the internet as a cultural artifact in a way that "interrogates the assumptions which viewing the internet as a site for culture entails, and highlights the status of the internet as itself a cultural achievement based on particular understandings of technology" (ibid. 39). In this way the internet can be seen as textual twice over: as a discursively performed culture and as a cultural artifact so that ethnographic approaches to the technology will not neglect some important aspects of the construction of the internet as a cultural artifact, through their focus on the bounded social spaces of the internet (ibid. 39).

Understanding the internet as a cultural artifact, made meaningful by the practices for which it is put to use, and as a medium through which culture and cultural understandings get played out, made ethnographic methods seemed the best way to investigate my research problematic in two ways: first, by exploring the practices of online dating as an everyday aspect of technologically-mediated lives ; these are the very mundane, everyday tasks that make up what we have come to understand as online dating – the time spent searching for potential dates, the emails sent, and the series of events from first contact to first (usually coffee) date and second by exploring practices of subjective identity formation, or what I call identificatory

practices (Butler, 1993), as tied to the pursuit of technologically mediated intimate relationships, that is, practices whereby people identify themselves and what they are looking for in potential dates and partners.

3.3. Research

My positioning as an interdisciplinary scholar who is trained as an anthropologist means that employing ethnographic methods as an incisive way to "think against the stream of what is taken for granted" (Sondergaard 2002: 191) by becoming immersed in the seemingly known to attempt to understand what is significantly unknown. My methodology is informed by an ontological position that understands people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions as meaningful properties of the social reality of which my research is designed to explore (Mason, 2002: 63), in this case the "reality" of experiential online dating practices. Further, this ontological position sees interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these phenomena, and act on them as central (ibid. 85). Ultimately this means that my epistemology is informed by the guiding notion that "knowing or evidence of the social world can be generated [not only by taking to people but also] by observing, or participating in, of experiencing 'natural' or 'real life' settings, interactive situations, and so on" (ibid. 85). This methodological approach is most commonly understood as ethnography, which emphasizes cultural settings as data sources and argues that the "best – although not the only – way of generating knowledge of these [settings] is for a researcher to get right inside them" (ibid. 55). This is why I developed, along with my semi-formal interview schedule (see Appendix B), an innovative approach to research that utilized the technologies of the internet. Along with interviewing forty Vancouver residents who were currently online dating or who had online

dated in the past year, I shadowed four of these individuals in order to get a deeper understanding of what it means to online date. I recruited, from my larger pool of participants, what I called "shadowed participants," two men – Daniel (age 24) and Tom (age 45) – and two women – Victoria (age 30) and Liza (age 44) – who I interviewed over a series of seven interviews, deepening my understanding of what it means to online date. These four participants participated in uniquely designed methods of data generation which were intended to be employed to help me understand the intricacies of online dating. I used these researcher-participant surfing sessions as an opportunity to do participant observation insofar as I immersed myself in the "lifeworlds" of online daters as they pursued the search for online love whether in their homes or in their local coffeeshops.

These methods involved researcher-participant surfing and online dating activity logs which allowed me, as researcher, access into the very everydayness of these practices as necessary components or "tasks"[4] that an online dater must complete to make contact, build rapport, set dates, and ultimately for some, find partners. These methods attended to my focus on the practices of online dating because they allowed me, as a person who had never online dated, access to the learning curve online daters experience through their engagements with various interfaces, as well as the appropriate codes of conduct that are involved in online dating (which are largely dictated by the online dating interfaces themselves – for a more extensive discussion of Vancouver's three most popular dating sites, see Appendix C). Through this kind of triangulation – that is, using these multiple methods – I was able to approach my research from different angles, and to explore my "intellectual puzzles in a rounded and multi-faceted way" (Mason, 2002: 190). Mason (2002) suggests that triangulation enhances validity in the sense that

[4] These online dating "tasks" are explicitly laid out in Chapter Four, from making initial contact to filtering through potential dates to planning the first (usually coffee) date.

it suggests that social phenomena are more than one-dimensional and that studies using triangulation manage to grasp more than one of those dimensions (ibid. 190-191). While this study does not constitute the use of formal "methodological triangulation" which is the technique of testing one method against another (ibid. 191), it does demonstrate an internal coherence to the data as similar and complimentary results were produced through each method. The interviews, online dating logs, and the information provided by my shadowed participants complimented each other and, further, deepened my understanding of online dating as it is practiced in Canada's third largest city, Vancouver.

3.4. Ethnographic Field 'Site'

As an ethnographic endeavour, my research required a place – one in which I could ideally "spend extensive time (e.g., months or years)…trying to understand some aspect(s) of the setting from the perspective of those in it" (Palys 1997: 203). While some researchers understand "cyberspace" as a space or place and therefore advocate the use of what they call "virtual ethnography" (Constable, 2004), I had reservations about what the construction of 'cyberspace' meant for ontological understandings of the "reality" of separate offline and online worlds as mentioned previously. Online ethnography, or virtual ethnography, therefore seemed a counterintuitive project at the outset of my research. In contrast to the formulation of virtual ethnography, which has been constructed along the lines of an "imagined community" – that is, global community building which the internet makes allowable (Constable, 2004: 32) – the internet has been reconfigured not as a "monolithic or placeless 'cyberspace'" but rather, it is "numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations" (Miller and Slater 2000: 1). Reformulated in this way, the internet and "cyberspace" do not constitute the

field in question. Instead, the field becomes anywhere and everywhere the internet exists, and the internet becomes grounded in the day-to-day lives of individuals from disparate parts of the globe. The field, as an ethnographic necessity, has been reimagined in recent years and an interrogation has taken place between the "mutual constitution of the 'field' as a specific empirical practice and 'field' as a discipline" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 29). This interruption of the field and the subsequent re-envisioning of the hierarchy of spaces and places led anthropologists in particular to call attention less to the field as a pure domain of locality and to give more of a sense of the field as a "mode of study that cares about, and pays attention to, the interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations" (ibid. 41).

Early work on the internet and cyberspace tended to separate online and offline "realities," thereby dislocating identities, practices, and activities from the people situated in particular places experiencing them (for example Turkle 1995). In Constable's (2004) groundbreaking work on correspondence marriages, virtual ethnography was employed in an attempt to "observe firsthand the way in which boundaries between the local, the national, and the global are challenged, resulting in a community that at once 'feels' local but is in fact highly global" (38). This example is yet another incarnation of the field as a site and as a method – by rethinking the boundaries between the local and the global we can come to know it in different, more entangled ways, by understanding the field as "one element in a multistranded methodology for the construction of what Donna Haraway has called 'situated knowledges'" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 41). In this research the field was not located in online dating websites; rather, the field was understood as the city of Vancouver. I chose this site in response to Miller and Slater's (2000) call for ethnographies that provide "lines of inquiry, linked to

dimensions of new media use, that can be usefully pursued across a wide range of settings" (9). I made this theoretically-informed decision for a number of reasons.

First, I understand internet technologies as localized and localizable to particular places (i.e., people homes, offices, internet cafes, and the homes/workplaces of friends and family) and mobile throughout the city. This mobility and locate-ability of the internet as artifact recognizes the everydayness of internet technologies as integrated into individuals' lives and specific parts of an individual's day (an online dater can also be an IT professional working online all day, an online shopper, an instant messager, a websurfer, a Wikipedia contributor, a Facebooker, etc.). The internet pervades everyday life, especially now with internet enabled mobile phones (the iPhone, Blackberry, Palm Treo, etc.) and its portability increasingly impacts social processes.

Second, certain aspects of city life and understandings of what/how Vancouver 'is' as a city are going to influence how online dating is understood, recognized, and practiced. Vancouver is a city understood to be beautifully scenic while having an urban scene for the many active Vancouverites who call it home. The official Vancouver Tourism site, Tourism Vancouver, which the City of Vancouver website refers visitors to, heralds Vancouver as a "dynamic, multicultural city set in a spectacular natural environment. No matter what time of the year you visit, there are indoor and outdoor activities to please adults, families, couples and friends to no end."[5] While it does not "take one to know one," as feminist standpoint theory assumes (when taken to its logical conclusion as Kirsch [1999] points out), being a resident of Vancouver positions me in relation to other Vancouverites in a way that makes it possible to know with them instead of simply knowing about them.

[5] *Tourism Vancouver* Website under the heading "Why Vancouver?": http://www.tourismvancouver.com/visitors/about_vancouver/why_vancouver, URL retrieved April 6, 2009.

By speaking with Vancouverites as a Vancouverite, I am able to understand the context of Vancouver and the way they construct it as meaningful to their online dating experiences. Further, Vancouver is a wealthy city that attracts people from around the globe who call Canada and at least one other country home – part of what Ong (1999) refers to as the "cultural logics of transnationality" that creates "flexible citizens." By positioning Vancouver as a knowable place with contingent constructions as "home," it stands as a site that is always and already unstable, fluid, and moving. My methodology seeks not to erase the contradictions and complexities that emerge from a relatively unbounded ethnographic interrogation of online community engagement and interaction as a grounded yet globalized reality in Vancouver. This example demonstrates the instability of place, especially as people become and stay connected technologically with people physically both near and far. Therefore, while Vancouver acts as the physical cityspace where practices of online dating take place in unique form, I made a conscious decision to start with a location rather than a website, a decision which acknowledges the various ways individuals engage in practices of online dating from sending emails to sitting across from a date in a local Vancouver coffee shop. It is my contention that locating this investigation in one or multiple online dating websites, instead of starting from the physical location of Vancouver as a technologically-enabled digital city, would have meant a failure to track and trace the many multiple ways various websites, physical spaces, mobile devices, and both 'old' and 'new' technologies come together in practices of online dating that enable it.

Finally, situating the field as a city instead of a website allows me to incorporate both aspects mentioned: the locate-ability and mobility of the internet as localizable and fluid in the "glocalized" (Robertson, 1995) place called Vancouver in a way that acknowledges that online dating is not locate-able only online. Online dating is a complex amalgam of digitally-enabled

internet technologies that exist in and around the city, as well as in mobile form as individuals walk through cityscapes with cell phones and other portable devices that allow them to stay connected with their email, make and break dates, or browse potential date's profiles. Online dating is not limited to cyberspace any more than people only have their home computers to rely on to use the internet. The notion of access brings up an interesting point about who can and cannot afford internet and the mobile devices that make connectivity seemingly so 'easy' however. Next to be considered will be the demographics and decision-making around my participant pool.

3.5. Participants

The decision to focus my investigation into online dating practices on professionals was one of practical consideration. The rationale for choosing professionals in Vancouver came out of a realization that professionals make up a good portion of working people in Vancouver as evidenced by websites catering to Young Professionals in Vancouver[6] and Asian Professionals in Vancouver.[7] I stipulated that these professionals were both busy and had significant access to technologies of the internet both at home and in the office. My definition for professionals was therefore broadly defined as anyone between the ages of 18 and 65 currently employed in a professional career, including anyone who has obtained accreditation in and currently practices in their chosen field. Professionals include management, academic, medical, legal, and business practioners. Both men and women, regardless of job title, were welcome to participate. Only those individuals who did not fit the abovementioned criteria, (i.e., anyone under 18 or over 65,

[6] Young Professionals in Vancouver website: http://www.youngprofessionalsofvancouver.com/yp/index.asp?f=home.asp. Retrieved November 24, 2009.
[7] Asian Professionals Vancouver website: http://www.naaap.bc.ca/. Retrieved November 24, 2009.

anyone without professional accreditation, and anyone who was not currently practicing their given profession) were not selected for an interview.

This broader definition means that, in rough terms, I had a possible participant pool of over 800 people going by the Young Professionals in Vancouver (YPOV) population alone (assuming that because it is a socializing, networking, and "connecting" club many of the members would be single). Further, professionals emerged as a practical group for reasons beyond their sheer numbers and easy identification based on employment in a professional field. Professionals find themselves in work situations with the same people everyday who may or may not be potential dates due to personal and professional constraints in the workplace. Professionals are out of the school setting, which is a place that generally provides a pool of single candidates (depending on one's sexual preference). Out of the school situation, professionals are faced with fewer options for dating that include going out to bars/nightclubs, being set up by friends/family, approaching strangers, and dating colleagues. Online dating provides professionals with a pool of single people that they "would not [necessarily] have otherwise met" (a common refrain in interviews) if limited to the options listed above. Professionals are also presumably in daily contact with the internet both at home and at work, are technologically-savvy to some extent (the degree to which is dependent upon their specific kind of work/training), and have access to income that facilitates access to both various kinds of technologies and the leisure time to date.

How did I recruit my participants? (see Appendix A for recruitment posters and Craigslist advertisements which proved to be the most effective form of recruitment, and Appendix A for my informed consent document that I would email to potential participants after first contact). After attempting to recruit participants through posters and other "analog" forms of

advertisement (e.g., an ad in the Georgia Straight – a free news and entertainment newspaper published by Vancouver Free Press Publishing Corp.) to no considerable avail, I began recruiting in the volunteers section of the Vancouver page of Craigslist.com, an online classifieds page that acts as a community forum for various cities around the world. Craigslist is unique insofar as it is an interactive form of a newspaper classifieds section that has everything from personal ads to housing to group activity postings and even a "volunteers" section, which is heavily used by Vancouver's many researchers from both local universities, the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, who are looking to recruit for their various disciplinary research. Individuals interested in volunteering – or who clicked on the "volunteers" link when they were also browsing for potential dates in the "personals" section of Craigslist – contacted me through my university email address included on the posting. This digitally-enabled form of recruitment was by far the most successful form, although I did recruit one participant from a blogging and social media conference I attended in Vancouver and one participant from the Georgia Straight ad. It seems to reason that those who are online dating in Vancouver would find it much more convenient to make contact and set up interview times over the internet, by email. In a few instances, a form of random sampling occurred (although "sample" here is the wrong word here as I did not compile a universe of all of Vancouver's online daters) where individuals I interviewed knew someone who might like to speak with me about their experiences and so passed my information along to them. In another case, I interviewed two couples, where one member of the couple agreed to participate and the other agreed to participate at a later date. My shadowed participants were unique cases and 'self-selected' in the sense that they acted as key informants would in an ethnographic setting. These four individuals had both the time and the interest to dedicate to the study.

Requirements for participation in this study were quite straightforward; participants had to be currently online dating or had online dated in the past year and were presently employed in a profession for which they had been trained. My pool of 40 participants included 23 women and 17 men, ranging in ages from 21-57, all of who identified as heterosexual and as seeking heterosexual partners. Participants came from a broad range of professionals including, but not limited to: a lawyer, a number of engineers, computer-programmers and graphic artists, a business-owning sex worker, two realtors, and a home inspector (a full list of occupations is included in Appendix D which includes more detailed demographic information). All but five identified as White; two as Asian, one woman as Persian/Iranian, one man as Latin American and one woman identified as mixed-race or "other" on her online dating profile. As evidenced by this brief overview of my participants, they do not constitute a homogenous group and are not being treated as such in this study. Rather, because the focus is on practices, the heterogeneity of the group is useful, demonstrating that while there are differences in the ways different age groups or divorced versus single people online date for example, there remains a discernable series of events, or tasks, individuals must accomplish in order to online date. These practices of online dating involve a learning curve for all online daters, and while these practices may be subtlety different for a middle-aged woman and a woman in her thirties, there was still a very defined and recognizable coherence in all participants' recounting of their online dating practices/experiences. This emphasis on practices is important to establishing what is similar or consistent within the context of this diverse group of Vancouverites.

The one aspect of my group of participants that was consistent was their self-identified heterosexuality.[8] This "accident" in recruitment, as this study was not intentionally designed to

[8] The only exception here is one female participant, 30-year-old Ann, detailed her desire to date a woman using online dating sites. She felt that if still lived in the city of her birth and/or was surrounded by the long time friends of

focus solely on heterosexual online dating practices, means that the data generated are based on heterosexual (and I argue, heteronormative) practices of online dating in Vancouver. While I ultimately intended to discover the diversity of experience involved in meeting, dating, mating, and hooking up using the internet, it is interesting that I managed to recruit this cohesive, largely heterosexually-identified sample. This "accident" was, in the end, an informative and illustrative one because the practices, experiences, and stories my participants told me were complementary along male/female lines. For example, men would tell me that they often looked at women's pictures only (instead of the picture and profile which was a more common practice among women) before contacting them (because they claimed that all women's profiles said the same things about clichéd romantic activities such as walking on the beach) and women in turn expressed concern that men did not read their profiles and therefore wasted their time by emailing or messaging them and leaving the work of deciding upon compatibility to the woman. This example is just one instance of the ways my male and female participants stories complemented each other – the major themes of this analysis demonstrate how deeply entrenched these "complementary" practices are the result of regulatory norms around heternormative dating practice. While men's and women's stories of their online dating practices are divided along conventionally gendered lines, it is not the intention of this study to further entrench or reinscribe seemingly inherent differences between men and women or their practices of social life. Rather, this study seeks to expose the heteronormatively-gendered aspects of online dating as the result of the pursuit of hetero-romantic love. The goal is to illustrate often taken-for-granted processes of gendered materiality as mediated by new media technologies.

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her youth that she would be more inclined to explore gay bars. However, while online dating did give her the opportunity to meet a few interested women, she was concerned that she was not ready for a same-sex relationship and that her period of "adjustment" to a gay lifestyle would be unfair to impose upon a woman looking for a serious commitment. This meant that Ann ultimately gave up on her desire to "experiment" with women online because, in her words, "I figured it would take me several women to find one who I could behave properly with."

That mostly heterosexually-identified people[9] would come forward to participate in this study could be the result of many factors, one of which is that I did not explicitly state who I wanted beyond the age parameters and the fact that they had to be professionals. Many online daters might have assumed only heterosexual individuals need apply. This recruitment 'accident' could have been the result of who I am as a researcher as well, which will considered in the final section of this introductory chapter.

3.6. Researcher Positionality and Ethics

As in any research project, the "identity'" of the researcher (as it is constructed not only by the "authoritative" discourses of the academy but also by the researcher themselves and the participants of any given research project) must be situated, as their identity undoubtedly has an impact on the outcome of research. While positioning oneself in research is as aspect of the important feminist demand for self-reflexivity, it is not an end in itself (Kirsch, 1999: 100). As Kirsch (1999) notes, self-reflexivity does not change social conditions, improve people's lives, or distribute material resources more equitably (ibid.). Rather, self-reflexivity is simply "one step in the complex process of redefining what it means to do research in a postmodern world often lacking in social justice" (ibid.). Therefore my identity – or various identities – as a relatively young white middle-class woman who is a graduate student at a well-recognized university within Canada confers with it various statuses and shortcomings when relating to my participants. In my relationships with professional women, these identities served me well as my female participants were likely to treat me as one of them, despite the fact that I was still in school and they were gainfully employed in various professions. Some of my female participants

[9] Two gay-identified couples (one male, one female) contacted me wanting to participate but had been together for over five years and had not recently online dated, making them ineligible to participate according to the parameters of my project.

had been graduate students, which helped to cement this notion of similarity between them and myself as they could relate to my experience through their own. Most women assumed I was heterosexual as I wear a wedding ring and this may have had an impact on their comfort level in talking to me about their experiences with men. My racialization as white means that women of other ethnicities and "races" may or may not have shared or elaborated upon information that they thought would be outside the realm of my experience or unique to their culture or background (as in the cases of the Persian/Iranian woman in my study, Seema, who was the only participant willing to move to specifically marry a Persian/Iranian man and Ann who was looking for a Jewish man as a marriageable partner only). These commonalities/differences between my participants and I is not to say that our perceived differences were insurmountable nor that because of some shared experiences I was the "same as" some of my female participants. However, our similarities in age[10] and socio-economic statuses[11] meant that there was much common ground for us to cover, especially with such an "intimate" topic as dating which women are accustomed to talking to other women (mostly friends) about.

Men, on the other hand, were a slightly different story. It was evident that the men who participated in my study did not necessarily talk about online dating to other men. Many were relieved to hear me say that most men receive a great deal of rejection from women and that that was not unique to their situation. Men are perhaps more accustomed to talking to women about the more "intimate" aspects of their lives, but this usually is limited to talk with their partners, and not with strange women who are in the demographic they are looking to date. I am no stranger to ethnographic experiences that put me in a sexualized relationship with my male

[10] The mean age of my participants was 32; the median was 30 – I was 28-29 at the time of the study.
[11] Roughly defined here as 'middle-class' means that most had the opportunity to attend university and grew up in relative comfort.

participants.[12] The parallels between my research and online dates themselves were made evident to me when I was setting up my first interview. Because my previous ethnographic work had been located in physical space, that is, on a nude beach, I had to go there and "hang out" to engage in participant observation and to recruit my participants, who I got to know through other beachers and just by "hanging out" at the beach. My online dating research stood in contrast to this previous experience because I did not know my participants until we met for coffee – which is the customary "first date" in online dating scenarios. An excerpt from my first email exchange with Tom demonstrates why I was at first surprised and unsettled by my research format's similarity to the setup of first dates online.

Email Transcript

>> Hi Jacqueline,
Got your message - Thanks. Okay 4:00 PM Thursday at [interview location]. I'll be there, long dark black overcoat, red rose in the left lapel, and yesterday's newspaper under my right arm, approach me and say...kidding. <<

After receiving this "spoof" romantic email, I considered, perhaps fully for the first time, how similar the setting up of this kind of interview could resemble that of setting up a first date after meeting online. The internet as mediator of my ethnographic research provided a glimpse at how meeting strangers for the purposes of sharing intimacies over coffee could closely resemble practices of online dating. At first, I was a little unsettled. In large part I was unsettled by Tom's attempt to "reposition" me with this email, that is, not as a researcher but as a date. This exemplifies something about power in both the research process and in dating scenarios. Tom's attempt to "put me in my place" by repositioning me differently in the power dynamic of our relationship as it was initially set up (with me as the researcher and thereby instilled with

[12] My ethnographic research into discourses of sexuality on a nude beach positioned me, in the heterosexually-identified space of the beach, as a potential 'conquest' for the men who frequented the beach who positioned all single women as potential sexual partners.

whatever level of power/authority that positions commands, however problematically) relates to dating power dynamics where women also get put in their place when men try to control the nature of the engagement.[13] This interaction with Tom helped me to see how crucial it was to not be positioned as a date no matter how similar the situation replicates the beginning stages of the online dating process. In the end however, after recognizing this as part of Tom's quirky humour, my interactions with him and other men became more straightforward.

No one, male or female, acted inappropriately toward me.[14] I was aware with one participant that the possibility of my being a young woman had not occurred to him and this is what may have ultimately caused him to change his story when we met about his not having found love (which he claimed in an email) to his having found love by the time of the interview (only a few days later). Men, unlike women, often asked my advice or asked if I liked or disliked certain things that men did when trying to interest a woman. I eventually began joking with my participants that I could write a "how not to online date" guide for men after hearing how the stories of what men did (and were rejected for in online dating scenarios) were echoed in women's stories about how "stupid," "lazy," and "immature" men could be. This joking seemed to put both men and women at ease as it called upon heteronormative logics about how men are clueless when it comes to love or the nature of emotional life (e.g., that men are from Mars and women are from Venus).

Negotiating my own relationships with participants and the sensitive information about their online relationships constituted the most difficult ethical aspect of this project. Because of

[13] As will be demonstrated in future chapters, this happens in online dating scenarios when men try to position conversations with women online immediately as sexual. An example would be men messaging women in the Lavalife instant messaging interface with opening lines such as "you have great breasts" and other more sexually explicit content in hopes of seeing if the women are "up for it."

[14] Besides Peter, who in his 'rant' about older women and 'fat' women, made crude statements about women generally and used coarse language, which I can only assume was meant to shock me or cause me to react defensively or offensively and another man, Edgar, blogged that he thought I was 'attractive' and then sent me the link.

the “intimate” subject matter of interviews, that is, dating, and the fact that I was following the romantic relationships of four individuals closely, I had to make the distinction between “friendship” and “friendliness” (Kirsch 1999: 30). Kirsch (1999) suggests that “unlike friendships, which are built on reciprocal trust and sharing of personal information, interviews only simulate this context” (ibid.). Therefore researchers need to remind participants of the fine line that separates friendship and friendliness as well as “closely examine our own expectations about the kinds of interactions we hope to have with participants” (ibid.). The best way of negotiating this for the context of my research, specifically with my shadowed participants, was not to share the personal and intimate details of my own life, which participants did not ask for, most likely as a way to respect my authority and impartiality as a researcher. Perhaps because of the previous feminist research I have done on “sensitive” personal matters (e.g., participation on a nude beach and discourses of sexuality thereon) and the helpful compliance of my eager shadowed participants, these boundaries of friendship versus friendliness where not breeched. Finally, as Kirsch further notes, “interviews represent an artificial, staged performance” (ibid.), something which my shadowed participants in particular seemed to acknowledge, either because of their past participation in research (as researcher and/or participant), or their general interest in research as valuable but ultimately contingent upon the people involved and the information they are willing to reveal.

