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Autoethnography: Swipe for Mr. Right

Introduction:

Download, date, delete, and repeat. Not only was that my Tinder bio for a period, but it also sums up my love/hate relationship with online dating and the vicious cycle I have fallen into over the past three years. The first online dating website Match.com launched in 1995 and transformed the way single people meet (Kauflin, 2015). Over the past few decades, thousands of dating apps have emerged making meeting potential partners even easier. With the use of my smartphone, I can easily download an app, and have a match within minutes of creating a profile. Although not its intention, while technology has made meeting people easier, the result is that dating has become harder, and these new methods of communication hinder the way daters communicate. Based on the research that I've conducted, there are a variety of issues with utilizing online communication, specifically applications designed for dating, in attempting to form authentic connections.

Prior to moving to Tampa in 2019, the only knowledge I had about dating apps was from friends. I hadn't personally experienced what it was like to go on a date with a stranger and the idea terrified me. I found my previous boyfriends the old-fashioned way, by connecting in person. I met guys out at bars, at parties where we had mutual friends, and at work. Three years later I would consider myself to be an online dating

expert, with enough experience to pass along to new users. The thing that makes online dating so appealing to users is that they allow easy access to meeting people with a minimal amount of effort.

I will never forget a story my previous manager had told me about being on vacation with his 25-year-old nephew. They were staying at a beach resort and his nephew caught the eyes of another vacationer. He thought she was cute, but when my boss asked him if he was going to approach her, his nephew looked appalled at the suggestion. He quickly dismissed the idea and said that he would find her on one of the dating apps and then approach her. My manager was shocked, but when he told me the story, I was not surprised in the slightest. My friends and I would often set our apps to view profiles within a one-mile radius when we would go out to the bars. It made meeting someone in person even easier, without wondering if someone was single or not interested.

While there are many positives that have come out of online dating, the increasing number of drawbacks are things that users need to be aware of. When I first started using the apps, I was careless, and was more excited about the number of matches I was getting rather than the quality of the actual match. This led to going on dates with men I had nothing in common with, who weren't looking for the same thing that I was, and ended up being a recipe for disaster. I have learned the importance of having clear intentions, expectations, and communication. There are things I tolerated then that I would never put up with now. I would never continue a date with a man who was drunk when I arrived. As I have grown as a dater, the dating apps that I have used have also grown with me.

Throughout this autoethnography, I will be discussing the three common trends that I think users need to be aware of when using the apps. The first thing is knowing which app is suitable for the intended use. For example, I personally would not recommend using Christian Mingle if I was looking for a hook-up. Tinder can be tricky though because it is the most widely used app (Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017). As someone who has tried the most commonly used apps, I have had to tailor my profile to explicitly explain my intentions and expectations. The second aspect is knowing what those expectations are and what the other person's are, too. This will help because prior to meeting for the first time, the only interaction was through technology. The last thing I will discuss is the impacts of ghosting. There is no right or wrong way to date online, but there are communication strategies that can be taken in order to prevent dating disasters, and to enjoy the overall online dating experience.

Part One: The Apps

My first exposure to the world of dating apps was shortly after I moved down to Tampa in January 2019. I was incredibly homesick, lonely, and longed for friendships. Making meaningful friends in Tampa was a lot harder than I had anticipated. After a particularly long phone conversation where I rambled on about my sad social life, my sister suggested that I download Bumble because there was a feature to find friends in the area. A coworker of her's mentioned that her daughter had used the app successfully to find friends when traveling around the United States. I was so desperate for friendship that I took a chance and downloaded my first app intended for meeting people. I didn't use Bumble for dating, rather than for friendship.

My first Bumble BFF date was with Hailey, we met at an Applebee's for half off appetizers and late-night discounted drinks. Hailey was great, she was upbeat, friendly, loved going out and dancing and was heavily involved in her church. Our friendship moved quickly, she introduced me to her friends and family, we went to the beach, to the bars and everything was fun and exciting. One of our favorite things to talk about was boys. She would tell me all about her dates that she had been going on with guys she had matched with on Bumble and encouraged me to switch my Bumble to the dating side. Hailey had met a man named Jay on the app and was infatuated to the point where I couldn't help but want to experience the same happiness that she had.