3.7. More on My Positionality

Haraway (1988), Weston (1998), Campbell (2004) and others argue your position as researcher is profoundly important in the construction/production of knowledge in any given research project. My positionality as a critical feminist researcher directs me to ask, “what is my

relationship to my participants?" and provokes a questioning of my positionality as an academic researcher. I am no "native" to cyberspace because, as Campbell argues, not only does the term "native" smack of the European colonialist project, but it also points to the fact that "no one actually lives in cyberspace…[therefore] we are all colonialists in this foreign virtual landscape where understandings of self/other and us/them may need to be discarded in favour of more fluid ontologies of identity" (Campbell, 2004: 185). Therefore, as the "non-native" non-online dater, I am faced with a presumed outsider status of a set of practices I seek to understand.

Notwithstanding the dichotomous, and arguably false, distinction between who/what is an outsider and insider, I believe, along with Naples (2003) that the shifting and changeable nature of insider/outsider status calls on us as researchers to constantly be mindful of the "power we wield and resistance we face in fieldwork" (48). Claiming an insider status is undoubtedly a position of power, just as claiming an outsider status tends to "Otherize" and fix ourselves and our participants in place. Indeed then, my recourse is to a reflexivity which means more than simply reflection and perhaps less than exaggerated attempts at familiarity. This is where Pillow's notion of "reflexivities of discomfort" enters my proposed research as a central aspect of doing research differently. Reflexivities of discomfort push "toward the unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable" and "cannot be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence of self-indulgent tellings" (ibid. 192). There is no doubt that I, as researcher, have a greater and more powerful role in orchestrating the research process. However, I suggest that a distinctly feminist form of collaboration that allows participants to speak for themselves offers a renegotiation of traditional power relations. As Kirsch points out, when participants become collaborators, co-authors, and co-researchers their roles are transformed and they cease being the "subjects" of our research (1999: 64). This kind of reflexivity, situated as it is in transparency,

allows individuals to speak for themselves through interviews, feedback, and written or verbal responses to how the research process unfolded. Further, after learning from previous research experience, I understand transparency to also be the burden of the researcher in terms of their own emotional, physical, and practical investments in the research process. After researching a nude beach and leaving many of the uncomfortable and sometimes embarrassing details out, I have learned from people like Newton (1996) and Campbell (2004) that these candid details are essential to understanding the process by which knowledge is constructed and power circulates. As Campbell points out, his hope was that self-reflexive incorporation of his own experiences was meant to shatter any pretenses to objective truth and, further, to "remind the reader that I, like all researchers, remain a positioned subject" (2004: 184). This can be further illustrated with an example from my own empirical research project on a nude beach. By drawing on Newton's (1996) notion of the "erotic equation" in fieldwork, I wish to illustrate how sometimes uncomfortable reflexive transparency can influence both entangled actors (researcher and research participant) in feminist research.

3.8. Implicating the Researcher in Research about 'Intimate' Topics

Newton suggests that by failing to problematize the erotic equation, defined as the erotic subjectivity or experience of the anthropologist, in research, we deny access to part of the fieldwork process and elide "one of the mightiest vocabularies in the human language" (Newton 1996: 228). Newton outlines an example from her own research where she became profoundly and intimately involved with her "best informant" Kay, during anthropological fieldwork compiling an ethnohistory of the gay and lesbian community of Cherry Grove. Newton expresses how this "emotional and erotic equation" gave her access to important information about herself,

Kay, and the community. Newton expresses that this information "has always flowed to me in a medium of emotion, ranging from passionate – although never consummated – erotic attachment through profound affection to lively interest, that empowers me in my projects, and, when it is reciprocated, helps motivate informants to put up with my questions and intrusions" (ibid. 221). Although my experience was not about an explicitly erotic encounter, it is one that positioned me as a sexual actor entangled with other bodies on a nude beach. As a young woman taking on the largely male-dominated space of Willow Lake, a small Quebec nude beach, finding another woman in the same situation and building a friendship is an ideal fieldwork experience. My relationship with fellow beacher Claudette[15] was just that. Claudette's presence on the beach empowered me to enjoy my naked body, engage with others, and express myself as a sexual person in our conversations with each other both on and off the beach. Claudette, in turn, was able to express herself and her experiences on the beach, including her sexual relations and resultant relationship with a man she met there, in ways that she explained made her feel understood and not unusual in her choice of a leisure-time activity. Without this "erotic equation," manifested by my specifically sexual relationship with Claudette (in that the majority of our conversations were sexual and we were in a decidedly sexual space) and her sexual "adventure" insights on the beach, my research would have lost much of the depth and intimacy it gained through my reflexive accounts of my experiences. Like Newton's unconsummated affair with her best informant Kay, eroticism "energized the project" (ibid. 227) and, I suggest, empowered us both on the beach.

I understand empowerment as used here by way of Ristock and Pennell (1996) who attempt to envision ways feminists can move toward research as empowerment which they

[15] Names of the beach and the beachers have been changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality promised by me in the informed consent document everyone signed when the research began.

define as “an approach to research that seeks to effect empowerment at all stages of the research process through critical analysis of power and responsible use of power” (8). They suggest using feminist community-building strategies that emphasize co-operation while affirming different cultural experiences, using multiple methods, and bringing forward postmodern insights to challenge all tightly held beliefs involved in the research process. They believe that all of this can be achieved “without relinquishing the empowering ethos of affirmative approaches to research” (ibid. iv). While my experience with Claudette was a profoundly positive experience, this same “erotic” lens could have been focused on the very uncomfortable, frustrating, and outright sexual experiences that occurred on the beach. It is my commitment to the “erotic equation,” and to empowerment as outlined above, in this current project that provides something other, something I suggest is more nuanced and transparent than assertions of insider or outsider status. In this way, I think both the empowering and uncomfortable aspects of my online dating work will need to be highlighted not only to demonstrate the ways by which my participants and I are entangled, but also to demonstrate that research is a messy process and one that impacts the lives, experiences, and practices of all involved.

I want to highlight and use my experience with Claudette to parallel my implication in my online dating research. While not explicitly “erotic,” there was the issue of my embodiment to consider in this project. Had I interviewed online daters online as other have chosen to do (Baker, 2005), I may not have been faced with negotiations and contestations over female embodiment that were undoubtedly impacted by my own embodiment. Oerton (2004) suggests that we bring the “body back in” to largely cerebral accounts that seek to detach and “disembody” accounts of research (305). Because mine is a “feminist and postmodern approach to the body” (ibid. 305) as part of the constitutive negotiated ground of the self I seek to situate

my body in terms of the fat phobic theme that emerged in the interviews with mostly my male (but sometimes my female) participants. This is not meant as "confessional" reflexivity which Pillow (2003) warns against, but a way to indicate how my relatively thin body impacted the discourse of fatness propounded by the men in my study.

3.9. Embodying the Thin 'Ideal'

Michael Moon (2001), with Eve Sedgwick, writes that in this society everyone who knows a fat woman feels they know something about her that she doesn't herself know (305). I would suggest that this "knowingness" lends itself to a practice among people who consider themselves thin or of "appropriate" weight to talk to people that they feel are of like embodiment (and seemingly, by extension, of like mind) about fatness as problematic in an uncensored way. I believe this was the case in my discussions with men about inappropriate female fatness. By pegging me as a "thin woman" certain men felt it was appropriate to speak to be about fatness as aberrant and inappropriate and in ways they obviously felt I would simply understand. Pressing men about weight appropriateness was in this way difficult because it was assumed I understood. Similarly, when pressed about what some men considered inappropriate sexual displays on women's profiles, it was assumed I would understand (e.g. for example what "skanky" meant without it being defined/explained). I take special pains to note this because embodiment, particularly the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate female embodiment, was particularly salient in my research and no doubt affected by my own embodiment and the perception of it by my participants. Whether "erotic" or embodied, I agree with Oerton (2009) that what

> needs to be forefronted is not the body per se but the mirror-like reflections, connections and separations between the various facets of the different bodies/selves that were

invoked in…particular fieldwork context[s]. As such, the slippage and resurfacing of the researching body is both inevitable and pivotal for in the final analysis, the apparent erasure of the body has ultimately had the paradoxical effect of securing the body at the very centre of the frame (320).

Chapter Four. Online Dating As Practices of Everyday Life

4.1. Introduction

Victoria calls to me, "I just got two more instant messages! This is exciting! Oh wait, ew, ew, EW!" "What?" I ask, "wait, let me see." Victoria shows me the men who are messaging her within the interface of Lavalife, touted as Canada's most popular, and populated, online dating site. "See, he looks old, but it says he's 33. He either looks terrible for his age, or he's lying," she says as she skims the pictures of this potential suitor who has given her access to his "backstage" which is a collection of pictures meant to supplement the dater's single profile picture. "Nope. I still don't like him," Victoria asserts, "he wasted some credits[16] on me but I haven't given him any reason to think I am interested in him. I don't feel like I owe him anything," she says as she closes the chat box. And with that, the indeterminate-aged man is off her screen, and out of her life so to speak, until the next time he is looking to use up some credits when he will most likely message her again. Victoria is an engaging woman, very youthful for her thirty years, assertive and definitive in her desires for a potential date. As we surf, the same man messages her again, and she considers "putting him out of his misery" by simply blocking him, just so he gets a clear message that she is not interested. "Now he just seems desperate," she explains, "maybe I should just block him."

What Victoria is involving me in here is her process of online dating, specifically the key part of the process that every online dater must complete; that is, selecting or "filtering" of

[16] Credits give the purchaser of them the ability to message potential dates and email potential dates, two paid-for serves on Lavalife. Men often purchase these and women get away with using the site for free because men are seen as the ones who are more appropriately the 'approachers' in heterosexual online dating scenarios. Men approach by paying for packages of credits (which vary in number and price) and then using them on women they deem attractive or appropriate potential dates. However, once an instant messenger conversation on Lavalife is initiated men must use up the value of credits it takes to initiate contact. This is why men often start up instant messenger conversations with any woman who might be online at the same time as them if they were rejected by their initial 'target' woman. Men who do this are trying to get 'their money's worth' since the credits are spent once the conversation is initiated (and last for only a certain number of minutes).

potential dates. This task follows the construction of one's own profile – a decidedly time-consuming and big step in the process of online dating. Victoria, having online dated for well over a year, knows the codes of conduct, the subtleties, involved in dating on Lavalife and is perplexed by men who simply don't get the hint. By browsing his profile, and most importantly, viewing his pictures which suggest a certain level of deception on his part in that Victoria would put him in his late forties and nowhere near thirty as his profile claims, she has determined that he is not for her. She has essentially filtered him out. Two weeks before, Victoria walked me through her own profile, how she carefully crafted the prose that constituted her self-defining "about me" section, short and sweet, generously leaving room for men to approach her online by stating that she likes sports, especially the hometown hockey team. She picked appropriately flattering pictures and is excited when men compliment her hair, clothing, or choice of footwear – a point of pride for this self-proclaimed shoe lover.

Victoria exudes a strong sense of self, something she can easily find reflected, or not, by the profiles of the men she occasionally searches for when she's bored. With the filters set to all that she feels reflect not only her political, intellectual, religious and habitual choices (respectively liberal, graduate-school educated, atheist, and adamantly non-smoking) she feels confident in simply browsing the profile pictures that meet her criteria and strike her as cute. "Cute kinda trumps a lotta things," Victoria explains she is quick however to filter out another "cute" prospect who is too materialistic, foregrounding a list of things he wants and has, rather than forwarding a self-description with some depth. "He says his ideal lifestyle is a dual-earner, no kids, excessive travel – I guess that means he wants you to have a job," she laughs, "I really don't like this profile. Based on this profile, and the fact that he included the kind of phone he

has, I don't think our personalities would mesh." And again, materialistic-guy disappears, off the radar, hopefully never to be heard from again.

In the end, Victoria sends one "smile," an emoticon of a happy, smiling cartoon face which interested parties can send for free on Lavalife, which acts as an indication of interest. These smiles show up on the potential dates' profile the next time that they sign in, leaving the door open for an exchange of smiles, or a return inquisitive email that tests the waters of interest. She was going to send two smiles after finding a "muscle" guy that catches her eye as she is skimming her search results. "Ohhh. I like muscles," she exclaims. He is "almost perfect": outdoorsy, athletic, intellectual, political, and adventurous. However, on his profile he says he is a blood donor and a reservist. "Wait," Victoria says, "doesn't that mean he is in the army? Forget that! I'd like to see the interesting conversations about politics we'd have!" And just like that, almost perfect muscley-guy is passed over, with a sigh of relief that this particular point of incompatibility was discovered and nipped in the bud.

I introduce you to Victoria as a way to introduce you to online dating – the work involved in getting from initial contact to a first date, usually for coffee. Online dating involves a good deal of work, be it searching for potential dates, responding to them, filling out profiles, selecting and posting pictures, setting up dates, sometimes chatting online and/or on the phone, and ultimately, meeting to see if your filtering has panned out, if indeed you "click." These steps are surprisingly encoded; there is a specific process that characterizes online dating in Vancouver – a series of steps that, if not followed adequately, will result in fewer dates and fewer possibilities to find that "special someone.'"

Online dating among my forty research participants was characterized, perhaps surprisingly, by the pursuit of life-long, marriageable partnerships, what were commonly referred

to as “soul-mates.” Online dating has, in the last twenty years, emerged from stigmatized oblivion to routinely cited stories about the “way we met” at wedding receptions. A recent article in the Chicago Tribune cites a Chicago-area couple, Chris Dunn and Pam Jensen, as the first successfully married internet couple (Heidi Stevens, May 18, 2008, Chicago Tribune). After meeting in 1982 on a CompuServe CB Simulator – an early version of a chat room – the couple married, one year to the day, in 1983 and has spent the past 25 years together. Their story was so unique at the time that five news cameras were present at their civil ceremony and they made appearances on the Phil Donahue Show, 20/20, and Good Morning America (ibid.). No such press follows the many individuals who come together by digital means these days. However, the practical means by which individuals come together through what has come to be understood as online dating remain quite vague and under documented. That is why I have isolated online dating practices as a key component of investigation. What are the specific practices that constitute what has come to be known as online dating? What difference do the physical and social technologies of the internet make in the everyday lives of the individuals who use internet dating technologies? What are the qualitative changes that result from expanding one’s social network through internet technologies in the lives and loves of individuals using them? In order to begin to answer these questions, it is imperative to uncover the process of online dating as a set of practices, with concomitant tasks, that must be adequately and accurately carried out to move from initial contact to first date.

In order to situate online dating, I turn to some current formulations into the ‘nature’ of this form of dating in contemporary life. Psychologist Monica Whitty has conducted some of the most extensive social psychological work into the investigation of online dating. Whitty (2003/04) conducted sixty interviews with thirty men and thirty women using a particular

Australian online dating site. Whitty's work is groundbreaking in that it is some of the first work that seeks to understand online dating as part of individuals' everyday lives and explains "what the space looks like, the rules developed to interact in such a space, and the purpose of using a particular space online" (Whitty & Carr, 2006: 124). This desire to get at the 'everydayness' of this phenomenon marks an important shift from earlier, technologically deterministic work that understands engagement with internet technologies as inevitable, totalizing, yet limited to cyberspace which was routinely characterized as a space apart, with little or no 'real life' effects (see Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1994). Recent work has understood engagements with digital technologies as part of the fabric of people's lives, beginning with the insightful work of Miller and Slater (2000).

Debates about the legitimacy of "virtual ethnography" (Hine, 2000; Constable, 2004) have captured this moment of shifting understandings about the relationship between the online and the 'off,' prompting Campbell to assert that "online and offline experiences blend into a single, albeit multifaceted, narrative of life" (Campbell, 2004: 100). Therefore, understanding how a set of practices like online dating is part of the multifaceted tapestry of life is central to this investigation that builds on the work of Whitty (2004) and Whitty and Carr (2006). My study expands upon their work by exploring practices more dynamically by not focusing on just one website, one practice, or one dimension of what this particular search for love looks like. Following de Certeau, the goal of this analysis is to make transparent the everyday practices of online dating, these "'ways of operating'" or doing things, [so that they] no longer appear as merely the background of social activity" (de Certeau, 1984: xi), but are instead foregrounded as the fabric of contemporary lives and loves.

4.2. Let Me Take You on an Online Date

If this set of practices called online dating is highly proscribed in Vancouver's techno-mediated dating scene, then what exactly does it look like and how do potential daters learn its appropriate and intricate rules? In order to explore these kinds of issues, I made a conscious decision to understand "online dating" as any means by which people meet online in the search for dates, mates, relationships, or marriage. Unlike Whitty's (2004) work, which focuses specifically on one online dating site in Australia, I understand online dating as a more amorphous phenomenon that exists in a network of online activities and as employing other technological means (the telephone for example). Instead of "reaching into" the internet and pulling out a specific sample of online daters who use Lavalife or Plenty of Fish, for example (the two most popular online dating websites in Vancouver), it was more important to understand use of the internet as considerably more "messy" and hyperlinked. This means that while I acknowledged online dating websites as a significant way to meet a new pool of people that individuals 'would not have otherwise met' – a common refrain among my pool of online daters – I also quickly acknowledged that more interfaces and technologies come into the online dating process – be they MSN Messaging, texting, telephoning, email, and other forms of mediated chat.

Further, I recognize that online daters often employ more than one online dating site. One thirty-year-old participant, Ann who identified as Jewish, used Plenty of Fish and J-Date, an online dating site for Jewish singles. Ann did this to maximize her chances of meeting a date, and a potential mate, who shared her common ancestry, culture, and values, while keeping her options open on the more generic dating site simultaneously. Because Vancouver's active Jewish community is small, according to Ann it just did not make sense to put all her eggs in the J-Date

basket, but it certainly made sense to supplement her Plenty of Fish dating with a subscription to J-Date as well. Taking this attitude of "multi-sourcing" into account, I decided to locate online daters (both online and off) in order to track their practices, which are multifaceted and varied, and trace how these daters live them. Here is an example of a "typical" online date, with attention to both a female and a male point of view due to the fact that there are significant divergences in the initiation contact between men and women in heterosexual online dating in Vancouver at the pre-meeting stage.

4.3. A 'Typical' Online Date

4.3.1. Task #1: Creating a Profile

Online daters who choose to use one of the formal online dating sites, such as Lavalife or Plenty of Fish (Vancouver's most popular online dating sites), must sign up to view the profiles of potential dates by creating a profile. Whitty and Carr (2006) explain that such online dating services "allow individuals to set up a profile where they provide personal information, such as age, gender, personality, hobbies, and so forth…[m]ost sites encourage individuals to include a photograph on their profile" (124).[17] Responses to how an individual's online dating journey began ranged from "actually I had a few beers and then signed up for it" (Carey, 30-years-old) to carefully crafted and revised profiles which evolved as daters learned more about the process and became more comfortable with the interface. As 24-year-old Doreen explains, "as far as the profile goes, just writing about me I guess, was difficult and I had to…there were a few times when I came up with something that I liked but just the evolution of it was pretty amazing. You know I went from 'Oh, I'm looking for a sweet guy to take care of me,' and then switched to

[17] Indeed Lavalife encourages the inclusion of photographs to new members as a means to get more interest on their profiles.

blatant honesty like about all my bad habits and just deal with it kind of thing." In the construction of profiles individuals have to make many choices about the most important things about themselves that they want to convey to a potential date. As evidenced by Doreen's changing profile over time, responses have much to do with how one constructs "who they are" in their profile. When I asked what prompted this evolution in her construction of self on her profile, Doreen explained that part of the reason she changed her profile was "just people messaging me and being like 'Oh baby, I'll take care of you.' I'm not like that, I don't need that and it definitely, with my new profile, I got definitely less responses because I wrote like a page and a half, like a huge write up, so the people that actually read it you know, probably in the end, they were right…but yeah, so the people that would write, they would be more suited for me, more people that I would write back to."

Profiles require participants to the fill-in boxes, checking such basics as those that Whitty and Carr (2006) outline, and to also provide more detailed information in "about me sections" where the online dater can be more free-form by outlining their characteristics or the desired characteristics of their potential dates. Online daters in my study were preoccupied with the authentic representation of self (a theme elaborated upon in Chapter Six) and diligently attempted to accurately depict a mirror image of themselves that would be replicable in "real life." Thirty-six-year-old Francesca demonstrated how the construction of her profile was in symbiotic relation to whom she was trying to attract, in that it must adequately reflect both her own sense of self and the kind of response she wants to get from potential daters. When asked what were important characteristics that she wanted to get across in her profile, she explains,

> A: Well, humour is really important to me so I really want to either make people laugh or them to understand that I'm sort of fully irreverent and they know that I can't date someone with a thin skin, it doesn't work. So it's humour and as pathetic as I feel like it is, it's really important what their sort of, pop culture references are. Like, if, what they

> like, what entertains them, so I always put what I'm interested in that regard because I figure that's what we're gonna be doing when we spend time together, plays, movies and things. And also that I'm fairly athletic but not Yaletown skinny. So, I like to put that in there too.
>
> J: Okay, so what are the characteristics that you're looking for in a potential date?
>
> A: Pretty much, I'm looking for my doppelganger, so what I just said, same thing.

Similarly, men in the study tried to appeal to what they think women might be looking for. This means explicitly avoiding talk of sex (unless they are in the "Intimate Encounters" section of Lavalife which is dedicated to daters looking for more causal sexual encounters) and often including their profession and annual income. Daniel explained how it is a delicate balance between "selling oneself" in one's profile, and explicitly "bragging." He said that in his profile, "I try to get across my sense of humour, that I'm easy going and that I'm a successful young professional or something like that...and to do it in such a way that, well some people will go on there and really seem like that they're bragging about themselves. I don't try to brag about myself, but the key is humour I think, that's the key." Daniel tried to balance his need to "sell himself" as a successful young (only 25-years-old) gainfully employed professional and coming across as materialistic-guy that Victoria so easily dismissed in the opening ethnographic vignette. Constructing oneself then, is about a kind of accuracy that is required when the inevitable goal is to meet within a week to ten days (two weeks at the top end) in order to efficiently "weed out" those potential dates that might not be suitable in person.

Constructing oneself in one's profile requires not only accuracy but also a kind of self-projection that can successfully capture the attention of one's "doppelganger" (in Francesca's words). In this way, men and women learn the ropes of online dating by surfing the profiles of their competition (and cutting and pasting where they deem appropriate), but also through trial and error. Many first time online daters made the "mistake" of spending too much time online –

surfing profiles, instant messaging – which means that they build a relationship over weeks, even months, with an individual who, when they meet in person, does not live up to the standard (or ideal/fantasy) that the new dater hoped they would. Online daters recognize the need to "go offline" quickly to make sure the chemistry translates (more about this in an upcoming part of the process) because, as 22-year-old Tina explained, sometimes the chemistry created through online rapport-building and flirting was in vain as sometimes that "e-chemistry doesn't translate" into in-person attraction. Profiles alone unfortunately are void of that important ingredient: in-person chemistry or attraction. In this mediated environment, people have time to present a version of self that may be well manicured and thought-out, but does not always "translate" into offline attraction resulting in disappointed daters. Initial contact can begin to round out this one-dimensional prospective date, although it is fraught with considerable concerns of its own.

4.3.2. Task #2: Initial Contact

Using Lavalife and Plenty of Fish as a general guide for the kind of interface most of my participants were using, an online date is often the result of fairly determined and extensive "fishing" on the part of men. Women characterized this intense and immediate attention by men, particularly when they first sign up as a new user, as being "flooded," often by men who, in their non-specific form-letter emails, neglected to read the woman's profile and address specific interests, characteristics, or defining features of either the profile or the woman. It must be noted that this common practice emerges as a holdover from more conventional forms of dating, an always already gendered practice, that sees men as the "hunters," as Tom, a forty-five year-old participant put it, and women as discerning "choosers" or "pickers" of the most appealing suitors. Men therefore have to become quickly comfortable with rejection, and more so with

simply being ignored, which most women adopt as an efficient way to wade through the immediate and persistent interest men display (as evidenced by the two instant messages Victoria received from the same man who had previously contacted her, and who had been previously ignored). Tate, a thirty-one year-old participant explains his changing strategies between "flooding" and "crafting":

> So I think I kind of put it mathematically at first and then I think I was just doing cut and paste letters kind of thing. "Hi this is me, blah, blah, blah," and I think I found the response rate was low so I changed and I tried to make personalized letters, like looking at their profiles and seeing what I had in common with them, trying to relate as much as I could kind of thing. You know if they had some Simpsons quote, I would reply with some Simpsons quote. Like whatever they put I would respond based on what they had so I found the response rate higher but it took way longer so I didn't keep track, but I don't know if paid off. Way more people responded, but I wrote to way less people just cause it took a lot longer to write those things.

Men quickly understood that they have to "stand out from the crowd" to get a woman's attention – especially a woman who is likely being bombarded as a new member. Men want to maximize their use of credits, when it comes to Lavalife, or time, when it comes to Plenty of Fish. Because men are constructed as the "seekers" or the "hunters," women are in the privileged position of "choosers" and can ignore or respond at will, always with the knowledge that another man is ready and willing to make contact. In our abovementioned meeting, Victoria explained, "I am far more picky than in real life because I have this great big catalogue of people to choose from." For men trying to make initial contact, women's advantage can be disheartening. Daniel explains, "the thing with women, they don't have to put any effort in because as my research has shown, they can literally put a picture in there and not add any words and be an above average looking girl not even ridiculously good looking and they'll get tons of replies, whereas a guy has to put effort in… you'll sit there and look for something to say and it'll take you half an hour to

write something and you have 1 in 100 chance that she'll respond to you, maybe even less. It just a lot of effort going nowhere."

Daniel is also upfront about being rejected, a common experience for men in such a highly competitive atmosphere. He elaborates on this rejection by commenting on the effects online dating has had on his life overall, stating that "a while there it got me really down because I was just so pissed off about the whole process, being rejected so much. There are impacts there, but they're not insignificant, I wouldn't say that. Real impacts, time wise, meeting people wise, your ego being scraped away wise…yeah - it's had an impact on my life." Like Victoria cited above, part of women's strategy is to ignore men so as not to be "leading them on" when they know they have no interest in the man in question. Initial contact then, has a lot to do with numbers, and a lot to do with luck. Victoria explained to me that during the periods that she is not multi-dating the men whom she has previously made contact with, she might log-on to her preferred dating site, Lavalife, and use her saved search (which includes all the "stats" – basic information about who she is looking for, e.g., non-smoker, non-religious, height, weight, etc. – in it) when she is bored to see if there is anyone new or interesting since the last time she searched. During these times, Victoria is much more willing to spend time on men she does not find immediately attractive. Unlike during times of plenty, Victoria will look at their backstage (as with the indeterminate-aged man above) and read through their profiles in order to be thorough in her filtering out of potential candidates. On one occasion, during one of these times of boredom, she met a man outside of her age criteria who said something witty in an instant message and she immediately began talking to him and building rapport, only later to discover he was outside her age range by at least eight years. Such is the arbitrary effect of "standing out" in online dating – where one day you might not fit someone's criteria, the next, you might be considered.

Daniel extensively outlined the ways he tried to use humour, witty banter, and also unusual conversation starters to make that all-important first impression (as one of my "shadowed" participants, Daniel, used his participation in the study as an opener that he hoped would peak the interest of potential dates). He explained that you have to "make sure that you – you have to be unique. This girl I know that I've been friends with that I went out with last night and the first thing I said to her was, 'I want to eat your brains,' or something like that [in an instant message on Lavalife]. I was just pissed off because I tried to talk to all these girls and they were not responding back, so I just started saying ridiculous things and that's how I ended up having a conversation with her." Men work at being unique in mainly comedic ways and women want to be approached in appropriate and targeted ways. Initial contact is mediated by an ongoing process of filtering, which newbies struggle with and experienced daters like Victoria excel at.

4.3.3. Task #3: Selecting/Filtering

Contrary to Daniel's claim above, the selection of potential dates, better known as "filtering" in online dating-ese, is a more complex process for women than for men. Since men are vying for attention, unless they find the woman particularly unattractive, or too "fat" as will be discussed in future chapters, men will work to move the initial contact into a first date rather quickly. As forty-three year-old Alex notes, this can also cause problems, as women require a degree of rapport to be built up before deciding that a first date is the appropriate next move. As previously stated, the average time for this to happen is somewhere in the two week range, hopefully sooner, but ideally no more than a month to six weeks. However, as Alex explains, the process cannot be rushed, "You generally send an email and then they send it back and then send

another and you know if you ask for someone's email too quickly, it turns them off, or if you ask to go on a date too quickly and sometimes that can be bad. I don't know, I can't say normally how long it takes, but usually it's, I mean in my experience it has been a couple of emails, then a phone call and then a meeting, so maybe it's a week or 10 days ideally."

While there is no "standard" formula, online daters soon learn that while the policy of meeting sooner than later is considered more desirable and connotes seriousness, meeting immediately can sometimes be misconstrued (meaning that women are often suspicious that men are only looking for sex or that they might be somehow "unsafe" or "unsavory" if they are pressing for a "too quick" meeting). The week-to-ten-days gives women an appropriate amount of time to determine "safety" and men an appropriate amount of time to establish themselves as worthy candidates for a date. Men must be persistent because, as Victoria explained in our above interview, someone she might filter out might look better on a day when she is bored, that "some of it is about chance, it depends on what the competition is at the time." Victoria relayed a story about a date who told her that he will message women in both the "Dating" and "Relationship" sections of Lavalife (these two sections are in addition to the "Intimate Encounters" section of Lavalife mentioned above and are understood by daters to be the best places to search for dates if you are "serious" about online dating and finding a marriageable partner or "soul mate"). While he might not receive a reply to his message in one section, he might in the other. This kind of persistence and experimentation is invaluable in maximizing men's chances of being noticed and acknowledged as a potential date.

Filtering also occurs in a reciprocal fashion, as evidenced by Victoria's comment above about materialistic-guy's profile; she was certain that their personalities would not mesh. Daters are often surprised at the type of people who contact them, both men and women, because they

feel as though their profiles are explicit about their wants and desires, providing a ready-made filtering device. Despite that fact that women include a specific age-range of preference for example, many older men contact much younger women who have to continuously ignore or reinforce to these men that they are not interested. Women who fall outside of men's age and/or body-type stipulations, too, occasionally contact uninterested men. Women expressed surprise at the ease with which they begin to reject men who fall outside of their stated preferences. Some women felt that they could more easily and assertively reject men online than they could in "real life." Different "codes of conduct," allowed women to feel more comfortable and less impolite and therefore freer to express their lack of interest either in person or in a mediated fashion such as email. Ariel explains, "like, I've done it myself. Like, you go out with someone and you're like, 'it was awful and I don't want to talk to them again.' You don't like them and say something polite like, 'I had a great time, but I don't think we are a great match,' it's like you, you're gone, you just make them disappear because there's no consequences for your actions." What Ariel is expressing is that because these dates are not part of your broader social network, you don't have to see them again or explain to friends who might have set you up that you really were not interested in their pick for you. In this way, these initial contacts, or even first dates, are filtered out, hopefully for good. Kaitlin elaborates on this point by explaining,

> I've heard some horror stories from my friends being set up by friends of friends on blind dates where it's like you get pressured more into like "He's so nice, he's my friend and you should give him a second chance." Whereas, if you met him online and you didn't really like him halfway through your date, you can pretty much just get up and be like "Meh, I'm sorry I don't really think this is going to work." I usually tell them right away, "I don't think this is going to work, but I have a lot of friends so you're more than welcome to keep in touch and I'll let you know if there are any events coming up that I'm gonna go to that you might be interested in." So, I usually tell people that.

Preliminary filtering can cause some anxiety as there are so many people to choose from, for women at least, that they have to use their time online to its fullest. Some women, when they

first sign up, will make promises that they will reply to any interested party. After putting up a posting in the Personals Section of Craigslist.com that made this promise, twenty-four year-old Jessa spent over eight hours replying to the 100 or so emails she had received by noon the next day. Women quickly learn that they have the privilege of being "picky" because men will continue to pursue them as long as they fall roughly within conventionally gendered standards of attractiveness (along with its age, size, and appearance parameters). Many women expressed concern about being overly picky, so much so that they essentially filter everyone out. As forty-four-year-old Liza explained, with the amount of information provided in men's profiles, "I think it's really easy to overscreen because you have so much information. For me it's easy to overscreen." Without the "proper" motivation then, the mandatory process that requires the "right" amount of time from initial contact to first date, women might weed out everyone and meet very few potential partners. Women begin to fear that their filters are too high to find dateable men, while men continue to cast their nets wide in order to increase their chances of a bite that will not inevitably filter them out. Casting the net wide ultimately pans out and the next stage of the process begins – that all-important first date.

4.3.4. Task #4: First Date

The standard rule for first dates, which new online daters do not always recognize right away, is that the faster the date is made, the better. Some women lamented that they spent a good deal of their time after they initially signed up responding to people that they inevitably were not interested in. They might have spent weeks or months getting to know someone, only to later discover that the "e-chemistry" did not translate. This dilemma results in the "writing off" of men (and women) who do not want to meet within a "reasonable" amount of time. This

relatively quick turnaround from initial contact to first date ensures that any rapport built from first contact translates "in real life" successfully. At this point, online daters report that online dating begins to mimic conventional forms of dating, though there are a few important differences. The first date is often during the day, which is unusual in conventional dating scenarios, and is usually planned as a brief coffee date. This strategy ensures that either party can "escape" if their date is not what they expected. As a result, some dates may only take five minutes. As Sue outlined above, she quickly reveals to her date that she is not interested, but offers the conciliatory prize of the possibility that one of her many friends might be interested in him. While women more often than men reported to me that they wanted to leave a first date for various reasons, e.g., the men were bald, wearing jogging pants (to a formal restaurant), or older than anticipated, some men also found interesting means of getting out of their dates. Forty-two-year-old Carla revealed a surprising turn of events when a date left her on the sidewalk. She explains,

> The guy actually left me… Oh, actually it was interesting because I let him pick me up which normally I wouldn't do with a blind date like that … but for some ridiculous reason, because he was from, you know, the same background as me—he was Jewish—and I just thought, "Oh, you know, I can trust the guy." And he picked me up. We went downtown. We parked and we were walking to the restaurant. He pretended that he forgot his cell phone in the car and left me standing on the street. And he said, "Just wait here I'll get my phone." And then after a few minutes he hadn't come back so I went back to the spot, he was gone. He e-mailed me when I got home and he said, "I just …When I realized we weren't for each other …" I mean, we hadn't had an argument or anything. [He said] "But when I realized you weren't the one, I didn't have the skills to go through the dinner."

While this scenario is not unheard of in conventional dating practices, especially in the case of blind dates and set-ups by friends, it appears to be more prevalent among online daters. Twenty-four-year-old Carmel describes a similar situation, where her date was late and then not what she expected. She explained,

> One guy I met, he was really late on a date and I was like "Are you kidding me? I have so many better things to do," like he didn't call me for like he was 25 minutes late, he finally called me, okay I called him. He showed up, he was 37, way too old for me but I thought it might be cool to go up for an adventure of random sorts. He showed up and he wasn't even that good looking, he was bad looking and he was old, so I left. I let him go into the [meeting place] and I was like, "No, you're too late and not that good looking," so I left. And then after he tried messaging me and I was like "No, you're a loser, that's lame, that's not good enough."

Both men and women reported being stood up on a fairly regular basis and argued that this is why it is crucial to build at least some rapport, and perhaps even speak on the phone briefly, to ensure your time will not be wasted.

Another point of departure from conventional first dates is the way online daters quickly let their date know whether they will see them again. Even if, for instance, a woman ends the date amiably and with an indication that she is interested in seeing her date again, she will quickly rectify the situation with a brief email explaining that they just "didn't click" and that she wishes him luck in his search. This happens for both men and women and is generally accepted as a normal code of conduct within the process of online dating. As Tate explains, the general outline of his first dates with women met online looked pretty similar, it "would always be a drink or a coffee somewhere kind of thing where basically you can end it at anytime kind of time." That way, he explained, "you can down your drink and say 'It was great meeting you,'…so I think I was always prepared for that, like I wouldn't go on a date that I couldn't immediately escape from if I needed or honestly, if she needed. If she was like, 'I'm just not into you and I want to go,' I didn't want her to have to sit through that as well. I guess just having that – escapability kind of thing I thought was pretty important." This speaks escapability somewhat to Sue's assertion that because an online dater exists outside your ready-made social network, you can simply leave a date within the first few minutes and not expect to suffer repercussions such as a friend's hurt feelings. You simply have to explain to your friends, if they

are even in the know about your online dates, that you were "not into" that particular date but there is bound to be another. This lessened accountability to your social group allows for freedom from some previously established "niceties" or mores surrounding first dates.

One other considerable difference in online dating is that dating a number of people, or "multi-dating" as it is referred to, is acceptable. While disapproved of in "real life" dating scenarios, online daters not only multi-date themselves, but anticipate or expect their dates to be doing the same. Victoria, whose first real foray into the dating world was made possible by online dating due to a young marriage (before which she had done very little dating) and recent divorce (which made her want to get back onto the dating "scene"), explained that while she is not positive on the assumptions made by conventional daters, she suspects that they do not assume that their partners are dating other people, or at least as extensively as online daters tend to. Twenty-nine-year-old Leanne describes her online dating habits as unique in her dating history – and hectic as well. She says,

> I've always had the experience where you go out with a guy, you go out for dinner and I've always just moved into a relationship. He likes you, you like him, you just keep going and you're just exclusive, the two of you. And now, I've never dated like this until January, and now it's like, you're dating six different guys and they're all calling you like, "Let's go out for martinis tonight," another one's like, "Let's go for dinner tonight," and another one's like, "Let's go to the seawall tonight."

Some unique holdovers from the fact that a couple met online then mark the shift to a more "conventional" style of dating. While "conventional dating" is not a monolithic concept, a date in Canadian society is widely recognized as a "planned social activity with the opposite sex" (Muehlenhard and Linton, 1987). This simple and heteronormative definition, I argue, characterizes a colloquial understanding of a conventional "date" as a social activity where individuals meet for fun and the hope/promise of a possible future relationship. Some of the holdovers from this definition of a "conventional date" are unexpected, such as the roadside

"dumping" experienced by Carla, while others are more practical. Codes of conduct in online dating scenarios reflect the changing ways people "acceptably" communicate feelings and desire, e.g., expressing in an email that your date was not what you were looking for, and how these conventions are changing. Other first date dilemmas come right out of 1950s white-middle class dating how-to manuals, such as who pays? Who picks whom up? And is it safe to meet anywhere but public places? Women generally insist upon meeting in public places and some even ensure that a friend or family member knows the information of the man they are going on a date with in the case she does not check in at a pre-arranged time. After explaining that she informs a friend in another city about her dates (outings) with the man's name and any other defining information from the site, 30-year-old Emma outlined her safety strategies, which include "public places. Always in public. Um, and I usually get my own way there. Like, sometimes the guys will ask to pick you up, or whatever, but I always drive myself. And that's usually the first couple of [dates], I'll meet them there." Most of the women interviewed characterized their safety strategies in similar ways – a meeting that is always in public and after a degree of rapport has been built (but not too much information is exchanged) so that trust can be established.

Men's view of safety is very different. Men reflected on the safety that online dating provides, particularly in the last stage of initial contact. Men see online dating as 'safe' because the nature of the medium insulates them from the face-to-face rejection that they might experience in bars or other places where they might approach a woman. Lawrence, a 35-year-old executive explained what 'safety' he feels is provided by online dating interfaces,

> You know, it's a safe environment, a controlled environment. Anything that you have control over had that extra sense of safety, you know. If I'm having a conversation on msn and it's not going well, I can just shut off msn, but if you're with somebody and you're having a conversation and you're making an idiot or your nose started bleeding or you're choking on the hors d'oeurves you just took, like you can't do anything about it. You're in front of that person. There's environmental factors, there's other people

> coming in, peers, friends that might do something silly just for the fun of it and then like makes you lose faith in whatever it is. But on the web, it's a controlled environment; you're controlling the variables.

Lawrence felt in control of his interactions, despite the fact that he might not feel in control of the overall rejection. Rejection goes both ways and once the much-anticipated first date occurs, either dater could come up short or end up wanting. Few daters reported second dates, perhaps largely due to the "plenty of fish in the sea" promise. One dater, 30-year-old Kendra, reported that after having a successful first date, he emailed and said he was not ready for a relationship, despite the fact that he had liked her very much. When she continued to see his profile on Lavalife, she decided to email him to let him know that he might be giving the wrong impression by keeping his profile active when he wasn't ready for commitment. Kendra explained that she had done this to call him out about what she felt was his attempts to mislead women into thinking that he was looking for a relationship when he was actually just looking for a "good time." Ultimately it gave Kendra satisfaction to let him know that she was aware of his first date only strategy (to try to sleep with women and then not see them again) and that she had had a fairly disappointing experience with him all around (which she suggested she might not have done in person as readily).

Most daters reported that once their intentions as to a second date, or lack thereof, were made clear, they either went ahead with that second date or never heard from that dater again after an exchange of pleasantries (often involving wishing the other person good luck on future dates). Some first dates ended with sex, which some men explained as their goal if the woman was not "marriageable material." If a woman was deemed too "fat" or not attractive enough, certain men might "try to make the best of it" and sleep with the woman with no intent to pursue the relationship further. This is not uncommon in conventional dating scenarios, and women

might also initiate sex as a way to "save" the night (however, this was much less frequently reported). Because the majority of online daters I interviewed were looking for their "soul mate," they felt sex would be inappropriate on a first date, especially if they saw the potential for a future relationship with this particular individual. "Serious" daters were seen as not "creepos" as Carmel referred to them – men who immediately strike up a conversation about sex, or complimenting women on their "physical attributes," such as their breasts. Carmel explained that,

> I mean there are people on there just for sex. You have to established that if that's what you're gonna talk about, that's fine go ahead and be pervy, but I was actually like, "I'm not really into talking about how you think my boobs are nice and I'm happy for you that you think they're nice but we don't need to discuss that." Usually those ones, we call that AMBD, abort mission, block, delete. Sometimes they'll talk to me six months later and I'll go to add them and I'm like, "Oh I blocked you, you must've said something pervy to me, not really worth my time." "What do you mean, what did I say?" "I don't know, I don't care. You had your chance."

Some men would also bypass women they felt "weren't their type," especially if the woman were too sexual in their self-presentation. When surfing with Tom, he paused on a few Plenty of Fish profiles where women were either in lingerie or posed provocatively to say that he would not choose these women because he found them "inappropriately sexual" in their presentation of self. He explained that he was baffled by this kind of attention-seeking behaviour and thought the women were either "high maintenance," "off her meds," or otherwise a "freakshow." Tom was one of the daters in my sample who did not go on many dates because set his filters very high. Many of the daters over forty years of age did not go on many dates for a variety of reasons, including high filtering-out rates, fears of rejection, and more limited pools of dateable people.

4.4. Conclusions

This chapter outlines the set of practices, and required tasks, that individual online daters must engage in if they hope to construct a desirable profile, achieve an original and compelling

initial contact, and perhaps "earn" a first date. The surprise perhaps is in the codification of such a set of practices into a workable and highly adoptable set of strategies to make one's online dating journey successful. In my study, daters who veered from this process found themselves to be less "successful." If they are unwilling to meet within the proscribed timeline, if they spend too much time with one person building rapport and not engaging in strategies that will lead to multiple dates, and if they filter out too many people they will find themselves going on few dates and having less overall "success" if, indeed, their goal is to find a marriageable partner. However, this process and these practices are negotiated through more than the accurate reproduction of proscribed tasks. Online dating as remediated dating carries with it significant holdovers from conventional forms of dating. Explicitly, this means that online dating is decidedly gendered, as all forms of dating are, in ways that reflect the amount of success an individual online dater is bound to have. Revisiting aspects of the process and viewing it through a specifically gendered lens means that these specific tasks that characterize the pursuit of hetero-romantic love online – this form of 'doing love' need – to be contextualized more centrally in the projects by and through which people construct intelligible and attractive identities thereby securing their success in the heterosexual online love game.

Chapter Five. The Struggle for Authenticity in Online Dating Practices

5.1. Introduction

In her innovative account of the complexity of human/machine interaction at the outset of the "virtual age" almost fifteen years ago, Sherry Turkle wrote that, "Virtual environments are valuable as places where we can acknowledge our inner diversity. But we still want an authentic experience of self" (1995: 254). While Turkle's account of the fluidity of identity in online spaces has been well critiqued, along with the work of Stone (1996), as a utopic leap into the modern age that leaves bodies and the messy contexts of their lives behind (Argyle and Shields, 1996; Campbell, 2004), her statement about authenticity holds true for online daters in my study. How does an online dater accurately and honestly construct an online self? And further, how does an online dater determine that others are presenting themselves authentically in return? This chapter answers these questions by exploring practices of selfing that occur in online dating scenarios. These practices of selfing highlight daters' attempts at authentically representing themselves and act as a requirement for proper engagement. This means that daters privilege the large amount of information, especially pictures, they have available before they meet potential dates in order to filter out people who lack the potential of being good soul mates or marriageable partners.

I will demonstrate that through highly gendered, racialized, classed, and embodied regulatory practices, online daters are required to represent themselves as authentic subjects. These practices exist in processes of subjectification whereby individuals are required to not only construct themselves as intelligible subjects, most importantly according to heternormative logics about beauty and desirability, but they are also subjected to these heteronormative modes

of identification and intelligibility by potential dates/mates. In particular, women are subjected to their bodies in highly regulatory ways that result in what I call practices of fat authenticity that hold them accountable to the 'reality' of their weight in order to not be rejected or humiliated when they meet their online dates in person. These practices of fat authenticity are ultimately both disabling and enabling for female online daters, as women have to confront the fat phobia they encounter online in men's profiles and in person. Ultimately, I argue that this onus of authenticity in the experience of women who online date results in practices of subversion that put into question the notion of authenticity itself.

5.2. Framing the Self

Forty-three-year-old Andrew sat across from me in a local coffee shop where I regularly conducted interviews, seated in a relaxed posture, slouched back in his seat, resting one ankle on one knee. Despite his relaxed demeanor, what he was saying made it obvious Andrew was not comfortable. He was fed up with online dating after admittedly having little luck finding the serious relationship he was looking for. Andrew was annoyed at the technology, thinking it is too impersonal, but hoped that it didn't appear that he was blaming the internet for his lack of success. He explains, "that that too much time is spent relating in that medium and that's what not a relationship is. A relationship isn't you on a terminal and me on a terminal and we're communicating with words or photos. I hope it never comes to that and that's ultimately why internet dating hasn't worked for me. It's not real. The communication that's formed is not real for me." Andrew's characterization of two terminals standing in for "real" face-to-face interaction is a common one, and one that is invoked in discourses of anxiety that seek to construct online dating as just one example of the many ways technologies are threatening the

very basis of sociality. The two terminal image conjures people who can no longer relate to one another, and who cannot identify the "proper" basis for coming together because they are too lost in "cyberspace" to know what – and who – is real. Andrew went on to explain that

> You're trying to play God, you're trying to meddle, you're trying to control everything. And there's that aspect where you're totally trying to manage it and to make it end, to come up with how it's gonna look. To me the beauty of meeting people and interacting with human beings is that you don't know who you're gonna meet, when you're gonna meet or how it's gonna happen. You carry yourself open in the world, you don't know what's going to be brought to you when you kind of get out of your own way. For me, it's kind of hard for me to use that technology and not over manage because I'm a writer and I like technology and I like to use technology. It's hard for me not to over manage and kind of come off of it too strong instead of just being measured in it because it is so virtual and so intangible. I kind of want something real. I can't flaw the medium, it's how we use it. It's like anything, it's not the flaw of the medium, it's how we approach and there are so few rules about it. Most of my friends are struggling how to date in person. How do we date in person? How do we meet someone, tell our story but not give too much away? How do we not get too close, too quickly? How do we not manufacture what we want? How do see people for who they really are? How do we tell people who we really are?