I made the switch to Bumble dating and quickly became addicted to the immediate feedback I was getting. So many men thought I was pretty and wanted to talk to me! I started messaging and talking to guys who I would normally assume were out of my league. Matching with a diverse, dynamic group of people is one of the benefits of online dating. I only picked Bumble as my first choice for dating because I had already been using it for friendship. Before this time, I had heard about my friends' successes with online dating, but I was incredibly insecure, so I was not confident enough to want to use it. Using Bumble was easy, user friendly, and exciting. When I first started talking to guys, I would often send my friends screenshots in order to ensure I did not sound stupid. I took every message seriously and put a lot of thought and effort into it.

I still remember the first date I went on, his name was Andrew, he worked for the Tampa Bay Lightning, and he was my definition of Prince Charming. The first thing I asked him about was where in Tampa could I find the best baked ziti. That was something he mentioned on his profile, and I used it as my opener. We quickly hit it off,

the conversations flowed, and he shared the same dark twisted sense of humor that I had. I thought I had hit the jackpot. Hailey encouraged me to go out with him and I remember feeling incredibly nervous and excited, he picked the restaurant Mole y Abuela. On the night of the date, I called Hailey and talked to her while walking through Plant Park. This was my first real date.

When it came down to meeting him, I ended up getting incredibly lost. I parked my car and walked about a mile in the wrong direction, in Tampa, at night. While walking around in the dark, an old man on a bike with a carriage on the back stopped me and insisted on taking me to my destination. Since I was still new to Tampa, I was not sure if this was a regular thing or not, but I was too naive to turn the ride down. The man bikes me to the restaurant and to my embarrassment drops me off right out front. Andrew was waiting outside in his midnight blue suit and found the whole situation incredibly humorous. The date itself was not anything out of the ordinary, the conversation flowed, but it felt more like an interview than anything else.

Andrew ended up walking to my car, around the block from the restaurant. He kissed me goodbye, and it was something out of a movie, under the streetlight. He texted me shortly after we parted ways and I thought he was going to be the one I ended up with. Unfortunately, at that time in my life, my grandma died, and I took a spiral for the worst. I was looking to cure my sadness and thought I could find the answer at the bottom of a Tito's bottle. I couldn't. Andrew kindly said that I needed to take time and focus on myself for a while. Hearing those words was like a bucket of ice water being dumped on me. So, I changed. I threw myself into my schoolwork, started

interning and working. I was dedicated to becoming a version of myself that he would approve of.

A few months later I was ready to get back on the market and start dating again. So, I downloaded Bumble, Tinder, and Hinge. I wanted to test the apps out to see which one would fit my needs the best. Tinder is known for being the hookup app, where users are only looking to find one-night stands and short-term relationships. Bumble was the one I was most familiar with, but I was not set on solely using it because I did not always want to be the one to make the first move. Hinge was not as popular as the rest, but I liked the idea of it being “designed to be deleted.” Ironically, most of my friends had met their husbands or boyfriends on Tinder. A friend of mine once told me “Kat, you need to create a profile that specifically states what you are looking for and you just might have to work harder to find it”. She had found her husband on Tinder.

The more I used the apps I started to recognize profiles that were on all three of the apps I was using. Seeing men struggling to find love online like I had comforted me. What I did not expect though was realizing just how small Tampa was. I would go out with my friends and see Chad from Bumble out with his friends. At one point I was at MacDinton's for happy hour and Sawyer, a Bumble match saw me, walked up to me and hugged me, then walked away. I never heard from him again. I became more aware of the fact that the men I was matching with were all in the same area that I was and were frequenting the same bars and restaurants. They were all around my age, social and looking for connection so it made sense that I would see them at the same places. The apps force the user to show their location, pick an age range, and fill out other information about themselves. A well-rounded profile helps to generate more


meaningful matches. (Chan, 2017) I once saw my college professor on Tinder and decided it was time to take another online dating break.

Over the past two and a half years of being on the different apps I have found that the way I use the apps has changed. When I first downloaded them, I was in