Andrew's concern for having something "real" with a "human being" reflects central concerns about the nature of human engagement and relationship formation both on and offline. In particular, Andrew's questions about how to not manufacture what is desirable and how to see people for whom they really are as well being able to represent oneself accurately demonstrate this anxiety about what is "real." These questions stand as important aspects of selfing in appropriate ways that will be recognizably desirable to a potential date (and soul mate). Andrew constructs a version of offline reality that he privileges over the "terminal to terminal" relationship he fears. However this offline reality is still informed by questions of authenticity; that is, how do we know what/who we want and how do we construct ourselves in such a way as to attract that which we want? Andrew's questions ultimately point to how difficult it is to self in authentic ways both online and off. While these questions point to the ways that Andrew understands "real life" as having more spontaneity and more authenticity of engagement, he still

questions what that authenticity truly means, how it is constructed, and importantly, how it can be maintained as distinct and more valuable than constructions of self that occur online.

I use Andrew's anxieties about authenticity in dating, whether online or off, as a way to introduce the topic of selfing as it emerges in a medium whose users are cautioned and instructed to distrust. Warnings about not sharing personal information flash on the screen while you respond to email, reportage of identity thefts and online scams from Nigeria abound online and in the traditional newsmedia. The message is clear: the internet is a place of anonymity which as Turkle warned many years ago, "may provide some people with an excuse for irresponsibility" (1995: 254). This means that before online daters even begin to online date, they must overcome anxieties about the warnings they have received about the rampant deception that occurs online. Further, this means that they must take pains to accurately and appropriately represent themselves so that they cannot be accused of participating in this kind of anonymous and irresponsible conduct. Online daters, armed with this knowledge about possible deception, largely protect against deception by signing up to one of the mainstream or "legitimate" dating sites. Lavalife is at the top of this list and Craigslist is at the bottom (and Plenty of Fish, as a free replica of Lavalife being in the middle in terms of popularity) in the discourses and practices of my participants in Vancouver. These sites, except for Craigslist, require online daters to fill out a profile, which is seen as further protection against inauthentic accounts of self because everyone must fill in the same information, according to the same categories of physicality and personality. Craigslist online daters follow a loose framework for creating a profile that includes "stats" – that is bodily statistics: height, weight, eye and hair colour – as well as personal preferences and the stats of what they are looking for in a partner.

Thirty-year-old Victoria explained the importance of "stats" to me in one interactive surfing session. These "vital statistics" or very brief descriptors that online daters see as they browse through the profiles of potential dates (the Lavalife interface allows you browse lists of people who include these stats with pictures so that you can filter people with a quick look at their stats instead of having to navigate to their full profile). These stats can be very basic, such as eye colour, height, weight, occupation, religious affiliation, and are based on the 'self' that the online dater creates upon joining the site by filling in the required information required to access the profiles of others. This information is understood to be given honestly, and in such a way that what you see online is what you get in person. Authenticity requires two central components that fall along gendered lines: physical replicability is mainly required by men, that is, does she look exactly like the picture and does she weigh what she said she weighed online, and replicability in terms of honesty and integrity seemed most important for women, that is, is what he told me online and in his profile actually true when I meet him in person. However, the beginning of authenticating the self begins long before the profile and is intimately connected to the boundaries of gendered, racialized, classed, and embodied identifactory practices that get transposed online through a series of categories that make the dater intelligible and immediately desirable.

5.3. Projects of the Self

As mentioned above, Turkle's (1995) and Stone's (1996) accounts of the self as mediated by technology fail to take fully into consideration the embodied nature of that engagement and the extent to which selfing – or identifying – is limited by the constraints of regulatory norms, in particular, heteronormative logics. Approaches like these that highlight the malleability of

identity construction at times fail to fully critically engage with what it means to be recognized as an intelligible subject in a medium fraught with anxieties about anonymity and deception. Kendall (2002), in contrast, discovered that in "virtual pub" known as Blue Sky, the "multi-user dungeon" (or MUD) she studied (which was originally developed as an online venue to play games such as Dungeons & Dragons, an offline fantasy board game) men and women were required to negotiate their gender roles in interesting and familiar ways. In this space, acknowledged as an anonymous and even "playful" space, Kendall observed patterns of gender behaviour largely reflective of offline interactions, statuses, and power relations. Rather than encountering gender play online – that is, strategies of playing with alternatively gendered "selves" – Kendall observed, "cyberspace remains a realm populated mostly by the white and middle class and is still largely dominated by men" (2002: 221). Further, she explains that "[r]esearchers who assert that online interaction creates greater identity fluidity or gives participants a new sense of a more fluid or constructed self contribute to this extension and reification of privilege in cyberspace" (2002: 221). Cyberspace should not then be understood as gender-neutral escape from our contemporary situation. By recognizing how 'real life' power relations and gendered identities get played out online, it is possible to see how online dating is an always already gendered phenomenon that does not exist outside relationships of unequal gender power such as those found in any "real-life" bar, pub, or nightclub.

5.4. Categorizing the 'Other'

In her self-representation, 44-year-old Liza could not be any clearer. With a strongly confident demeanour, a disarmingly youthful appearance combined with a stylish wardrobe and trendy hair, Liza appears to be the epitome of "desirable" in Vancouver's online dating scene

(despite the fact that she is out of the "ideal" range articulated by some men in this study that positioned young women – that is, under thirty, as most desirable). After some discussion of failed attempts at online dating, Liza slowly began to reveal to me what she feels was part of the reason behind her sometimes reluctance, and sometimes outright difficulty, presenting a self that attracts the "right" men. She located the majority of this "problematic attraction" in her own inability to properly represent herself as a "mixed race" woman. By her own description, Liza is half-White and half-Asian, and has chosen to check the "Mixed" race category on her Lavalife profile so as to maintain the ambiguity she feels is her right (also to destabilize the preconceptions about what it means to be "differently" racialized) and to avoid the uncomfortable emails from Asian men seeking a "proper" Asian woman that she has received in the past when she identifies simply as "Asian" (or conversely any other men who objectify, fetishize, and sexualize Asian women as "submissive" lotus flowers). Liza explains her conundrum as a "Mixed" race person on Lavalife,

> It was difficult I think because if you put mixed, which is the only option that I felt I could put, I don't know, it just really brings up really weird questions right away. I definitely put that down, but I mean I can't put down Asian because I feel like I'm not, and I wouldn't put down White because I'm not, so I mean it's…I don't know if was important, but it was necessary.

Liza characterized this inability to locate herself in one of a few race boxes in order to make herself intelligible in her online dating profile as an obstacle to being properly desirable and/or attractive. Liza felt trapped in some ways by having to live up to what she felt was a societally-defined measure of attractiveness based on Whiteness. To her this meant that she had to be open about her "difference," which impacted upon her on a very personal level, making her feel as though she was not properly attractive because some men are, according to her, not attracted to anything but "blonde, blue-eyed girls." She explained her conflicted choice to put mixed race this way: "I felt I had to because that way they had the right to know, if they're looking for

somebody who's White to just exclude me. I think it was a protective thing, okay when you contact me, you're gonna know going in that I'm not White so there is gonna be no question here. But I also felt like it's, I mean it's such an odd thing to put mixed…yeah it's just really odd."

In this way, Liza felt that it was her responsibility to be open about her racial background in order to not be rejected because her potential date was looking for someone White and "blonde-haired, blue-eyed" or "authentically" Asian. In this case, Liza was anticipating and managing the possible rejection she might encounter for being neither White nor Asian enough. Liza explained, "I think because I [am] in Vancouver and because a lot of Japanese or Chinese men, because of cultural pressures, really do tend to date Japanese or Chinese women exclusively [that I couldn't put hat I was Asian alone]. Not all, but a lot of them do, and I felt by putting Japanese down, it would make it difficult in terms of, if that's what they're looking for is a Japanese that's not who I am, but if they're looking for a White woman, that's not who I am." Liza justified her choice to highlight her racialization because to her, it exists in relation to both attractiveness and desirability. She stated, "I don't think I ever feel like I can just say I consider myself to be an attractive woman because I'm always really conscious that that's always tied to race and that that might not be true for people who see things from a really racialized point of view."

Having to be upfront with her racialized identity therefore puts Liza in an uncomfortable bind. In order to be true to who she believes herself to be means that her own sense of self, as an attractive and desirable date/mate, is destabilized largely due to her idea (and the potential reality) that the generalized other will have trouble finding her intelligible enough to be viable as a potential date. In the end, this balancing act of trying to be authentic, to make provisions for

those daters who might reject her outright based on her racial category, and to live with the reality of the complexity that was created for her by checking the "mixed race" category box, Liza stopped online dating halfway through the series of six follow-up interviews we had scheduled. Much of her explanation for removing her profile centered on her inability to properly express who she really was and what she was looking for in a partner. She sums up some of her frustration,

> It's like I'm half something and I'm half something else, but this whole idea of a mixed race is not about a kind of wholeness. So I'm really kind of on the one hand, I find that really hard to push myself into that little box, but on the other hand there's not a lot of other options other than to say "other" or to refuse to answer that question. But to me that's just, that's not who I am either, to try and hide it somehow.

Liza's frustration with online dating, and her ultimate decision to remove herself from the Lavalife dating site, largely came from a problem with the interface's inability, and the concomitant inability of the other users, to account for differences that lie outside the categories provided. There is little room for ambiguous categories like "Mixed" race, and these ambiguities are not easily expressed by checking categorical boxes of identity in the construction of self through the process of profiling.

Liza's story acts as a graphic example of the ways that online dating requires immediately knowable and understandable subjects who are properly gendered and racialized and desirable based on that intelligibility. Subjects like Liza who do not construct themselves straightforwardly and unproblematically are easily filtered out of the searches online daters conduct for their "perfect soul mate." Categories of desirability as they emerged out of the practices of my participants were largely heteronormatively constructed along gendered lines that were also very racialized. For example, men had to be taller than women, women had to be "thin," "fit," or "active," men had to be gainfully employed, certain races were considered less

attractive than others (shadowed participant Daniel explained to me simply that he did not find "Asians or Blacks" attractive so he left them out of his search criteria), and some men constructed Asian women along the lines that Liza describes (Nick explained that his new online dating strategy was to "target Asian women" because "because status [to them] would be dating a white guy so it is really easy to date Japanese girls. I'm white, I have a job and I make really good money." In contrast, Tom explained that he had recently met a Chinese woman in person whom he had liked online but soon realized that she "still had too much China in her" for him to find her properly desirable). These examples illustrate the extent to which heteronormative practices of the self that are significantly racialized impact and restrict certain online daters ability to authentically self. Further, these examples are not isolated, individualized anecdotes of online dating. They speak more broadly to the gendered and racialized experience of online dating and how pre-given categories work to shape an online dater's sense of self. Liza's story highlights in particular the inability and the seeming disconnect, between perceived selves and the cyberselves she, had to create to become an online dater. Liza's story represents an inability, and a conscious refusal, to fit into a "race" box and construct a self that ultimately will be judged by a single picture or racial category. Her story exists within a narrow frame of reference that requires individuals to make themselves desirable to members of the opposite sex, thereby to enter into discourses of dating that are extant and pre-exist the advent of online dating. While many researchers acknowledge the existence of matchmaking services prior to the advent of the internet (see Ben Ze'ev, 2004 and Whitty and Carr, 2006), few recognize the powerful (in both a productive and reductive – or limiting) role that gendered and racialized (and classed) expectations play in what it means to date, and to be a desirable date at that.

Online dating ultimately lays bare the regulatory nature of the Butler's heterosexual matrix (2006 [1993]: 208n.6) because it requires people to self in an overt way. Online dating requires individuals to self for the other, as we do in everyday life, but it forces both the dater and the generalized other to lay bare the mechanics of that process of selfhood and thus exposes the gendered and racialized norms that influence its construction. Online dating asks the dater to allow themselves to be exposed, judged, and evaluated – all in a particular form, and through particular means. As an online dater, if you are having trouble locating yourself on the grid of intelligibility, that becomes your problem, your personal flaw or inability to attract dates. You quit, or make due with less – less contacts, less dates, less opportunities to meet "Mr. or Miss. Right." In order to further uncover how this matrix operates in online dating, as in everyday life, we must look to the ways that cyberselfing is managed, manipulated, and perfected along highly proscribed lines. Many of these heteronormative and racialized logics that undergird practices of heterosexual dating in Vancouver can be seen in the practices that privilege the visual, specifically filtering and fat phobia.

5.5. Filtering Fragmented Selves

Online dating differs from more conventional forms of dating primarily because of the wealth of information an individual has access to about their potential date prior to ever meeting face-to-face. As Whitty reports in her 2003/2004 study of an Australian internet dating site, some online dating sites require individuals to conduct a personality test so that individuals can be matched on compatibility. Most sites however simply require individuals to provide general as well as more in-depth details about themselves (e.g., gender, location, physical description, interests, and what they are looking for in a partner) to be perused by interested singles (Whitty

and Carr, 2006: 124). In my study, online daters appreciated the amount of information they received prior to an actual face-to-face meeting because it helped to 'filter out' undesirable people and qualities. As Tom explained, online dating and the process of viewing profiles online,

> expediates the filtering. Because you know when you meet somebody you know the first thing is well, you have to look nice, but lets find out about you now, right? Well, the internet is sort of the reverse of that unless you have a picture and even that's not accurate, right? But yeah, the internet allows you to sort of reverse that and go "lets expediate all of the fluff" and get that out of the way and decide if we even want to meet at that point.

This view was repeated by both women and men who sought to "simplify" and expedite the "getting to know you stage" of online dating. Twenty-three year old Dana echoes Tom's sentiments on filtering by stating that, "I guess there's that power of having information about people, like a filter. It's time-saving as well." Participants largely experienced this ability to filter as empowering and commonly suggested that they had not had any "bad dates" (i.e., horror stories) because they considered themselves good at this part of the process. However, some participants outlined how this filtering could become problematic, both by heightening their own and others' pursuit of "ideal dates" and causing them to more easily reject those who did not fit one's search for the "perfect date." Many of the women in my study expressed concerns that they were "too picky" by filtering out those potential dates that they might not have if they did not have so much information to begin with. Liza's own concerns about the ease of rejection based on filtering, or in her words, "weeding out," best exemplify this trend. She explained, "I mean it was nice to weed through and perhaps that was like the biggest issue for me. It was too easy to weed everybody out and have nothing left."

The anxiety around being too picky was more acute for women, who are understood as the "choosers" in the gendered stratification of labour in online dating practices in Vancouver. Men generally flood women with smiles (a free emoticon sent to potential dates as a sign that

one is “interested”), emails, and instant messages. Men characterized their online dating strategies in terms “hunting,” “flooding,” and “contacting as many women as possible” because the way online dating plays out among heterosexual daters in Vancouver is sharply divided along gender lines, with men contacting widely, while women have the “luxury” of choosing and rejecting from the pool of men that contact them.[18] Men therefore have to negotiate a lot of rejection and often expressed frustration around this seemingly unfair “privilege’ or advantage women enjoyed as a result of men’s practices of “flooding.” But this gendered pattern of “flooding” and “choosing” also results, for women, in a sense of being “picky.” Forty year old Carla reflects this anxiety around being “too picky” by saying that online dating is “kind of addictive, you know that’s what I was trying to say, like you know? There’s always someone better out there. You know?” While I will later discuss the implications this level of choice affords women in a seemingly new form of (re)gendered dating schema, for now I point to the primacy of the visual for these selection and rejection practices and how they are intimately related to the gendered phenomenon of fat phobia.

While women seemingly have the final say as to who they will meet given the large pool they have to choose from, women also experience an implicit and explicit anxiety about being rejected once the process moves “offline.” Women expressed considerable anxiety around being rejected on the basis of their weight, and many agonized over the appropriate way to represent their weight so as to be as accurate and “authentic” as possible, similar to Liza’s anxieties about being as legitimately “knowable” as possible. Many women routinely scaled their weight up in their profiles so as not to be seen as inauthentic by checking the box for “thin” when a potential date might see them as “average.” This is an interesting understanding of authenticity that

[18] This trend changes as women age. Older women have to put in more time and energy to searching themselves because older men tend to focus attention on younger women, whilst often ignoring the profiles advances of women their own age.

demonstrates the extent to which an authentic self is constructed in contingent relation to what the generalized other expects. Women did this for good reason however as the majority of my male participants expressed concern and dismay about the potential for women's deceptions about weight. Male online daters not only explicitly stated their desire for women who, in "positive" terms, were described as "fit" or "active," and in negative terms, for a woman who is simply "not fat."

In our first interview Tom explained an online dating deception that he had experienced when he met a woman from out of town for an agreed upon meeting over a weekend when she planned to visit a friend in Vancouver. When the woman's friend was called away on business, she asked to stay with Tom at his place. He reluctantly agreed but when he went to pick her up at the bus station, he explained that he had been deceived. Tom explained

> My first though was you freaking lied to me. You are a lot fatter than what you are in the picture. And as mean as that is I don't do well with fat. So, I just sort of went "Oh god." So we ended up going back to my place cause it was late and she ended up crashing. We get up in the morning and I phone my buddy Ray and I said "Ray phone me back here in 15 minutes" – she was in the shower – "phone back in fifteen minutes. Pretend you're my brother and my grandma just died." He says "What?" I said "Just do it"…I could have won an Oscar for my performance.

Here, it is evident that Tom felt deceived and intentionally misled. In response, he deceived this woman through an elaborate lie that would provide him the basis for his rejection, or at least dismissal, of her as a love candidate. Tom explained that she had later sent a sympathy card to him expressing her condolences about his grandmother which, he explained, just made her more pathetic especially since she kept sending him things in the mail. He explained, "So then she started sending me things in the mail. And I ended up getting a parcel and there was all sorts of things in there. But one of the things that she put in there was this little tiny pair of very sexy panties she put perfume on. My first thought was you would never even fit into these things."

This reaction is perhaps an extreme example but was echoed to greater and lesser extents in the majority of my interviews with male online daters.

For women, this requirement to be authentically embodied translates into being overburdened with what I call the onus of authenticity, which takes the form of responsibility for being either "authentically fat" or "authentically thin." Women are responsible for being honest and authentic about their weight representation, from filling out the appropriate box on their profile, to posting profile pictures that allow potential dates to objectively measure their body mass index or BMI,[19] which twenty-four year old Daniel explained as an important guideline for date selection. Daniel also explained that it was helpful to get multiple pictures (sometimes from being added to a potential date's Facebook account) in order to be able to visually quantify a woman's measurements to accurately decide if she was an appropriate weight to date. Daniel used his fingers to try to objectively measure the width of women's hips from their photos they provided. Daniel further articulated that dating a bigger woman would be embarrassing because when he introduced her to friends, he knew that they would be thinking that she was fat and wondering why he could not do better.

Of course, fat phobia is not a new phenomenon in dating. In their discussion of a slightly different form of fat phobia in offline contexts described as "hogging" by the men who engage in it,[20] Gailey and Prohaska (2006) came to similar conclusions about dating when they found that men did not ultimately want to be in a relationship with "big" women because that would infringe upon their status as appropriate and desirable males (45). This research demonstrates how online dating reiterates attitudes of male fat phobia in North American dating practices, and

[19] Body mass index (BMI) is a statistical measure of a weight of a person scaled according to height.

[20] "Hogging" is a practice in which men prey on overweight or unattractive women to satisfy their sexual urges (Gailey and Prohaska, 2006: 32).Gailey and Prohaka further point out that men engaged in processes of neutralization such as denial of the victim and victim-blaming by perceiving overweight women as deviants who do not appropriately fulfill their female role obligation by being "attractive" and thin (ibid. 33).

has perhaps amplified rejection based on body size now that men have greater access to diversely shaped women and their sometimes inaccurate representations of themselves which are compelled by the desire to be "authentic.' In this way, gendered relations of power are enhanced and further articulated by the ability to have more information prior to a face-to-face meeting. This visual and textual enhancement results in higher rates of rejection based solely on primarily visual and some textual cues (in this case of weight) as well as by and through the reification of women's presumed appropriate role of "becoming an attractive object as a role obligation" (Shur cited in Gailey and Prohaska, 2006: 33).

The primacy of embodiment in my study stands in stark contrast to Turkle's fluid self that she imagines in interface-based play where "the self is not only decentred but multiplied without limit. [The internet provides] an unparalleled opportunity to play with one's identity and to 'try out' new ones" (1996: 356). Rather, the authentic self that emerges in the online dating practices of my participants, especially with regard to a woman's weight, requires accurate depiction and conscious, authentic and extensive explication. Nakamura (2002), points our attention to how celebratory notions of the "fluidity of self," of freeing ourselves from our limiting bodies, "tend to overlook the more disturbing aspects of the fluid, marginalized selves that already exist offline in the form of actual marginalized peoples, which is not nearly so romantic a formulation" (xvi). Nakamura coins the term "cybertypes, borrowing from the concept of stereotype, to describe the distinctive ways that the internet "propagates, disseminates, images of race and racism" (3). She rejects the notion that we are "virtual" in cyberspace on the basis that "machines that offer identity prostheses to redress the burdens of physical 'handicaps' such as age, gender, and race produce cybertypes that look remarkably like racial and gender stereotypes" (5). Through her concept of the cybertype, Nakamura is arguing

against the notion that the internet is a democratic space capable of freeing us from our embodied selves/identities. Instead, she argues that these assertions of the fluidity of identities and selves emerge from the privileged invisibility of whiteness and mask the differential access various groups experience in relation to new technologies. Nakamura claims that cybertyping keeps race "real" through the discourse of the virtual (26). Just as Liza was unable to be limited by one "cybertype," so too are women gendered negatively by being located in bodies that are cybertyped as lazy, unhealthy, unfit, and, most significantly, unattractive. I will explore the gendered responsibility of selfing through what I call the onus of authenticity that results in a particular kind of authentic askeses.

While this theme, of men desiring only "thin" women, may not seem entirely surprising or entirely new, it is interesting in light of the work done on technologically-mediated transformations of self, and ideas of the mutability of physical characteristics in online environments (for examples see Turkle, 1995 and Stone, 1996). Here, I suggest that this "fat phobia" serves at once to subject women to their bodies even in online environments, while requiring them to continuously become or reinvent themselves as "fat subjects" by constantly having to own up to the "reality" of their weight in order to avoid embarrassment, humiliation, and rejection. I complicate this notion with Foucault's understanding of the networked relationship of assujetissement; that is, at once becoming subject and subjected through practices and care of the self, or askeses.

This project of the self is decidedly heteronormative and has been documented elsewhere by feminist scholars of the body, weight, and dieting (see Bordo, 1993 and Bartkey, 1990). However these feminists have often adopted from Foucault's normalized disciplinary practices a decidedly passive or acted upon (i.e., agency-less) understanding of women's bodily

subjectification by understanding women-as-dieters or women-as-exercisers as "docile bodies." Heyes (2006) suggests that this is only half of the story. In her own ethnographically-inspired analysis of weight watchers, Heyes understands the process of working on the self, in this case through dieting discipline, as also involving enabling moments. These moments, Heyes explains, "exemplify Michel Foucault's thesis that the growth of capabilities occurs in tandem with the intensification of power relations" (126).

The men in my study almost universally claimed that women in the past have deceived them with regard to false or misleading representations of their weight. Further, when asked, "What are the fundamental characteristics you are looking for in the profile of a potential date?" they again almost universally responded with some variation of "not fat," as mentioned previously. Only two women mentioned weight as important in their choice of potential date. Thirty-one year-old Emma explained that she is not attracted to over-weight or out-of-shape men and another said that she does not look for "really big men," whether muscular or heavy.

More significantly, I began to hear how the stories of my male and female participants complimented each other, how "not fat" was not only a male desire but was also tied to practices of authentically representing the self for women. As Emma explains, "I'm a little bigger than lots of women, right? So my pictures show that." Another thirty-six year-old participant, Francesca, explained that she isn't a 'Yaletown' size two (Yaletown being a trendy upper-middle class neighbourhood for professionals in Vancouver's downtown). She wanted to make sure the men she contacted online knew that prior to their meeting. As much as her efforts can be perceived as a strategy of authenticity, they can also be understood as a "project of the self" or a technique of the self, insofar as they represent a project that one both subjects themselves to and is made subject to. As Foucault explains, self-formation as an ethical subject – in this case as an honest,

authentic, "real" person – "requires him [sic] to act upon himself, to monitor, to test, improve, and transform himself" (Foucault, 1992: 28). Further, he explains that there is "no forming of the ethical subject without 'modes of subjectification' and an 'ascetics' or 'practices of the self' that support them" (ibid. 28).

What makes this particular practice of the self gendered is its disproportionate effect upon how women construct and cultivate themselves in their profiles for potential dates. In this heteronormative practice of cyberselfing, women are responsible not only to their representational cues "given," but also for the cues being "given off" (to again use the language of Goffman, 1959). Women must construct a version of themselves that abides to male standards of beauty and desirability while maintaining an "honest," true, and "authentic" self-portrayal. In this way, women must consciously and continuously reconstruct themselves as "fat," and own up to an identity or "self" that they understand the generalized other conceives them as. Women become "subject to" their bodies by accepting an identity, or in the case of Lavalife, by checking a body size box on their profile that is somewhere above "average" and below "queen-sized." In this way, women's bodies define them and accompany them online: there is no transcendence here, only "truth." There are moments in the data generated in my limited study that attend to the notion that women are not entirely disabled by this subjectification. These moments of subversion can be understood to be destabilizing the very ground of the "authentic self."

5.6. Contingent Authenticities

While my research findings bear out that men overwhelmingly say 'No' to fat women online, the resultant reaction from women in my study has not been a negative one to this labeling or perception. Rather it appears that the reaction to a perceived stigma against "fat" has

been largely to engage in the "constant reinvention of self," as Victoria put it. By this, Victoria was referring to the constant performance of self that must occur in the context of online dating. For example, the dater repeatedly tells dates where she works, what she likes to do, and what she looks like. This performance has been variously explained as confusing and messy but always honest and authentic, particularly for women. Most of the women I interviewed embraced their appearance with a kind of "take it or leave it" attitude. They did not dwell on the perceived or real rejection they may encounter based on their physical appearance.

As Emily explained, she wants to demonstrate that she is not like other women, but bigger, and attempts to accurately portray that to potential partners. It is here where self-discipline and proper practice of the self fail to conform to normalized techniques of the self. These women recognize what is expected in the world of heteronormative ideals; that is, to be "fit," active and thin women, whether online or off. Nevertheless, while reacting to the power of ascetic truth or authenticity, they reject such normalization. By "telling the truth," and I argue, by embracing the onus of responsibility around their "fat authenticity," these women "exceed normalizing goals and expand, rather than reduce, [sic] possibilities for being in the world" (Heyes, 2006: 146).

When Francesca said that she wants potential dates to know that she is athletic but not "Yaletown skinny," she is resisting the definitions and rejections of men who would construct her as 'fat' and opening up an enabling space of being that is not restricted by the profiling practices that subject her to her body. Rather, Francesca's and Emily's discourses of subtle resistance, coupled with their practices of fat authenticity, offer a dynamic picture of self, one that is both constrained and enabled by the particular technique of self that compels them into ascetic authenticity in a process of cyberself-ing that takes embodiment seriously. In perhaps the

most subversive example of fat authenticity, women over-report their weight in an attempt to be as authentic as they believe the generalized other wants them to be. In this way, women not only embrace their embodiment, but also acknowledge the contingency of authentic representations of self as a complex process of regulated and constrained performances. By finding ways around the limited picture of self that the profile limits them to, women subversively rewrite their authenticity in ways that acknowledge the contingencies of self and other. This complex interplay of truth-telling as a project of the self that is both disabling and enabling means, according to Heyes, that we must "understand that we have reason to embrace the increases in capacities it permits without acceding to the intensification of disciplinary power it [sic] requires" (ibid. 127).

Chapter Six. Managing 'Excess' Online

6.1. Introduction

Daniel[21] is a fun-loving, at times intensely serious and successful, twenty-five year-old professional who, even at his young age, has his sights set on long-term love and commitment. At our first meeting Daniel explained that he had recently broken up with a girlfriend and decided to try online dating to look for another partner. He explained that his motivation for online dating was simply that he thought "Oh sure, why not? Throw a profile up there and see what happens." Daniel was committed to finding the "right" mate while dabbling with women who might not be "quite right" but were interested and interesting, and thus worthy of at least one date or a causal friend-like relationship. Daniel's experiences of frustration around the amount of work he had to put in and the amount of rejection men have to get used to in order to online date were not unique, but most fully articulated in his narrative.

Daniel's frustration held significant contradictions, and his experiences of online dating highlight the nature of these contradictions well. During our time together, Daniel had a number of women whom he contacted and "hooked up" with regularly, noting that they were "friends with benefits" rather than marriageable material, which he was still actively seeking. To put it bluntly, Daniel noted that three of the women he was casually seeing were "fat." While Daniel expressly stated an interest in women of a healthy weight – even voluptuous – he was particular about body shape and size and whether or not a woman could "wear weight well." Daniel explained that women wear weight differently so that some could hide it better than others. He noted that he and his male friends go by the rule that if you suspect a woman on Lavalife is

[21] Daniel also participated in the shadowed portion of this research, meaning that he participated in seven interviews total (one preliminary and six follow up), interactive surfing sessions, and he kept an online dating log of all of his online dating-related activity including usernames of women he was in contact with, times/dates of contact, and the nature of the contact (e.g., a first date, phone call, chat session, email on Lavalife, etc.).

overweight, then she probably is. This belief is reflected in his and his friends' concern that "a lot of girls will describe themselves as having a 'few extra pounds' but they are fine and others are putting 'average' but are overweight." This is where Facebook, the social networking site, became invaluable as a tool for finding out just what weight a woman actually was. Once added by a potential date as a friend on Facebook, Daniel would compare the many causal shots from a woman's Facebook profile to the more posed and manicured photos available on Lavalife to make a final decision about a woman's weight appropriateness. Daniel even used his fingers to measure a woman's hip width and finally resorted to the "science" of the Body Mass Index (BMI) when pressed about what actually constitutes "fatness." Primarily, Daniel was concerned about the health implications of dating a woman with significant weight, stating that "obese people die young." This purported concern for health was coupled with his concern that women's weight has a significant negative impact on their partners. He explained that "sometimes fat girls have self-esteem issues" and it "affects the guy because she won't want to take her pants off to have sex because her thighs are too thick." This was not the only way Daniel saw his own reflection in the weight of the women he dated. Daniel explained that it is "almost embarrassing if you are dating a woman that is 300 pounds" because "your friends would say that you can do better than that because who you are with is reflective of who you are." Further, if you date someone "beneath you" people would "wonder because everyone wants an attractive girlfriend to show off to their friends and every girl wants a successful boyfriend to brag about to her friends." Here, Daniel articulates some of the central gendered dynamics that emerged in this project. Foremost, he articulates the conventionally, stereotypically, and heteronormatively gendered components of desire – that is, aesthetics and beauty as appealing for men and "stability" or financial security for women. Through these common-sense logics that reflect

functionalist perspectives on how men and women "serve" each other, Daniel's sense of self becomes inextricably linked to his future girlfriend's appearance, in particular her weight, as a measure of himself as a man, and a successful online dater.

This chapter considers how male online daters construct various kinds of "inappropriate excess," mainly sexual and embodied excesses in women, through an analysis of their discourses and practices of online date and mate selection. These discourses of excess reflect a kind of othering that is based on retrieved gender stereotypes about "proper" female partners. These discourses are firmly based in heteronormative logics that privilege notions of female passivity and a specific racialized embodiment (the thin, White, North American "ideal'). In practices of online dating, these excesses are managed through the construction of the abject – that is, the not-self, the expelled and reviled – in order for male subjects to construct a self that aligns appropriately with the achievement of normative, heterosexual masculinity. By othering certain "excessive" women through particular strategies and stereotypes retrieved and then uniquely enabled by internet technologies, these men who online date seek to buttress their own desirability in the eyes of "appropriate" marriageable partners while maintaining the heteronormative logics that define their version of 'proper' masculinity. Daniel's story acts as an illustrative example of this retrieval of gendered stereotypes while highlighting the ways certain practices of online dating result in reconstituting the normative and desirable man.

6.2. Daniel's Story

Daniel was already seeing a number of women he felt were interesting when I met him, who shared his interests, and who he was, by all accounts, sexually compatible with. However, these women were not "good enough" or were simply "beneath" his understanding of himself as

desirable, both physically and financially. Further, as the example below of the "Dutch Girl" illustrates, being physically "excessive" could spill over into other areas of "improper" femininity such as "aggressive sexuality." By our third meeting, Daniel had begun talking to a woman whom he nicknamed "Dutch Girl" as she was from the Netherlands and, according to Daniel, was sexually permissive, as the Dutch are stereotyped to be. In previous interviews, Daniel had told me that he shied away from any sex-related talk on the chat function of Lavalife or on MSN messenger where he occasionally added contacts that might be potential dates after some online conversation and rapport building. He did this, he explained, so as not to be that "creepy what-are-you-wearing guy."[22] However, online conversations with the Dutch Girl quickly lead to sexual banter, despite Daniel's conscious attempts to keep conversation sex-neutral. Daniel asserted that the Dutch Girl would often initiate conversations about sex and he eventually was happy to go along with them. By the fourth meeting with me, Daniel had had a date with the Dutch Girl; he had slept with her and as a result crossed her off his list of potential long-term relationship candidates. In the end, she was unsuitable physically because, after having sex with her, he discovered that she had too many "jiggly bits." Soon after, Daniel's anxiety that online dating was making him sexually promiscuous began – creating an interesting relationship in his mind between the of physical "excesses" of the women who would be appropriate sex partners, but not appropriate relationship partners, and what he saw as his own increasing physical – sexual – excesses.

Daniel did not reject women based on their overt sexuality. He did not view Dutch Girl as a "slut" or any of the other women he "hooked up with" as sluts, and ultimately expressed to me

[22] This is what my participant Carmel called men who initiate what she deemed inappropriate sexual conversation in the Lavalife interface. For example men might begin an instant message conversation (often because they have paid to initiate conversation with a woman who was not interested so they "use up" their 20 minute messaging session on other women who appeal to them) by asking "What are you wearing?" or in Carmel's case, telling her that she has nice breasts, as one man did in a instant message conversation that she recounted to me.

more concern over his own self-proclaimed "slutty" behaviour (which was reflected in his idea that online dating was effectively turning him into a "slut" because it was so easy to meet and go on first dates with women who were not "ideal" and thus easier to sleep with and then reject because he saw no future with them). Daniel did express anxiety over these women as suitable long-term partners. In this way, women's "excesses" were feared seemingly because they might potentially "rub off" on Daniel himself. Daniel's need to repudiate these women's excesses, and his engagement with them as problematic and "slutty," reflects a concern over how his practices were changing the desirable image he has of himself. Women are constructed here as not only excessively problematic but also as harbingers of such excess, which could potentially impact men who come in contact with them. What is significant here is that this excessive "pollution" as it were, affects Daniel's sense of himself as a masculine and desirable man, not his health or any other purported concerns. Excessive women here are specters of improperly gendered pollutants which can sully a man's masculine potential. This concern over excess was reflected in other male participants' sentiments about "appropriate" partners as not overly or explicitly sexual, whatever guise this might take (e.g., in their profile pictures, backstage pictures, "about me" sections, or in the way they engaged in online conversation). Some women were easily deemed hook-ups, while others had dating and relationship potential. How these two constructions of women's excess, both physical and sexual, are related, and how they are entangled in the selfing-process of the men I interviewed will be considered in the remainder of this chapter.

6.3. Multiple Excesses as Inappropriate 'Aphrodisia'

In contemporary Western white culture, fatness does not usually (with the exception of "fetish" pornography that features bigger women) signify "sexy." As Murray (2004) points out,

the fat woman "is supposed to be asexual: often, she is not permitted to experience sexual desire at all, let alone sexual pleasure" (239). Further, she notes that increasingly "[w]e talk about fatness as a major health crisis, an epidemic, a drain on resources, a symbol of the failed body, and as an aesthetic affront. We do not talk about fat and sex" (ibid. 239). This "asexuality" is conferred upon both fat men and women, but impacts women significantly as they, in 'proper' feminine form, are meant to be the objects of the male gaze and male pleasure, both visual and sexual. While "our culture codes these imaginings [of fat bodies engaging in sexual pleasure] as disgusting, perverse, [and] perhaps an underground sexual fetish for kinks wanting to be dominated and smothered" (ibid. 239), fat women are still often targeted as "easy" sexual marks for men looking for a one-night stand.

In their discussion of an active, albeit negative, sexualization of the fat woman, Gailey and Prohaska (2006) outline how men "prey" on seemingly vulnerable fat women in bars. Similar to Daniel's attestation above about how fat women do not make appropriate long-term partners, Gailey and Prohaska come to similar conclusions about having sex with, versus dating, fat women, when they found that men did not ultimately want to be in a relationship with "big" women because that would infringe upon their status as appropriate and desirable males (45). This preference can be seen as a reification of heteronormative notions of women's presumed appropriate role of "becoming an attractive object as a role obligation" (Shur cited in Gailey and Prohaska, 2006: 33). Because fat women are constructed outside this appropriate role, they are seen as "deserving" of this sexual exploitation while not deserving of an ongoing relationship. Sexuality, fatness, and "inappropriateness" come together in this formulation of how men "other" women in order to establish themselves as appropriate and desirable mates. This othering

requires an integrated notion of the self that combines the strategic "use of pleasure" with active abjection that is made more obvious through the practices associated with online dating.

Foucault's later work focuses on the care or cultivation of the self in a way that is contingent upon the ethical practice of the "use of pleasure" (1985). While attempting to trace the ways that morality and sexuality have become intertwined in Western civilization, Foucault investigates how the uses of pleasure have emerged and changed since Greek Antiquity. He tracks changes in what he calls "aphrodisia," which was akin to sexual relations or sensual pleasures, and how it became important as a beacon of morality and a force that had the capacity to corrupt the formation of the ethical subject. Foucault therefore links the 'care' that is to be taken with the exercise of aphrodisia that was initially outlined by the Greeks (not, as with Christianity, as a list of rules and regulations, but as an "articulation of a technique of living" or a techne [Smart, 1985: 114]), to the "care" of oneself, not only a health precaution, but an "exercise – an askesis – of existence" (Foucault, 1985: 126). He states,

> It is a question, in this techne of the possibility of being formed as a subject in control of one's conduct…it may thus be understood why the need for a regimen for the aphrodisiac is emphasized so insistently, when so few details are given of the troubles the abuse might cause, and very few statements as to what should or should not be done. Because it is the most violent of all pleasures, because it is more costly than most physical activities…it forms a privileged area for the ethical formation of the subject (ibid. 156).

The Christian codification of this ethical work on the self emerges in the form of the regulation of certain acts, and truth-telling must result from the transgression of certain bodily "laws." In contrast, the askesis that Foucault speaks of takes a unique form in the practices of sexuality that some of my participants engaged in. Daniel's story and anxieties over his own inappropriate aphrodisia – that is, his willingness to have sex with women who are not "ideal" but are nonetheless willing to have sex with him – demonstrates the extent to which his own self-regulation, and formation as a properly gendered and appropriately desirable heterosexual mate,

is tied up in the management of "excess" which, he believes, too much indulgence in will not serve him well.

Excesses of all kinds – women's overt sexuality, Daniel's own "promiscuous" behaviour (with the inappropriately embodied, no less), and the peripheral sex he has with women who are excessive – all threaten Daniel's appropriate construction of himself. Much of this excess is constructed as coming from outside himself – in the form of sexual engagements with women who are "beneath" him or "improper" – which he downplays in favour of highlighting his ultimate goal – a properly gendered – thin – heterosexual woman. Sexual engagements with fat women ultimately affect his sense of self, and his excessive sexuality with inappropriately gendered women further affects his sense of himself as a "good person." His anxiety over "becoming a slut" himself is evidence of the moral nature that he imposes on his sexual explorations with "fat" women. Fat women become the specter of his personal sense of moral decline and act as evidence that aphrodisia, for him, is winning over his formally moral self. The next section explores how work on the self through the "abject pleasures" of other's bodies and desires muddies the clean line between selfing and othering. And further, it asks whether this process is unique to online dating?

6.4. Abject Pleasures and the Quest for Appropriately Gendered Selves

In my (limited) study, fat women and overly sexual women are constructed as abject by the men involved in dating them, having one night stands with them, and rejecting them based on their 'appropriateness' as long-term partners. Defined by Butler, abjection "designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered "Other" (Butler, 1993: 181). What makes the construction of the abject as the "Other" so compelling is that it is a

boundary-making project as well as a project that makes "the distinction between internal and external" through the "ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness" (ibid. 181-82). In other words, that which is abject is part of the self, i.e., the constitutive exclusion/abject, externalized and made "improper." Further, this boundary between inner and outer is tenuously maintained by social regulation and is "confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes the outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, a model by which other forms of identity formation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit" (ibid. 182).

The activation of an abject realm of womanhood becomes important for online daters as it compels the boundary of the coherent and "properly" gendered male subject. Male online daters experience a tremendous amount of rejection which in some cases causes them to "lower" themselves and date women who are not ideal. Men ultimately reject these women based on embodiment which makes them an inappropriate object of desire. Similarly, men take women who are overtly sexual on their profile on dates in hopes that it will lead to sex and nothing more. By constructing fat and sexual women as abject – that is, by constructing them as "not-me" – these men accomplish the establishment of the "boundaries of the body, which are also the first contours of the subject" (ibid. 181). Thus, the construction of an intelligibly gendered subject requires adherence to heteronormative logics that help to construct the subject intelligibly – that is, to make oneself into a coherent, and desirable, heterosexual male. Men who online date do not necessarily make it known that they turn "bad dates" into sexual "conquests" or that they might contact women who they think are "slutty" for the sole purpose of sleeping with them. It is through their very secrecy however (as evidenced by one thirty-year old man, Blaine's, concern that I was going to share his causal sex conquest stories with his partner who was also a

participant) in this practice among men, that it was evidenced as a particularly strategic use of pleasure.

As Foucault notes, strategic uses of pleasure, whether the sexual austerity practices among the Greeks, codifications of acts among the Christians, or other strategic uses of pleasure such as seeking out "slutty women" online in hopes of sex for the price of dinner, act as an "intensification of the relationship to self by which one is formed as a subject of one's acts" (Foucault, 1992: 55). Men who seek to engage sexually with women deemed "excessive," therefore, are working on themselves and constructing themselves as ethical subjects through these regulated sexual acts, which ultimately end in disavowal and abjection. By not allowing themselves to enter into relationships with women who they nonetheless engage in abject pleasure with, men police the boundaries of proper femininity, in their own minds, by treating those excessive women as "not good enough" for relationships but good enough for one night stands. Through their use of what they see as "rewards and punishments," these men hope to form themselves into "an ethical subject by shaping a precisely measured conduct" (Foucault, 1992: 91). Therefore, the fat woman, the sexual woman, the excessive woman, must "conform to the aesthetic ideals that lay at the core of an art of existence, she needs to transform her body, and her flesh, to become normatively beautiful. She must achieve this through restraining her supposedly excessive desires, she must learn to exercise control in all aspects of her daily life, she must set about employing Foucault's 'techniques of the self'" (Murray, 2004: 241-42).

6.5. Gendered Stereotypes: Reformatted to Fit Your Screen

Dating is arguably both an already gendered and a mediated phenomenon. In other words, dating, as a practice, has always been mediated by the gendered norms and behaviours

historically expected of men and women in heterosexual "courtship," and further by the contemporaneous social technologies such as the telegraph (explored further below), telephone, video technologies, and even the music of the dance-club. Gender stereotypes, and the particular manifestations of what is "proper" for men and women, have undoubtedly shifted and transformed over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. There are particular normative notions about what proper gender should look like, however, that are laid bare in heteronormative practices of mate selection and definitions of what is aesthetically pleasing or beautiful. As Orbach (1984) points out, "fat emerges as a barrier to a fulfillment of traditional female roles" (43) and this is evident in the practices of men who vilify women who do not embody ideals and uphold normative notions of "normal," proper, decent, and importantly, desirable femininity.

Gender stereotypes, perhaps unsurprisingly, figure heavily into the practices of online dating, and specifically into men's constructions of what an appropriately gendered – or feminine – partner would look like, both online and off. First and foremost, these stereotypes are "retrieved" from an era when, fifty-seven year-old Peter explained, women were "women," and men were "men." Peter elaborated upon this bygone era by elaborating on how he feels that dating for him now means competing with women, because "society has spent the last 30 or 40 years teaching women how to be men and even teaching men how to be women and now women want men to 'out man' them when the truth is, this is as good as it gets. I prefer women who will out woman me." Peter is clear that "womaning" should be relegated to sphere of females and that he should not have to compete, or does not want to compete, with women trying to "out man" him. For Peter, and the majority of the men in this study, "ideal" women are thin, young (roughly defined as women under thirty), and attractive. As Peter explains,

> Women your [own] age, the sphere that I'm in, which is the geriatric phase, women still think the same as women your age, you know, and they're about as attractive as I am. I'm personally at the stage where I'm sick and tired of the bullshit, I'm just sick and tired of it…There's nothing left you know, you know they're [women in their 50s are] all dried up and worn out and wasted and they still think I should be romancing them and why hell would I want to romance somebody that just got nothing there.

This acerbic contention that women of a certain age have little or nothing to offer a man is reflected in the patterns of male "flooding" which has been explored previously as men's attempts at maximizing their time spent on online dating by sending form emails to women whose pictures they like. Older women, stigmatized as "all dried up," are less likely to receive the flood of smiles (free emoticons indicating interest), emails, and instant messages from male online dating "hunters," and are therefore more likely to be responsible for making and maintaining contact if they want to proceed with the process and meet offline. Fifty-four-year-old Linda explains that after she initiates contact, which is the case the majority of the time, if she doesn't hear from the men, she proceeds by "giv[ing] them a little leeway because I know they are busy out of town or busy with business, which a lot of them are. So I give them a week or two weeks. By then, if they're not interested, they're not interested; there is no point in pursuing it so…then I usually like to move it along." Linda assumes much of the responsibility for making and keeping dates and even goes so far as to remind men of the upcoming coffee dates they had previously scheduled. This responsibility for initiating contact and making dates was fairly unique to the women forty years of age and older. In contrast, younger women, especially those thirty and under, had difficulty keeping up with the demand from male "suitors," and often had difficulty remembering who was who. Ageism that is woman-specific is another layer of gendered "appropriateness" that women have to contend with to be considered desirable in the online dating practices evidenced by my participants in Vancouver.

As previously noted, age is not the only way women were stereotyped as perfect or imperfect soul mates however. As has been previously mentioned, weight and race were also significant grounds for rejection, as was perceived sexual prowess. Subscribing to a discourse of the virgin-whore dichotomy, women understood to be "party girls" were not seen as appropriate life partners. They were often skipped over in the men's searches, or contacted for one-night stands only. While "surfing" with 45-year-old Tom, we encountered many profiles, particularly on the Plenty of Fish site, of scantily clad women. Tom rejected these women outright, stating that was not what he was looking for. Similarly, thirty-year old Blaine explained that he "found that the people that were on Plenty of Fish, I don't know, there were some skanky girls, let's put it like that and I'm not really turned on by the skanky factor. It's okay to have a quick peek at, but I wouldn't want to date someone like that…so I tended to stick with Lavalife." When probed about what constituted a "skanky girl," Blaine explained that, "you see girls with their boobs squished up in the camera and all bent over the bed and stuff. You know, entertaining to look at but again it didn't do too much for as far what I thought of them. That's just not the kind of girl I like to date."

Women are held to a high standard of sexual propriety if they are to be seen as a viable potential soul mate, particularly a marriageable partner. These gendered relations of power are directly reflected by the stereotypes that link ideas of "appropriate" femininity to ideas of women being "used up" or "worn out" if they are older and if they are perceived as having prior, and perhaps extensive, sexual experience. Online dating has retrieved not only the fairy-tale endings told in storybooks that idealize the stereotypical roles played by "prince" and "princess," but it also intensifies them by putting them on a larger scale of potential date selection and rejection. By engaging in what many daters conceived of as "shopping" through profiles, most men in my

study seemed to search for stereotypical ideals of "emphasized femininity" in their practices of online dating.

"Emphasized femininity," coined by gender theorist R.W. Connell (1987), reflects the obligation for women to comply with the interests and desires of men, in this case to be seen as desirable and appropriate women, and by extension, to be ideal candidates for marriage and partnership. Kimmel (2000) explores emphasized femininity's articulation through stereotypes of "proper womanhood" and explains how it operates in everyday life by "exaggerating gender difference as a 'strategy of adapting to men's power,' stressing empathy and nurturance; 'real' womanhood is described as 'fascinating' and women are advised that they can wrap men around their fingers by knowing and playing by the 'rules'" (11). In practices of online dating, women are compelled to relearn the rules of proper womanhood in order to catch and keep a man. Women have to be appropriately gendered and embodied, and in the case of online dating, translate this appropriate femininity accurately through their profiles which are regulatory and restraining in the kinds of options they offer women for representing themselves. Women, again, become "objects" in this mediated domain of profile pictures and category boxes of age, gender, race, and interests. Women negotiate these "networked" power relations and regulatory ideals in interesting and innovative, and at times, unexpected, ways that being to shift retrieved gendered stereotypes by re-gendering certain practices of dating.

6.6. Reversal of Fortune: How Women Re-Gender Online Dating

In this final section I explore the ways women re-gender certain power relations that result from the retrieval of gendered stereotypes in remediated dating. Women retrieve gendered stereotypes primarily by engaging in practices previously considered to be the privilege of men.

Women are afforded a unique degree of autonomy in online dating scenarios through the first "right of refusal" by choosing from a pool of men rather than feeling like "the chosen."[23] Women need not wait for a man to approach them, nor do they feel threatened by rejecting men who they see as inappropriate for them, "creepy," "too old," or uninteresting. Empowered by this increased power to choose, women can often forego the niceties expected of them in face-to-face rejections in bars and clubs. Women, who may at first be concerned about hurting a man's feelings, soon feel emboldened by the new codes of conduct that come with remediated dating and accept them as "normal" and "appropriate." Men for their part expressed extreme frustration over rejection and their displacement as the "choosers." While men may often have the final say over whether to reject a woman based on her perceived deception or honesty about her weight, women are selecting and rejecting men on the frontline of online dating, choosing from many interested men who may or may not turn out to be Mr. Right. Many men in my study constructed this power imbalance as "unfair." As forty-three year-old Andrew explained,

> people say "Andrew, you're expecting too much, women get too many emails," and I guess, but I just don't accept that or maybe I'm just too sensitive for that and maybe I have too thin of a skin for it. I can accept that, that I'm too sensitive to rejection, but I'm sincere. Maybe I'm investing too much into it, but just to be ignored, maybe that's a strong word, but to not get a response, it doesn't sit too well with me. And I've done that too, I've ignored responses too because it's easy, there's no one there. But if someone says, "Hi how are you?" in Capers [a local grocery store], you don't just turn away.

Andrew went further, describing rejection as the power of women in remediated dating as the result of inverted gender roles. He articulated this by explaining that as a man online, "I don't

[23] While men also "choose," they are understood – at least by women – to be less "picky" because many flood women with emails, which are often taken from a standard template that they have created. Choosing is complex in online dating and begins at the moment one makes their profile. While there are different layers of choosing, women are privileged in the sense that if they are seen as desirable enough to be contacted (and most women receive a good deal of attention despite any nuances in their appearance) then they get a chance to reject or ignore once contacted. The power of choosing is up for grabs again however, when daters meet in person and choosing becomes dependent for men, often on physical appearance, and for women on the man's integrity, which is contingent on the man being a good and accurate replication of his online profile.

have as much power as I do in person, as I do in real life, and that's ultimately what it comes down to." Andrew attributed this "impotence" to women acting like men and men acting like women. Peter explained this inversion of gender roles by saying that "society has spent the last 30 or 40 years teaching women how to be men and even teaching men how to be women" and reflected some of Andrew's concerns around this inversion leaving men "impotent." While this explanation could be seen as evidence of an anti-feminist backlash, or, at the very least, the romanticization of a nostalgic past where women were "women" and men were "men," it also clearly illustrates how patterns of online dating can be seen as re-gendered through different practices of what we understand as courtship or dating. In everyday ways, women expand their ability to do love in ways that performatively subvert the categories of their femaleness, femininity, and womanhood by taking on and embracing their "new" and seemingly different role as the primary "rejectors" online.

Chapter Seven. Homing In on 'Happy Endings'

7.1. Introduction

In this empirical chapter, I build on the previous chapter by exploring the challenges to heteronormative male sexual privilege and instances of challenging differently gendered action by women that are made possible by online dating. By exploring what in fact comes first for many online daters, that is, their motivation to online date in the first place, I explore the ways women in my study used online dating in strategically subversive ways that both reinscribed and rearticulated heteronormative "happy ending" online dating stories that reify the hetero-romantic search for love online. These online love "success stories" are predicated on the heteronormative ideal of the procreative nuclear family as the ultimate outcome of online dating. For example, advertisements for eHarmony.com (an online dating "matchmaking" site) feature happily coupled individuals who tell their "happy ending story" (i.e., that they found their soul mate and got married) to the camera. The date of their match and/or wedding is revealed at the end of the commercial, thus establishing that not only are there "normal" people out there who online date, but these normal people (read: like you) can find success (if you pay the right site). Similarly, some online dating research focuses on the "successes" of online dating as being commensurate with quantifying how many people marry as the result of online dating (Brym and Lenton, 2001; Baker, 2005).

I foreground motivation in this chapter because it illustrates the complex, and sometimes contradictory, relation that online daters have to the possibilities and potentialities offered by online dating as a remediated form of dating. This question of motivation is integral to understand how the stories of men and women merge in heterosexual fantasy and desire and

culminate in the final task in the online dating process – meeting offline. Motivation also begs questions of authenticity and deception, which have been covered in previous chapters. This chapter highlights the experiences of women, who, as we have seen, undergo significant inspection, filtering, and 'measuring' to see if they add up to the perfect 'quality' date. Further, I use the metaphor of home to signal both the motivation of the majority of my participants – that is, the fantasy of "home" as heteronormative idealized goal/outcome of online dating (i.e., the quest for a life-long, marriageable partner or soul mate), and to indicate the subversion of this fantasy. These subversions, I suggest, are made clear through Nicola's struggle to achieve a "home" despite her sexual "permissiveness," and Victoria's conscious refusal to believe that "home," family, or marriage should constitute an ideal that one should strive for (or see as the result or outcome of online dating). Victoria and Nicola's stories demonstrate the extent to which the search for hetero-romantic love online can offer possibilities for movements toward differently gendered agency/practices. Online dating allows for the possibility of re-gendered action, thus challenging the heteronormative logics that structure conventional heterosexual love relationships. However, the limited extent of which this subversion of desire (specifically for women) can create possibilities for significantly re-gendered action/practice will be illustrated.

Because men were significantly more forthright – or simply had the language to express their desire in a way women did not – their experiences have been highlighted so far in this narrative. As will be made clear however, some women's practices (not necessarily their explicit statements of desire) of online dating belie subversive practices that seek to rewrite at least some of the heteronormative conventions of love that abound in my study of online dating. Women in my study created innovative and subversive practices, motivated by their heterosexual desire that resulted in a significant challenge to the notion that the search for love online results only in

maintaining extant gendered scripts for men and women. These subversive practices include Victoria's creation of a male "harem" and in the struggle Nicola had reconciling her desires for a partner and her desires for an active and exciting sex life. While women were constructed by men in my study as being either "willing" or "unwilling" sexual partners (and questionably appropriate ones at that), some women in my study were imaging ways to challenge what they saw as men's sexual privilege in heteronormative dating scenarios.

Women's motivations, nuanced by their sexual desires, while less overtly discussed, were made abundantly clear through their re-gendered actions that sought to actively sexualize and "use" men for sexual pleasure. I will use the illustrative examples of two women, Victoria and Nicola, who spoke at length about their sexual desires as they related to "proper" and "improper" forms of heterosexual dating and courtship. The experiences of Victoria, with her self-described "harem" of men whom she alternately took turns hanging out with and having sex with, and Nicola, whose sexual "permissiveness" seemingly locked her into perpetual singledom by her own account, demonstrate the possibilities created in practices of online dating for differently gendered action. First we explore 30-year-old Victoria's harem in order to begin to flesh out women's digitally-enabled desire.

7.2. More than Multi-dating: The Evolution of a Harem

"I didn't start out thinking, yeah, I am going to get myself a harem," Victoria explains to me on our fifth follow-up interview. "I started out just wanting to casual date, and then…it just happened!" We both burst into laughter, knowing that what we are talking about, casually and loudly, in a public place, is taboo for women, while acknowledging the unease that is created when two women, who are not intimate friends, talk about sex. This unease is usually the result

of knowing that you could possibly tell the other woman too much – or just enough – to be faced with her judgment or scorn because of your overt declaration of the desire for sex.

Victoria is an engaging and vivacious woman, with arresting blue eyes that convey honesty and an intensity that becomes clear upon getting to know her. Victoria is not exactly embarrassed about her harem, but knows well the judgment that comes from being open about her decision to take what she calls "multi-dating"[24] beyond drinks and a goodnight kiss. She explained that her friends variously support her and judge her for her keeping of this "harem." While some of her friends thought she was a revolutionary, transgressing the boundaries of "proper" femininity, she suspected others were supportive to her face, but she picked up on disapproving "undertones of 'Oh, you're one of those'" from them. Victoria is educated and deeply passionate about research, thus explaining her participation in the shadowed portion of my research. She was my most thorough shadowed participant, who kept a meticulous online dating log, and made every one of her scheduled follow-ups on-time, prepared, and enthusiastic about updating me on the progression of the relationships that she was negotiating. At the time of this fifth interview there were five regular men in her harem and two she had just met online whom she was evaluating for their suitability for admission. The idea for a harem had been proposed to her by one of her "regulars" (that is, regular sex partner). After he had told her that he kept what he called a "harem" or women, she thought to herself, in her words, "What is good for the goose is good for the gander." She then went about creating her own harem, which included a range of men that she had varying degrees of interest in, as well as varying shared

[24] Multi-dating emerged in my study as a more generic term to indicate a different code of conduct in online dating that allowed online daters to date more than one person at the same time. Multi-dating is in part a strategy to maximize time spent online dating by setting up dates in relatively quick succession so that chemistry could be quickly establish, and if it was not, it was easier to move on to the next date (because the online dater had already spent time building rapport with a number of other people). If daters dated one person at a time, they would significantly increase their time spent on the computer, and significantly decrease their actual in-person dates.

interests with. She acknowledged in an early interview with me that, according to "societal beliefs," what she is doing is seen as inappropriate for a woman. She had decided however, that because men could legitimately get away with this kind of "multi-dating," and the fact that she does not share these beliefs about "appropriate" sexuality, she could construct herself legitimately as a non-monogamous person (as her "harem mentor" had done).

Victoria believes that with honesty she could ethically keep a harem, which is easy to do because of all the men online looking for casual dates and hook-ups. Of utmost concern to Victoria is honesty. She told each and every man she became involved with that she dated and slept with other men, that she was openly non-monogamous and was only interested in seeing men who could accept this practice openly, without judgment. One man had in fact, "fallen in love" with her, and subsequently had to stop seeing her because he was unable to be part of the harem without being jealous. While Victoria felt bad that this man could not accept her decision to "multi-date" in this way, she knew he was not the right person for her, so was able to accept his decision and continue on with her harem. With most of the men in her harem, Victoria has a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and only a very few of the men acted as if they are aware or concerned about it at all. An interesting note about Victoria was her self-proclaimed lack of "real-life" dating experience, having been married and divorced young by some standards. She expressed some concern that because online dating was her first "real" entrance into any kind of systematic dating, it was ruining her possible experiences of "real-life." Victoria explains that due to the high volume of information that she was armed with about potential online dates, she was often frustrated in real-life situations such as bars and clubs, where she could not easily determine if men were single, looking for relationships, or even straight. Online dating provided her with easy access to men who were actively looking to date, and who would be willing, even

if their stated motivation or goal was a relationship, to be part of her harem and hook up when they both had the time and the inclination. Connecting offline meant a variety of things for Victoria and these men. Offline "hook-ups" would range from a one-off meeting online which would result in talking all night on MSN messenger and then meeting up in the early morning to have sex; movie nights that would end in sex; or just plain getting together to have sex and sometimes take pictures that would be exchanged over the internet later. Her concern that online dating was ruining her for the "real world" of dating was mitigated by her technological prowess, which resulted in her being very successful at online dating, if meeting men and having continuous relationships, sexual or otherwise, is the goal. Also, she recognizes that in conventional offline dating relationships, a harem would be less than viable. In online dating, she explains, multi-dating is taken-for-granted, while in real life dating it is the exception to the rule. In this way, Victoria's practices subvert "happy ending" stories that were meant to result in the fantasy of home. She rejects monogamy through her practices of "multi-dating" and is concerned that her privileged position of being able to create a "harem" would not be as successful in strictly "offline" dating scenarios. Because of the greater acceptance of "multi-dating" online, Victoria could comfortably keep a harem and be open about it in ways that she knew would be stigmatizing offline.

Interestingly, Victoria claims that she was willing to give up her harem for the "perfect" person (interestingly, this perfect person came along roughly six months after our final interview, through other technologically-mediated means, and Victoria gave up her harem). While Lavalife was Victoria's choice of an online dating site, which has an intimate encounters section for the express purpose of facilitating casual sex hook-ups, she did not use this section after having experimented with it at the beginning. She saw this section, as did many, as being about

unconventional sex acts that were outside of her sexual interests, thus, about the "perverse" (although Victoria did not judge them explicitly as such). And in a poignant moment, Victoria expresses to me that while she recognizes the judgment of others, including her friends, and the societal judgment she knows surrounds her choice to have a harem, she is okay with that because she did not think she was doing anything wrong. Further, she explains that that judgment was about them, that "it is their own limitation if they can't understand that people have different ways of being."

Victoria's development of a harem was an evolution introduced to her by a man "she would not have otherwise met" in "real life," who evidenced a kind of being outside of what she had previously experienced as a sexual woman. While she acknowledges that her harem came with some costs, those of societal and interpersonal judgment, she mitigated those costs with honesty and openness, incorporated into what she saw as the ethical pursuit and fulfillment of her desires. Victoria's story stands as an example of re-gendered action that she consciously undertook as a means of rejecting the fantasy of home. Victoria engages in non-monogamy in ways that would have been difficult for her to negotiate offline. When asked if she would try to translate her experience of a harem offline if she ever chose to discontinue online dating, she suggests that she most likely could not, as it would be more difficult. In particular she thought that men in offline situations would be less open to the idea. In this way, Victoria subverts not only motivations to online date that emerged in my study but she further reverses "conventionally" gendered action in heteronormative sexual engagements by rejecting the trope of home, family, and monogamy. In contrast, Nicola represents a slight different story that highlights the difficulties and complexities involved in negotiating fantasies of home. Nicola's

experience illustrates the struggle between female sexuality, motivations for online dating, and the regulation of women's desire.

7.3. Escaping Slut: Nicola's Struggle Through Desire

At first glance, Nicola comes across as much older than her twenty-five-years. She is a purposeful woman with a gait and demeanour commanding of attention. This appearance of maturity holds until she begins talking. Her stories and experiences convey the youthfulness of her twenty-five years wrapped in a shield of projected sophistication. Nicola has not yet told me what she does for a living and this did not strike me as odd, although most people who contact me tell me how they are employed upfront, to make sure that they fit the 'professional' category that the call for participants requires. When I ask Nicola what she does for a living as an introductory part of the interview, she says, "sensual massage." I ask her if this makes her a small-business owner, thinking that perhaps she runs a salon. She tells me "yes," she owns and runs her own business giving massages and hand-jobs out of her home. She is her only employee. Nicola explains that she is parlaying this into a "legitimate" small business, which will manufacture a sex toy that she had developed – the first models were to come off the line in two to three weeks. Nicola is proud of the transition she was making into what she terms "legitimacy," and is taking this transition from sex worker to business-owner seriously, having gone back to school to pursue a diploma business course. She explains that part of her motivation for online dating is "to get a long term partner" and she feels that this added professional legitimacy (of manufacturer) would help her in that pursuit. Further, Nicola explains that she has become addicted to online dating and is starting to feel "like [she] has become obsessed with finding a partner forever."

Nicola does not think that the search for a marriageable partner negates taking advantage of what comes along in the meantime however. Nicola explains that, as the result of her job, she realized that she is "kinky," and so was originally attracted to an online dating site for people interested in alternative sexuality. She found some inconsistencies with these sites however. There was not enough focus on the exchange of pictures and she experienced some disappointment with the men she met, who turned out to be better friends than lovers. But going "mainstream" posed a unique problem for Nicola. She explains, "You know, I think about, I think 'I'm young, I'm pretty, I'm intelligent, I'm a business-owner,' you know, all these wonderful things, very, very easy-going person, like to laugh, like to chat with people, but as soon as you throw in sex worker, I'm not even a sex worker, I do rub and tug, you know, hand-jobs, very little interaction with my clients, you throw that in there and it like shifts the whole picture." Nicola essentially had to "out" herself as a sex worker (despite not necessarily identifying as one), which she initally thought would be positive for dating. She figured only men who were comfortable with her line of work would contact her. Nicola was disappointed and frustrated that this was not the case. Mainly, she found that men did not read her profile, and those who did expected her to "put out." In her words, "unfortunately, as modern as men think they are when it comes to women, you know, that whole virgin/whore dichotomy is there. It'll never disappear, not for years." Nicola found herself in a bind; if she told potential dates what she did, she got dates, but those dates either overlooked (literally) what she did, or expected her to "perform" for the price of dinner.

One story Nicola recounted illustrates this bind well. When I ask her if she had ever felt deceived while online dating, Nicola recounts a story about one "weirdo" she met. She explains, "I met him on Lavalife and it was in the dating section. His profile said, "'Where are all the nice

girls?"' and I'm like, 'Oh god.' Whatever. You know, he seemed interesting. I can't remember if I wrote him an email or if he…I think I sent him a link. We set a date. Again I'm going out to his place. I'm very trusting." As Nicola made the trek to her date's house, he sent her sexually-charged text messages on her phone. Nicola explains that although she thought this was a little forward since they had not met yet, she was also interested,

> I'm like I want to see if he has the balls to actually carry through with this when I get there or if he's one of those guys who's all talk and no action. So I get out there and he's a very, very attractive guy working on his second master's degree, very intelligent, very well-travelled and he's a funny guy. So we're hanging out, having a decent time. The conversation was, he seemed a bit stilted and I was a bit nervous. It was going, it wasn't necessarily flowing. So we're hanging out and then he puts the moves on me, but earlier on in the night he had said very clearly, "I do not want a girlfriend." And I'm sitting there and thinking "Oh, that's strange, you're profile says that you do." I figure most guys are honest. So he's putting the moves on me and I'm kinda thinking, "Oh…" and one thing leads to another and we have sex you know it's done and we had a great time. So, he drives me home and I kinda thought, "Oh I probably won't hear from him again, he doesn't want a girlfriend."

Much to Nicola's surprise this date did call her and texted her numerous times after that initial date. It is clear that this man was contacting her only for sex. Nicola explains that, "You know, a one night stand is one thing, it's the extended booty call that I don't deal well with." She explains that she "falls" for guys easily and did not want this to be another case of a broken heart for her if she got attached to him. When she finally made it clear that she was not interested in seeing him again he said to her, '"Oh, so you're a one night stand kind of girl?" (These conversations took place over text message). Nicola responded by texting

> "Resorting, for an educated person, such as yourself, resorting to insults is the lowest trick, the cheapest trick in the book." And I kind of said "I don't understand why what is making you so angry about this. You said you didn't want a girlfriend and I believed you. I had a great time." I was still friendly and polite and I had a great time, but you don't want a girlfriend and you…wanted to see me again, but he wouldn't say admit that maybe he was interested. He just wouldn't and I was trying to force his hand. He writes me back, "I'm not angry, I'm chuckling, you're a dirty, slutty skanky whore, you disgust me."

Instead of being insulted, Nicola sent the text to her brother, thinking it was "hilarious" enough to share. She went on to explain to me how she felt:

> You pick every sexually derogatory word in the book and throw it at me and think that I'm going to cry. Are you joking? I couldn't believe it…that kind of ended it for me. I'm kinda thinking "Is that guy crazy?" But he has a scarf of mine that I really liked, how am I going to get that back? A few minutes later, I wrote him another email and I was like, "Hi, how are you doing? I'm sure you don't want this beautiful scarf from this dirty, skanky not to mention, slutty whore. You can mail it to," I gave him my sister's address. He's such a weirdo. I got an email from him a couple of days later and says, "You're not worth the postage, I'll drop it off." I'm like, "You'll drive in from [that distance] to drop a scarf off for me?"

Nicola explains that she did not know if this kind of reaction to this man's verbal attack made her what she called a "fourth wave feminist," but she was clear that even though she had chalked it up to him being a "weirdo," when he did want to see her again, she explained to him, "you're so weird. You can't call me a dirty, skanky, slutty whore and then be nice. You don't care if I get the scarf back, you just want to see me again. You fucked that one up dude, really harshly…you can't. I can't see you again. You were really nice, but you can't call me a dirty, skanky, slutty whore and then want to hang out again. It doesn't work." What is paradoxical for Nicola about this situation is that, although it was the most extreme example of a man's reaction to her line of work she could think of, the other online dating stories she recounted to me had a similar thread.

Men rejected Nicola on the basis of her overt sexuality and "inappropriate" employment. In her own estimation, Nicola was up against the virgin/whore divide, one side knowing that she "should" leave the profession and be involved in the adult world without performing sex acts, and the other side of her recognizing that it is laughable and unfair to punish a woman, who is looking for love, for having sex on the first date. In some ways, Nicola felt trapped by her desires and the desires of others. She explains, "I'm finally at a point where I'm comfortable with myself, I'm comfortable with my body, I'm comfortable…I'm getting much more comfortable

with who I am and it would be nice, I would like to have kids by the time I'm 30, I'd like to start because I'd like to have two or three children and you kind of start going, I kind of need someone. And so that would be the ultimate goal." Nicola's desires, both for casual sex and for marriage and children, were palpable. Throughout the interview, Nicola oscillated in her discussion between continuing to online date and giving it up. Toward the end of the interview, she states,

> I don't think I'm going to do online dating anymore because I don't need to because I meet so many guys…and especially once I quit my job and I won't have to tell people that, it will make it easy to meet people face to face. You know I won't really worry about it at all. I mean the lucky thing about dating men is that they are generally a bit more sexually open so I mean it's not such a huge part of my life that…I'm not into stuff that kinky that I would actually scare a guy. I think that's not a hard thing…guys are fairly open so I'm not worried at all about it. The online dating was mostly because of my job, so I don't think I'll need it.

What started as hope for a different life for Nicola, or at least a different approach to the fulfillment of her "obsessive" search for a partner, ended, at least in this discussion, as the recognition that even online, she could not escape the judgment and rejection that she encountered in her offline relationships. Nicola assessed her desires, and in the end decided that they might be more palatable offline, since online they seemed to be magnified and deemed inappropriate. Nicola's story illustrates how the regulatory norms of "proper" female sexuality can be policed and exploited by men who are seeking women who fit into their fantasies of home. Nicola, too, struggles with her own version of home and the constraints she experiences in finding a mate for her dream of home that can accept her as an "appropriate" and desirable partner.

Online dating as remediated dating in this instance allows Nicola to reverse "conventional" power dynamics in heteronormative sexual relationships by resisting conventional sexual norms and the label "slut" and actively seeking out sexual pleasure in her

quest for a soul mate (which goes against conventional heteronormative courtship logics of the ideal female partner as a "chaste," or not sexually available one). In this way, remediated dating allows Nicola to create her vision or fantasy of home in various ways that enabled her to seek causal sexual pleasure (through online dating) that she both desires and welcomes. However, Nicola's construction as abject by the "weirdos" she encounters (who treat her as abject according to their normative notions of what "proper" femininity and masculinity should be predicated upon) demonstrates the constraints she faces while trying to reverse fantasies of home in her practices of online dating. Nicola does not rearticulate the ground of these heteronormative logics, but attempts to articulate new versions of "home" that allow her more sexual autonomy and freedom than she experiences in conventional dating scenarios where she feels less able to be open about her profession.

In their experiences online, neither Nicola nor Victoria experienced a complete release from the constraints of socially-sanctioned appropriate desire for women, but Victoria had a greater experience of sexual freedom. Why this might be is considered in the next section that explores how sexuality is constructed more broadly in online dating.

7.4. Stigmatized Sexuality

Sexuality was a noticeable silence in my study, which is strange for research having to do with dating and relationships, a part of social life in which sexuality plays an integral part. Silence is perhaps too strong a word for a subject that was not explicitly posed in questions, or incorporated expressly into my research. Sexuality did emerge in surprisingly gendered ways however. As Schwartz and Rutter (2000) point out, "the gender of the person you desire is a serious matter seemingly fundamental to the whole business of romance. And it isn't simply a

matter of whether someone is male or female; how well the person fulfills a lover's expectations of masculinity or femininity is of great consequence" (1).

The gendering of sexuality is particularly salient in online dating scenarios as online daters are often trying to distinguish, sometimes only from a picture, if someone is a suitably gendered sexual partner. For women, this means that men have to be seriously interested in relationship-building – this requirement often results in women verifying the "truth" of men's claims that they are interested in a relationship by checking to see if the men they are interested in have an "intimate encounters" profile on Lavalife (because such a profile indicates an unconventional and disproportionate interest in sex versus relationships as mentioned above). Women will search intimate encounters once they meet a potential date online to make sure they do not find their date's picture on any of the profiles in this section (men often change their username, which would be an easier way for women to search for them, because they are aware women do this – a picture is harder to find). Further, men cannot be "creepos" as Carmel outlined in the previous chapter, or be too aggressive sexually during initial contact if they want to be successful finding dates. For men, women cannot be too visually "slutty" or "skanky." Women are held to a particular standard of proper femininity that leaves out, or is coy about, potential sexual prowess (as was discussed in Chapter Seven).

While both men and women stigmatize overt sexuality online, few acknowledge it as an integral part of their practice of online dating (for example, few people said that they were looking specifically for someone who they were sexually attracted to as their "ideal" soul mate). Both women and men participants tried to avoid people perceived as overtly sexual, unless they are explicitly looking for a good time or "making due" with the date that they are faced in "real life" with. What makes Victoria's and Nicola's stories unique is their direct confrontation and

discussion of desire as an important part of their online dating experience. Why did Victoria and Nicola move beyond "acceptable" gendered boundaries of female sexuality? And why did their stories end so differently – one seemingly in defeat, and the other in apparent and self-described comfort? I argue that these different endings have to do with what technology enables while women users are being simultaneously constrained by the cultural conditions of desire.

7.5. Domestic Desire as Anathema

Judith Halberstam argues that the "home and family function most often as myths of the naturalness of heterosexuality, but these myths…are remarkably vulnerable and fragile" (1997: 189). The threat posed by sexuality in an online dater's search for the perfect soul mate appears to speak to these myths and to heteronormative desire as properly focused on partnership, marriage, home, and family, and not on explicit displays of, in particular, female sexual desire. "Home," Halberstam suggests, is a particularly salient trope in this heteronormative construction of appropriately targeted desire as it functions as an "ideological space which mimics order, comfort, privacy and personal space but which in fact balances upon the precipice of sexual chaos, produces restricted genders and functions as an extension of the public policing of gender" (ibid.). Further, she suggests that domesticity in general "tends toward chaos and as we turn the corner on gender technologies moving in to the twenty-first century, the home increasingly figures within popular representation and queer representation as a site for the collapse of heteronormativity and the development of techno-homos and or queer-genders" (ibid.). With Halberstam, I explore the home as a symbol of proper heteronormative desire, a place where online dating usually begins (at the home computer), where online daters connect, and where various desires get played out. Here, home is less about literal domestic space, and

instead acts as a metaphor for the heteronormative desires that see home and family as the properly gendered outcomes of dating, courtship, and marriage among heterosexual partners.

As seen above, Nicola strives to create a home for herself. In her mind, a home is appointed with the perfect man – hopefully highly educated and respectable (she details the educational background of some of her dates to highlight their intelligence) – and the two or three children that she is hoping to have before she turns thirty. When she talks about her desire to get married, Nicola speaks about her sister, who is further along at creating her own "home." She explains,

> I don't care, [but] it's a bit of a competition. My sister just got engaged and, you know, I've always been…We look very different. She has these very high cheekbones. Just our entire lives she has always been the beautiful one you know what I mean? It's crazy, we're only a year apart and we're very close, but I guess I've always felt like the guys always want her and that's not the case at all. It's a bit of neurosis and she is now engaged and I'm kind of jealous, I'm very jealous so I think that's part of my motivation. I don't know what she thinks about my dating. A girlfriend of mine said to me, when I was 15 or 16, a good friend of my sister's, I remember she looked at me and said, "You know, it's going to be hard for you to find a partner." It wasn't, it wasn't meant as a negative and that, her saying that, keeps coming back into my head recently because it was very accurate.

Nicola enters the world of heteronormative dating with a number of goals that have to do with her assessment – as well as her sister's – of her ability to have a man in her life who will be her partner for life. While Nicola started out on alternative dating sites that cater to individuals who are explicit about their sexual desires, fetishes, and "alternative" lifestyles, she ultimately turned to Lavalife to meet men. Lavalife is mainstream, largely heterosexually-identified site where the majority of users are looking for long-term love. Nicola's "neurosis" about what her sister has and what she is looking for – long-term commitment, engagement and marriage – keeps her "addicted" and "obsessed" with finding love. While Nicola acknowledged that there is truth in her girlfriend's statement – that she will have trouble finding love – Nicola went into online dating thinking that this method would be different, in that all she had to do was be honest about

her profession and she would succeed in love. Nicola's eventual decision to quit online dating, that kept changing throughout the course of the interview, was informed by her frustration about having put the time and effort into online dating but still coming up empty. Nicola's attempt to fit herself – and her career – into the heteronormative myths of home and family, and into the popular discourse of this ideological space as Halberstam terms it, ultimately failed because Nicola is unable to make herself "appropriate" enough to get what she wants. Nicola is marked by her inappropriate desire, her inappropriately gendered action. She is unable to escape the slut label, whether she refuses it or not, because she remains within the discourse that sees what she does as illegitimate. Nicola does not changed the discourse of female heterosexual desire, but is hopelessly trapped inside it.

In the context of weight, particularly for women, Susan Bordo (1993) discusses what she calls the "preoccupation with the 'internal' management of the body (that is, management of its desires)" that is "produced by instabilities in what could be called the macro-regulation of desire within the system of the social body" (199). Bordo is explicitly addressing the contradiction individuals face as both producers and consumers who are faced with the "double-bind" of being "continually besieged by temptation, while socially condemned for overindulgence" (199). This "double-bind" also faces female online daters who wish to have their libidinous cake – and eat it too. As well as the attainment of an acceptable body, women have to attain and authenticate acceptable sexual appetite – a desire that embodies the "not-too-much" and "not-too-little" companion to male-defined heterosexuality. The management of desire then, for women, is a classic double bind, just as Bordo outlines, in which the self is "torn in two mutually incompatible directions" (199). For women who seek partners online, desire must be carefully managed so as not too indicate "too much" thereby turning them into the "party girl" described

by Blaine in Chapter Seven – who is fun for a good time, but not a long time. Moreover, the stigmatized nature of sexuality online makes any overt declaration of desire cause for suspicion and relegates individuals – both make and female – into a 'not serious partner' category. Men are allowed to be more openly sexual in online dating scenarios because they are constructed as naturally being more sexual, while women have to ignore and negate sex, unless they want to be relegated to just "hook-ups," with no possibilities for long-term romance. Multi-dating, while an option for all who online date, is not necessarily an unrestricted pass to play out various desires with different people, especially for women. As twenty-nine-year-old Leanne outlines,

> L: Well, that's where I am and I think it's crazy because when do you finally say "Enough is enough, I'm going to commit to one person." It gets to a point where you have say, "I can't keep seeing six different people."
>
> J: When is that point going to come for you, or is it going to come for you?
>
> L: I think it's, I think it comes with, if you start being sexually active with any one of them, to me, it's a moral issue, I wouldn't do it. To me, it's you have to draw the line. And I think right now, not knowing where to go and not knowing who I really want to commit to, it's all these six different experiences and…I mean I'm not going to settle for anyone, but I'm interested in six different people or four, I'm not going to make it so that there's an experience or a chance that I'm going to be in situation where I'm feeling or I'm going to have sex with someone if I'm not ready to commit to that one person.

Men like Blaine did not have to contend with the same kind of self-imposed moral regulation which might have kept them from hooking up with dates who they reasoned would not make good long-term partners. Blaine outlined how he "wouldn't back down" if sex presented itself, but that was a definite indication that this woman was not "the one." Blaine explained, "I think a lot of men and women are the same in that, I wouldn't say that I would take what I would get…but if I was attracted to a person physically and it was going to happen, I wouldn't back down that's for sure. The intention I think was more for something steady than a one-night stand. A one-night stand is fun but I would rather have somebody around long term." Ultimately,

Nicola's goals of home and family were undermined by her seeming "mismanagement" of desire, her inability to "prove" to men that she was the kind of woman they could settle down with. Victoria managed desire, and visions of home as an ideological space, differently.

By the time that I met her, Victoria had been divorced for a little over a year. She had left the home that she and her husband had built right after of high school. Because of deception on her husband's part, Victoria decided that she could no longer live with him and continue what she saw as the façade of home and married life. Victoria, since her divorce, privileged honesty in relationships above all else and would not tolerate any lying on the part of her potential and actual dates met online. This desire for the honesty that she did not get from her husband led Victoria to be honest about her harem with all the men in it and any others who might like to join. Victoria's story of the adultery and lying in her past – that is, in the most important relationship of her life until that point – illustrates what Halberstam calls the tendency toward chaos in the home insofar as it exemplifies the myth of the heteronormative fantasy of monogamous married bliss. This chaos is further exemplified by Victoria's use of what Halberstam calls the gender technologies that exist in the home that can and do serve to mediate possibilities for re-gendered action. Victoria, as part of her motivation and practice of remediated dating, accepts the chaos of home and rejects the stability that home is meant to afford. Victoria's desires are enabled by her past experience of home that recognizes possibilities for disruption as enabled by the remediated technologies of the internet. Victoria's non-monogamous stance and creation of a harem do not begin with the fantasy of home, and are ultimately less fraught than Nicola's because of this negation of home.

Victoria's story is not more successful than Nicola's. While Nicola does ends up un-partnered in the end of her story as we know it, and Victoria ends up partnered, does not stand as

“proof” that one story is successful than the other. Success, in a formulation privileging partnering, would be measured on the attainability of a man, a “home,” and a happy ending. Rather, Victoria’s story is more a story about, if not the “collapse of heteronormativity” that Halberstam speaks of, then the disruption posed to heteronormative ideals through the rearticulation of gendered action created by Victoria’s sexual practices. By disidentifying with appropriate modes of gendered sexuality (which Butler [1993] outlines as a powerful means of rearticulating desire), Victoria does not get mired in the same visions of home that undermine Nicola’s search for a soul mate. Victoria does not strive to make herself appropriate, but rather confronted what is appropriate desire, denied its significance (that is, negated the “home” fantasy), and chose instead to create for herself another discourse that sees, in her words, that what is good for goose is also for the gander. More than that, Victoria rejects the boundaries placed on her desires, and refuses to “properly” manage them for the sake of home and family. Most significant is the way Victoria calls upon the technologies of her own literal home to make these rearticulated desires “real.”

Chapter Eight. Conclusions

8.1. Doing Love as Part of the Performative Urban Everyday

In this investigation into the practices of Vancouver professionals seeking hetero-romantic love online, I have suggested particular ways of 'doing love' emerge along specific gendered, racialzied, sexualized, aged, and class lines that are appropriate and desirable in these technologically-mediated new media environments and beyond. I have explored the ways in which online dating necessitates a kind of rigor and authenticity of the self that is both particularly gendered in problematic ways, and full of potential with moments of rearticulated being, particularly for my female participants. Online daters must acquiesce to the demands of the interface and represent themselves in the narrow categories provided, but that does not however always end in frustration and debilitation. Rather, through the restricted nature of presentation online, meaning the limited but powerful extent to which people can make themselves intelligible to potential partners online, a reinscription of self may occur, one that is innovative and creatively "honest" in its determinedly authentic manner. I will first outline conclusions that speak specifically to my empirical chapters, outline how these conclusions relate to the concept of 'doing love' as part of the performative urban everyday, and finally explore the limitations of my study and possible future research directions.

8.2. Doing Gender/'Doing Love'

In her exploration of text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC), del-Teso-Craviotto (2008) argues that authentication in online dating chats is not an external process, but the result of specific social practices. In her examination of linguistic strategies in these text-based chats, del-Teso-Craviotto (2008) determines that the succinct representations of self,

largely through usernames and the related cultural, age-related, gendered, and physical connotations of these names and vague descriptors,[25] are sufficient to create an online identity because "participants draw from shared cultural and social ideologies about gender and sexuality that function as authenticating devices in this local context" (265). Essentially, gendered and sexualized norms act as authenticating tools that create shorthand for the internet user, the online date seeker, and the chatroom participant. Del-Teso-Craviotto is also quick to point out that reliance on these shorthand authentications, as shared cultural notions of identity, is "aided by the general assumption that stereotypes and clichés are constructed upon some objective reality" (265). Unlike del-Teso-Craviotto's work, this research includes online dating interaction that begins with the creation a profile and then the search for potential dates in order to find soul mates and love specifically. My study recognizes how this search can quickly escalate to include instant messaging, webcamming, telephone conversations, and face-to-face meetings. However, even with greater contexts behind these "selves," it appears that more multifaceted online daters are no less likely to engage with the shorthand shared cultural notions of identity as Liza's story (outlined in Chapter Five) and the story of women's practices of fat authenticity reveal. This practice of excluding particular races or embodiments, while couched in practices of "self" and "preference," belies the degree to which del-Teso-Craviotto's findings ring true – how a person constructs their "self," along with their preferences, is situated in particular cultural notions about what "others" are like, and to what degree people are willing to tolerate extreme differences between their constructed notion of self and the constructed other (and the contingent versions of "authenticity" that result).

[25] Del-Teso-Craviotto (2008) uses the example of the vague handle "RiCaN CuTeY" who created her screen name based on two aspects of identity, nationality (Puerto Rican), and physical appearance (cute). She explains that "these two aspects of identity are general enough to trigger a wide variety of (gendered) images, but they are communicatively effective because the images prompted by the screen name are likely to be drawn from shared cultural notions of what cute Puerto Rican women are like" (265).

In Chapter Five, I explored how self-representation based on the intentionality of meeting, mating, and dating online and off, necessitated a kind of rigor and authenticity that was gendered in problematic ways for both male and female participants. My notion of authentic askeses helps to tease out the ways that online daters are called upon to act upon themselves in service of the remediated dating realities of online dating. These gendered process of selfing rest on notions of authentic and seemingly stable physical characteristics, as opposed to fluid and malleable 'identities.' Online daters must acquiesce to the demands of the interface and represent themselves in the narrow categories provided. They must rely primarily on the visual (largely pictures and text) provided by the medium to make decisions about intelligibility, authenticity, and ultimately, desirability. But this reliance does not always end in frustration and debilitation however. Rather, through the restricted intentionality of profiling – meaning the limited but powerful extent to which people can determine, protect and portray themselves to potential partners online – a reinscription of self may occur, one that is innovative and creatively "honest" in its determinedly authentic manner. Online dating does not provide individuals freedom from self or the physical constraints of real world identity and (male) desires, but it perhaps surprisingly creates a space of rearticulation through its forcible self-making. While "decentering" and multiplicity may describe the fantasies of outdated internet interfaces such as MUDs (which, as Kendall [1999] notes, are also explicitly gendered), contemporary online dating offers a space to reinscribe and reassert powerful discourses of the self that embrace the physicality of the body and speak it through a series of profile checks and balances. These practices of self are mirrored in Chapter Six that looked closely at the ways sexuality is gendered and how stereotypes of proper sexuality are employed to regulated the excesses of women.

In Chapter Six, I demonstrated how various constructions of proper and appropriate womanhood and femininity are made evident by the othering practices of male online daters. Through a discussion of male online daters' use of abject pleasures, I argued that gender is remediated through the retrieval of gendered stereotypes that are enhanced online through the sheer volume of possible dates and the amount of information, both visual and textual, provided by the medium. The parallel here between the intersubjectivity created by both abjection and remediation means that online dating does present us with different, but not entirely new, modes of gendered interaction and subjectification. Constructions of "excess," and how they guide practices of online dating as remediated by retrieved stereotypes of appropriateness give us access to what constructions of proper femininity exist both online and "off." As with the enhancements of the visual in practices of online dating that result in filtering and fat phobia, these practices of othering are not solely disabling for women. By working within the context provided by online dating interfaces, and through the acknowledgement of stereotypes at work in date and mate selection online, women use their privileged position as initial rejectors to strategically negotiate their abjection. Women's movements toward agentic decision-making about who to accept and who to reject online, and their displays overt sexuality, demonstrate how online dating is a cogent resource for understanding how gendered strategies are shifting and changing with the possibilities opened up by online dating (particularly in the cases of multi-dating for women and of Victoria's experience of the harem). While online dating may be no more and no less dating as we know it with all its gendered conventions, including gendered stereotypes, acknowledgement of dissonant moments (that do not align with heteronormatively gendered convention around dating practices) that occur in online dating may draw us

productively into a discussion about how online dating offers a space to potentially reinscribe and reassert powerful discourses of gender.

Halberstam (1997) examines the performance of gender in a culture that seems to adhere to "a rather outdated notion of a public/private split between male and female society" (185) by considering the sex-segregated reality of public washrooms – a space of "privacy" in the public sphere. Upon being mistaken for a man in the women's washroom, Halberstam considers the implications and possibilities of male femininity and female masculinity while acknowledging that, "we do not name and notice new gender because as a society we are committed to maintaining a binary gender system…we could also say that the failure of 'male' and 'female' to exhaust the field of gender variation actually ensures the continued dominance of these terms. Precisely because virtually nobody perfectly fits the definitions of male and female, the categories gain power and currency through their impossibility (ibid.). With De Lauretis (1987) and Haraway (1990), Halberstam outlines that this impossibility is eclipsed by technologies of gender that "work to obscure the mechanisms by which gender is rendered natural" (186). In this way, the gendered technologies of the body explored in Chapter Seven that require Nicola to "confess" her betrayal of female femininity, with its concomitant desire regulation, allow Victoria to display a kind of female masculinity that subverts the conventional schema that sees men as the appropriate 'owners' of sexual desire and prowess. Victoria evidences that this kind of desiring female subject demonstrates that "masculinity does not belong to men, has not only been produced by men, and does not properly express patriarchy" (188). More than simply inverting gendered stereotypes, Victoria engages in an entirely different discourse of embodied desiring action that rearticulates the boundaries of her seemingly "natural" femininity. And in another layer of technological complication, Victoria employs the boundaries of "home" as a

physical location, through techno-enabled mutual masturbation, hook-ups, and sex chats in her living room/bedroom, to subvert the very fantasies of home (as a heteronormative ideal) Halberstam explores.

When Victoria mutually masturbates with a member of her harem over webcam, or shows her friends pictures of her and another member of her harem having sex (because he requested this of her), or when she talks all night to another possible member of her harem over MSN messenger only to leave in the morning to go and have "live" sex with him, Victoria is using the technologies of the internet to make incursions into technologies of gender. I suggest that the metaphor of home, which acts as a motivational force behind online dating for many daters, get obfuscated by Victoria, who fronts her pleasures – her desire – before the promise of appropriate femininity. The internet is perhaps a space that bridges this "home fantasy," a technology that enables the reconstitution of heterosexual home-making, and the potential for home to be seen as a portal onto the articulation of previously disabled (female) desires.

In his examination of gay male chat channels on IRC or Internet Relay Chat – multiuser synchronous computer-mediated communication channels – Campbell (2004) argues that the "alternative sexual constellations" that emerge in these channels, such as muscle worship and weight gain by gay men in his study, "indicate the constructedness and artificiality of binary understandings of sex (male/female) and sexuality (heterosexual/homosexual), and therefore hold the potential of unsettling those 'truths' fundamental to power structures" (149). Campbell makes an argument that is concerned with embodiment in his exploration of interaction in these IRCs. He suggests that "any notion of a continuum of naturalness of the desirable body" must be abandoned "unless naturalness is understood as a relative and culturally constructed attribute"

(135), thereby addressing a central concern in new media studies about what can be determined about the potential for internet technologies to enable new "understandings of the erotic" (148).

I am in agreement with Campbell's line of argumentation that oppressions are reconstituted in online environments, and that the body is important, whether or not individuals choose to take their physical or emotional relationship into an offline context. Further, it is important to note that Campbell too argues that online engagement is inextricably linked to "cultural codes reinforcing preexisting social schema, such as those surrounding gender and race" (147). But Campbell offers a new view, related to Halberstam's, that seeks to position his participants, "if even momentarily, into freaks and cyborg subjects" (150). He thus borrows from both Butler's and Haraway's language that explores the complex amalgam of machine/human hybrids. He explains that fundamentally the cyborg and the freak blur the "distinction between the organic and the techno-social" (146). While acknowledging the problematic formulation of the cyborg as it has been forwarded by those seeking to position it as inherently liberating (from embodiment in particular) (see Stone, 1996), Campbell positions his view of the gay male cyborg in his research as "negotiating its existence in a society in which the very technologies that appear emancipatory can, in fact, be used to reinscribe restrictive social schema onto the body" (147).

The paradox of Nicola's and Victoria's stories becomes clear at the intersection of the fantasy of home. While both could also be considered cyborg subjects, insofar as they "render the constructedness of their own bodies evident through the radical reshaping of their physical forms to conform to their particular understandings of the erotic" (148), their ability to work through the technologies of the internet on the technologies of gender differ. The difference between the two women's stories lies in their particular understandings of the erotic, and their

particular understandings of their "selves." While Nicola seeks to enact a self that might be more acceptable in the online realm, which promises the myth of home and the fantasy of the ideal partner, Victoria takes advantage of creating a cyberself that is unhinged from the social networks that might construct her as a slut. Victoria enacts a cyborg subjectivity that acknowledges but unsettles the "comfortable truisms in Western understandings of sex and sexuality" and constructs her own re-gendered discourse that is "potentially fuelling a progressive politics of pleasure and a pleasurable mode of resistance" (Campbell, 2004: 149).

In the end, the effect of this rearticulation of heteronormative desire is not complete. Victoria has not been liberated from the constraints of heteronormative understandings of sex and sexuality, but she has taken advantage of an alternative mode of subjectivity, one that is enabled and constrained by the internet technologies she uses. As Campbell explains, "[b]y incorporating technologies into their constructions of self, the cyborg and the freak become conterminous. The resistive power of both the cyborg and the freak rests not on their existence outside relations of power but rather in their refusal to be rendered 'naturalized' others" (148). Nicola and Victoria demonstrate that female sexual desire can be both restrictive and rearticulated in their position as cyborg subjects, but that whether this effect is enabling or disabling is contingent upon one's notion of the erotic and, ultimately, one's fantasy of home.

In this way then, online dating is an example of what Richard Cavell (2008) calls biomedia. Citing Eugene Thacker, Cavell defines biomedia as "novel configurations of biologies and technologies that take us beyond the familiar tropes of technology-as-tool, the cyborg, or the human-computer interface. 'Biomedia' describes an ambivalence that is not reducible either to technophilia (the rhetoric of enabling technology) or technophobia (the ideologies of technological determinism). Biomedia are particular mediations of the body, optimizations of the

biological in which 'technology' appears to disappear altogether" (Thacker cited in Cavell, 2008: 39). The goal of my formulation of online dating as the search for hetero-romantic love online is not to make the technologies of the internet disappear, but rather make them "appear to disappear" by foregrounding the importance such everyday technologically-mediated practices have on the constitution of biological – embodied – boundaries, inclusions, exclusions, and categories of intelligibility.

Online dating, as a collection of biomediated practices, forces us to recognize our humanity through the technologies that help to enable it as Cavell argues McLuhan asked us to do. Cavell suggests that McLuhan's formulation of remediation asks us to look at technological mediation as "not 'out there' but 'in here'; not disembodied but embodied; not immaterial but material" (ibid. 40). By recognizing the embodied and performative nature of online dating and the constitutive effects of online engagements on our intelligibility and desirability in the world, we can begin to shift responsibility from 'out there' to 'in here.' I am not suggesting that we individualize the constitutive effects of technologically-enabled gendered power relations, but rather that we acknowledge, in our discourse and practice, that the new media technologies of the internet have material effects that do not exist outside, above, or beyond the heteronormative logics that govern heterosexual relationship formation whether online or off. Biomedia reminds us that what McLuhan called our "environment" is constituted by our engagement with technologies, and that through these technologies, we become human (Cavell, 2008).

8.3. The Effects of Biomedia on Love

If we begin to highlight biomediated practices – that is, performative practices that serve to solidify how we come to know ourselves as human – we can begin to understand the tenacity

of heteronormatively constructed gender in the contemporary spaces of the urban everyday. Love is but one way we "do" and thus reconstitute gendered forms that solidify around feminine and masculine gendered selves. Online dating provides a unique window onto the gendered practices of everyday life that coalesce around pursuits of love. Unlike feminist formulations from the second wave that articulated the pursuit of love as oppressive for women, I suggest that the pursuit of hetero-romantic love online has implications for every gendered being. Online dating lays bare the gendered exclusivity of heteronormativity by demonstrating the extent to which daters (in this limited study) had to work at being recognized as properly gendered, and therefore valuable as a candidate for love and loving. While the online dating literature heralds a "new era" (Brym & Lenton, 2001) in the world of love, dating, and relationships, it is evident from my small group of participants that pursuits of love, even as technologically-mediated, reinforce ideas about "natural gender differences" that "translate into an unreflexive production of doing inequality that reproduces the hierarchical gender system more broadly" (Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman, 2002). What makes us human in the online dating interface, it seems, is a reflection of how well – that is, how authentically – we can do our gender in the pursuit of love.

I want to suggest that these regulatory ideals of gender affect everyone, contrary to ideas that unequal power relations in the pursuit of love only affect women negatively. Men are also compelled to adhere to notions of the desirable male which force them to cling to modes of patriarchal power that are problematic, such as the managing of women's excesses in ways that belittle and degrade women. While there are moments and possibilities, particularly in the kind of autonomy afforded women who demonstrate fat authenticity, to rearticulate the boundaries of gendered beings, it is equally important to recognize and challenge the ways that gendered practices of selfing currently consolidate around hegemonic categories. When we examine the

orienting and performative aspects of the hetero-romantic pursuit of love, as realized through contemporary engagements with new media, we can see how these practices of selfing stand as another piece of the intellectual and political puzzle about the enduring and persistent nature of gender as an organizing, and at times, oppressive, force in our everyday lives.

8.4. What's Love Got to Do With It?

By aligning with the recent work of Ahmed (2004), and resituating love as a performative and orienting force rather than the possession of individuals, this study seeks to situate the pursuit of love online in contemporary technologically-mediated Canadian society, as an intersubjective project of the gendered self. What "orientations" reveal is the limited scope of thinking about the patriarchal nature of loving relationships that serve to tie women and men to bounded and oppositional social roles by subscribing to heterormative logics that see men and women as "naturally" intended for love relationships due to their inevitable attraction to one another (Ingraham, 1997). What love as an orienting force causes us to reconsider as feminists is the extent to which presumed "natural" heterosexuality enacts the appropriate genders that are formed and consolidated in such engagements with technology. I have demonstrate the extent o which engagements with the new media technologies of the internet in the pursuit of hetero-romantic love orient individuals not only toward objects of love that are decidedly heterosexual but also how this orienting is done through the policing of bodies, boundaries, and beings of heteronormative intelligibility. New media technologies, such as the interfaces employed by online daters, contribute to the restrictive orienting forces of heterosexualized bodies that emerge in this study as "appropriate," "desirable," and most importantly, "intelligible" bodies and identities. New media technologies and their use in these pursuits help buttress heterosexuality as

an effect of how "objects gather and clear a ground, how objects are arranged to create a background...we could say that heterosexuality functions as a background, as that which is behind actions that are repeated over time and with force, and that insofar as it is behind does not come into view" (2006: 87).

Orientations also move us away from the stability of the modernist bodies imagined by second wave feminists and into a domain that allows feminist sociologists to recognize how our theories of gender, and love, can and do "contribute to the production and institutionalization of hegemonic heterosexuality" (Ingraham, 1997: 369) by relying on a patriarchal understanding of love that assumes natural sex differences. The heterosexual forms of intelligibility that emerge in my study demonstrate the extent to which the "heter osexual imaginary" (Ingraham, 1997) – that is, the "way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality as an organizing institution" and "circulates in taken-for-granted, naturally occurring, and unquestioned" ways – functions for both my participants and for feminist theories of love. The heterosexual imaginary helps us to delineate discourses that privilege understandings of patriarchal ruling over how the pursuit of hetero-romantic love itself act as a constitutive force that is continually embodied in the practices of gendered selfing online. In this way then, the pursuit of hetero-romantic love is the object-relation that necessitates the gendered forms produced. This is a significant insight by queer theorists that asks feminist sociologists of gender and love to rethink the trajectory of their analyses of gender, not as the socially-constructed by-product of a naturally occurring phenomenon (i.e. biological sex), but rather as a by-product of the regulatory force of constitutive hetero-romantic love pursuits that necessitate intelligibly gendered bodies and beings deemed suitable for heterosexual coupling. This study also calls attention to moments of fracture is this understanding of heterosexual orienting as a constraining and regulatory force. For women

in this study especially, there were significant moments of dissonance between what was expected of them and what they produced in terms of intelligible bodies and orientations toward "proper" heterosexuality or heteronormative desire. Even while "bodies become contorted: they get twisted into shapes that enable *only insofar as they restrict the capacity for other kinds of action*" (Ahmed, 2006: 91, emphasis in original) and result in what Ahmed calls "straight tendencies" (ibid.), women expand this possibility for "other kinds of action" through fat authenticity and digitally-enabled desires – those desires made uniquely available through new and different engagements with new media technologies. I want to suggest, along with Ahmed's formulation of lesbian desire as "reorienting" (2006: 102), that these moment of interrupted "straightening" by the women in my study can also be considered moments of "reorienting one's relation not toward just sexual others, but also to a world that has already 'decided' how bodies should be oriented in the first place" (ibid.). This reorientation will help us to consider how differently determined love/ desire "enables points of connection that are discontinuous with the straight line" (ibid.). Ultimately, what this rethinking of the concept of love means for feminists is an understanding of the imbricated nature of feminist and queer theories that successfully take us beyond either/or thinking about how bodies are constituted in the world and to what extent slippage, dissonance, and subversion, as evidenced by and through these gendered biomediated and reoriented practices, can be seen to increase the circumference of the visible (Sondergaard, 2002: 202) in the world and in love.

8.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

My study of forty urban professionals in Vancouver provides only a small glimpse of what is currently taking place in online dating and in online environments more generally and is

not a representative or comprehensive study of online dating practices nationally or globally. Since this research was conducted, some major changes to Canadian internet practice have occurred. During some of my final interviews, participants began reporting that Facebook was taking up a great deal of their time (it was becoming highly popular in the Vancouver context in the late winter of 2007) and some of them were exploring the possibilities of online dating on this social networking site. Daniel reported that Facebook was proving to be an important tool in cross-checking potential dates' pictures (and thus helping him more easily define who was "fat" and who was not). In more informal conversations with online daters since my formal interviews, eHarmony.com has emerged as an alternative choice to the sites where the dater has to search, make contact, and set up dates themselves. eHarmony.com matches people based on compatibility across "29 dimensions" in an effort to help people find "fulfilling and lasting relationships" (www.eHarmony.com) from information gathered on an extensive questionnaire. Online daters have expressed the "ease" of this service as compared to the continuous searching that one has to do on Lavalife, Plenty of Fish, and Craigslist. These changes in preferences (based on anecdotal evidence) are reflective of the fast-changing nature of online engagement in terms of popularity and preference when it comes to choosing online dating interfaces.

Finally, this study is significantly lacking insofar as it explores only the pursuit of hetero-romantic love. While this recruiting "accident" meant that I managed to get a group of participants who have roughly similar goals and motivations, it also means that it excludes people using the internet to find same-sex partners and alternative relationships of any kind. Again, anecdotal evidence from presenting aspects of this work at conferences demonstrates the extent to which this study does not speak to gay experiences of online dating which have been explained to me as both similarly and differently gendered with regard to embodied practice

("fatness" as problematic for gay men and the ease it affords gay men who might not be able to identify themselves or each other in public but can do so openly on a gay dating site for example). This study recognizes this unintentional exclusion as a significant limitation. As well, I recongize the very real fact that many people use online dating services for motivations other than the pursuit of hetero-romantic love, or any kind of love for that matter. I am aware of uses of the internet that seek to disrupt these "love motivations" and recognize that there are other permutations of online dating practice beyond these traditional "soul mate" discourses. Future work would do well to investigate these other motivations for engaging with online dating sites, as well as the impact of the popularity of social networking sites on online dating practices. Similarly, I suggest that future investigations into the uses of the internet that seek to address the fat phobia that emerged as a central theme in my study are important. Exploring this theme in the context of part of the blogosphere known as the "fatosphere" would be particularly significant. Bloggers who participate in the fatosphere are overweight or obese by biomedical standards and their personalized up-to-the-minute reportage on their blogs about being fat in North America contributes a great deal to what little is known about the everyday lived experience of fatness/obesity. This kind of work would speak to the thread in my research that seeks to situate fat bodies as unsuitably gendered bodies (particularly when they are female bodies) and address the extent to which these marginalizing discourses pervade, and are challenged, in online environments.

8.6. Final Thoughts

I want to acknowledge here that everyday practices of gendered selfing online may at first glance appear to be outside the realm of "serious" gendered politics or gendered oppression.

However, I want to argue that it is through this focus on the everyday engagement with practices of gendered selfing that the subtleties of the gendered organization of daily life in the technologically mediated urban climate of Vancouver, Canada are made apparent. This study in some way attempts to explain the tenacity of gender, especially in hegemonic heteronormative forms, in the everyday lifeworlds of Canadians. In doing so, I attend to the "everyday world as problematic" (Smith, 1987). Smith (1987) suggests that the "concept of problematic is used to relate the sociologist and sociological inquiry to the experience of members of a society as knowers located in actual lived situations in a new way" (91). This suggestion means that however banal or fantastic the topic, we can come to know about social lives, processes, and oppressions through the everyday experiences/practices of those who live that which we seek to know about. Understanding online dating practices in Vancouver, Canada will not change the world, nor will these data even necessarily be generalizable outside of the unstable and shifting boundaries of the country. But gendered practices of selfing as realized through new media practices stand as another piece of the intellectual and political puzzle about the enduring and persistent nature of gender as an organizing, structuring, and at times, debilitating and disabling, force in our everyday lives.

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Appendix A. Example of Newspaper/Website Ads

The Intimate Internet: Online Dating Practices Among Vancouver's Professional Set
Calling for participation in an online dating study! Are you are a young professional living in Vancouver between the ages of 21 and 35 and are currently dating online? Would you like to participate in a sociological graduate study of your online dating practices and experiences? If so, contact UBC PhD student Jacqueline Schoemaker Holmes at jschoema@interchange.ubc.ca to set up a confidential interview! Interviews will be 1 to 2 hours in length and are based on an interactive model using the Internet. Follow-up interviews of the same length may be requested. Some participants will be asked to participate in future interviews over a three month period of time. Participants determine their level of participation and can withdraw from the study at any time.

Version date: October 5th, 2006

Appendix B. Interview Schedule

PART ONE: Introduction

1. Introduction and overview:
   - Ask if they have informed consent clarity questions
   - Remind them of their right to end the interview at any time without explanation and to not answer questions
   - Remind them that anything they say will be held completely confidential and that their identity will be changed with the help of a pseudonym – ask them if they would like to choose their pseudonym
2. Let them know that at the end they will have the opportunity to show me online some of the things we will talk about IF they are comfortable with that – e.g., the websites they frequent, their profiles, the profiles of others, ones that inspired them
3. Brief social/personal characteristics – you online dated for this long, have married your online partner, etc.

PART TWO: Participant's Interpretation of Online Dating

1. How did you first hear about online dating?
2. How long have you been interested in online dating or how long have you been online dating?
3. What motivated you to begin online dating or to make a profile on an online dating site?
4. In your experience, how does online dating compare to other more conventional forms of dating?
5. Can you describe how the online dating process works from initial contact online to first meeting or date?
6. How much time on average does this process take – from initial contact to first date?

PART THREE: External Influences

1. Do any of your friends, family members, or colleagues online date? If so, who?
2. Are/were you open about your online dating to people in your life? If yes, what kind of feedback do you get from your friends, family, or coworkers about your online dating? If not, why not?
3. What is your experience, if any, with stigma attached to online dating?
4. Has your social circle changed over the long term as a result of online dating?

PART FOUR: Demographics and decisions

1. How do you choose the websites you online date on?
2. What kind of work went into beginning your online dating experience? How did you decide on the content of your profile, whether or not to put a picture, etc.?
3. How did you determine whom to contact? Who to respond to? Who to meet/go on dates with? Who not to?
4. What do you consider the most important things for you to include in your profile? What are the most important things for your potential dates to include?
5. What would you say are your overall strategies for meeting potential dates online? Have your strategies changed since you began?

PART FIVE: General technology questions

1. On a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being low and 10 being high, how would you rate your amount of Internet use?
2. What do you most commonly use the Internet for?
3. What other interactive communications technologies do you use?
4. What is your favourite thing to do on the Internet? What sites do you most frequent?
5. Where are all the different places you use the Internet? Where do you spend the most time on the Internet?
6. Has online dating impacted your Internet use?

PART SIX: Overall online dating impact questions and conclusions

1. Would you online date again in the future?
2. Would you recommend online dating to others?
3. If you are in a relationship that resulted from online dating – what role does the Internet play in your ongoing relationship?
4. Do you feel that you have been deceived or have you deceived others in your online dating experiences?
5. Has online dating had an overall impact on your life? How or why?
6. Do you have any final comments about your online dating experience that you would like to share or would you like to add anything else that I haven't covered with these questions?
7. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you and now ask you, if you are comfortable, to show me some of the websites you frequent, your profile, whatever you think will help me to understand your experience and online dating strategy better

Appendix C. The Social Geography of Popular Vancouver Online Dating Websites

The three most popular dating sites reported by my participants were Lavalife, Plenty of Fish, and Craigslist – in that order. Lavalife, a paid site, was seen as a popular and populous mainstream site that had 'built-in filters' due to the fact that those who paid for online dating were seen to be more serious in terms of looking for love online. Plenty of Fish (POF) replicates many of Lavalife's features but is a free site so many of my participants also had a profile on POF despite the fact that it was considered less legitimate due to it being a free service. Craigslist was on the bottom of the interfaces of choice as it was deemed to "free-form" – a place where people could write anything they pleased – and so less tightly controlled and monitored than the others. Each will be considered in detail in order to describe their uses, features, and participant-reported problematics. Note: while the participants in this study also occasionally mentioned alternative sites (such as Nicola's use of the alternative sex site Alt.com and Amy's use of J-Date, a dating site for Jewish singles) these were usually used in combination with the three more 'mainstream' dating sites. This was largely due to the amount of people on the more mainstream sites versus the fewer people (thus shallower dating pool) on the more 'niche' sites.

Lavalife

Lavalife is advertised as Canada's leading online dating site for over ten years on its website (www.lavalife.com). Lavalife is an online dating site that has three "unique" communities (Dating, Relationships, and Intimate Encounters) and boasts instant messaging (IM) and email services to connect you the "best Canadian singles." Lavalife purports that it is Canada's number one dating site and is ranked among the top ten dating sites worldwide (ibid.). Whether or not Lavalife's self-proclaimed statistics are true, the majority of my Vancouverite participants used Lavalife as their primary dating site, making it appear to be the most popular online dating site among professionals in Vancouver. Lavalife is a standard online dating interface. Once daters log on to Lavalife.com they are required to create a profile in order to be able to search other profiles for possible matches. Profiles are free and there is considerable advice given on how to make your profile stand out (e.g. statistics on how the inclusion of pictures will significantly improve your chance of being contacted for dates). Newly made profiles will be given priority in the searches of current Lavalife users. Profiles largely consist of what participants called "stats" – that is, your physical description (eye/hair colour, weight, age, height), your likes and dislikes (interests), habits (smoking/non-smoking), religious affiliation and preferences (children/no-children). You can choose what people can see when they search certain stats, i.e. how much or how little will show up about you in people's searches. Profiles also include "about me" sections which are more free-form and users can write up to a maximum word count anything that they want possible dates to know (and to help round them out as a full and interesting person). Victoria, for example, had saved searches with the stats she felt most important on her profile. She would search these stats for pictures of men she thought were "hot" and then she would read their about me sections to decide whether or not she wanted to send a free "smile." Smiles are a way to indicate interest on this paid site for free. If Victoria's "hot man" checked out her profile after receiving a smile and was interested, he would either send a smile in return or, more likely, contact her by paying (that is, using his credits) by instant messaging if she happens to be online when he is or sending her an email, which he also has to pay for. Women on this site can manage

to use the site for free as it is tacitly understood by daters on this site that if men are "serious" they will pay to open up lines of communication. Pictures are very important on this site and you can post them on your main profile which anyone can see and some in your "backstage" area which only invited people are privy to. Even in the backstage pictures there is no nudity or violent images allowed. These unsuitable aspects of profiles are judged by site administrators. Most people spend their time on Lavalife actively searching the profiles of potential dates, reading messages, instant messaging in the site's messaging interface (but this usually quickly moves to free messenging services like MSN Messenger because you have to use credits to communicate through Lavalife. This is facilitated by giving your Hotmail.com email address to your potential date and asking them to add you or you add them to your friends on MSN Messenger. You can talk for as long as you want for free on this messaging service. This indicates the extent to which online dating interfaces act as only one part of the online dating process that may begin with Lavalife but ends in a coffee date usually arranged by phone or email that is not enabled by the site itself). Victoria complained that some of the sites features were "counterintuitive" due to the fact that you had negotiate different pages to receive messages, search for potential dates, and respond to instant messages – all the services were not well integrated in her opinion and based on her use.

Plenty of Fish

Plenty of Fish (POF) has many of the same features as Lavalife which is what makes it so appealing to people who are interested in online dating but not interested in paying for the service. CEO Markus Frind, a Vancouver-based computer-programmer started the site in 2003 which was reportedly making over 10 million US dollars in 2008 (mostly from advertisements on the website). In 2007 the Wall Street Journal reported that POF was the most profitable business, on a per-capita basis, and the busiest, site on the entire World Wide Web (PentyofFish Owner has the Perfect Bait for a Huge Success: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117987775136211487.html, retrieved October 20, 2009). The main differences between Lavalife and POF, despite the paid/free difference, are the roses sent instead of smiles (which indicates the emphasis on the chivalrous male doing the 'courting') and the ability to block people you are not interested in or do not want to hear from again. Some participants reported more ease-of-use with the site and claimed that it had easier, more accessible messaging and email features as part of the interface (less need to go off the main site to engage with potential dates and/or set up dates). Participants reported other major differences such as people on the site being less serious, more interested in sex than relationships, and more potentially dishonest because it is a free site.

Craigslist

Another free site, Craigslist is an online classifieds page started in San Franciso by Craig Newmark. Newmark, a former Charles Schwab and IBM employee started Craigslist as a "very simple mailing list" and then into a business in 1999 (Craig Newmark Interview: A Brief History of Craigslist: http://broadcast.oreilly.com/2008/12/craig-newmark-interview-a-brie.html, retrieved October 20, 2009). This site has everything that a newspaper classifieds section would have in it in digitized form. Some of my participants were wary of this site for this reason. Because it is a site meant to help people find what they are looking for in terms of housing, jobs,

and love/sex to name a few, some of my participants felt it was an unmediated site full of, in Tom's estimation, "freakshows." This site is very different for the reason that it is not an online dating interface like the others. It is a community forum, regulated by the community itself. For example, in the section entitled Rants and Raves people can post in asynchronous time, anything that is on their mind. People may or may not respond and engage in a particular rant or rave. However, if five people think the content is inappropriate and "flag" it, it will be removed by site administrators. This is how the Craigslist community polices itself. Similarly, in the "personals" section, very much like a classifieds personals section in newspaper (but with the difference that it is free to post as long as you have a legitimate email address and there is no word limit), women will report bad dates, misleading men, and other people they think are fraudsters and deceivers in posts where these men advertise themselves to warn other women. The personal ads are very free-form and generally include a laundry list of likes and dislikes, as in "I am looking for..." and "I do not want..." Sometimes pictures are included but more rarely than on the online dating sites. Some of my male participants reported contacting women who turned out to be sex workers who advertise under the guise of "dates" but are looking for paid work. The majority of my participants mistrusted this site and it was considered to be on the bottom of the online dating hierarchy of popular or most frequented sites.

Appendix D. Participant Demographics

NAME (Pseudonym)	SEX	AGE	PROFESSION	MARTIAL STATUS (SINGLE NEVER MARRIED: NM; DIVORCED; COUPLED)	SELF-IDENTIFIED RACE/ETHNICITY
Ann	F	30	Lawyer	Single NM	White (Jewish)
Andrew	M	43	Writer	Single NM	White
Blaine	M	30	Teacher	Single NM	White
Brennan	M	29	Realtor	Single NM	White
Carey	M	30	Engineer	Divorced	White
Carla	F	40	Lawyer	Single NM	White (Jewish)
Carmel	F	26	Recruiter	Single NM	White
Daniel*	M	25	Engineer	Single NM	White
Doreen	F	24	Computer Programmer	Single NM	White
Dorian	M	30	Civil Servant	Coupled (with Elena)	White
Donna	F	44	Executive Analyst	Divorced	White
Elena	F	27	Administrator	Coupled (with Dorian)	White
Emma	F	29	IT Consultant	Single NM	White
Eva	F	22	Nurse	Single NM	White
Francesca	F	36	Small-business Owner	Divorced	White
Harry	M	31	Engineer	Single NM	White
Helena	F	23	Graphic Designer	Single NM	Asian
Jessa	F	24	Administrator	Single NM	White
Jim	M	31	Engineer	Single NM	White
Kendra	F	30	Nurse	Coupled (with Blaine)	White
Kevin	M	34	Consultant	Single NM	White

NAME (Pseudonym)	SEX	AGE	PROFESSION	MARTIAL STATUS (SINGLE NEVER MARRIED: NM; DIVORCED; COUPLED)	SELF-IDENTIFIED RACE/ETHNICITY
Leanne	F	29	Teacher	Single NM	White
Lawrence	M	35	CEO	Single NM	White
Linda	F	54	Home Inspector	Divorced	White
Liza*	F	44	Researcher	Divorced	Mixed Race: Asian/White
Michela	F	25	Researcher	Single NM	White
Nick	M	37	Contractor	Single NM	White
Nicola	F	25	Small-business Owner	Single NM	White
Ollie	M	30	Researcher/ Former IT Professional	Single NM	Latin American
Olivia	F	31	Administrator	Single NM	Asian
Paula	F	42	Administrator	Divorced	White
Peter	M	57	Contractor	Divorced	White
Roland	M	33	Teacher	Single NM	Asian
Seema	F	26	Realtor	Single NM	Persian/Iranian
Simon	M	30	Manager	Single NM	White
Sue	F	29	Administrator	Single NM	White
Susannah	F	29	Architect	Single NM	White
Tate	M	32	Researcher	Single NM	White
Tom*	M	45	IT Salesperson	Single NM	White
Victoria*	F	30	Researcher	Divorced	White
* signifies “shadowed” participants					

Appendix E. Ethics Approval

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	DEPARTMENT	NUMBER
Currie, D.H.	Sociology	**B06-0851**

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT
UBC Campus ,
CO-INVESTIGATORS:
Schoemaker Holmes, Jacqueline, Sociology
SPONSORING AGENCIES
Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council
TITLE :
The Intimate Internet: Online Dating Practices Among Vancouver's Young Professionals

APPROVAL DATE	TERM (YEARS)	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
NOV 09 2006	1	Oct. 20, 2006, Consent form / Oct. 5, 2006, Advertisement

CERTIFICATION:

The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
by one of the following:
Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures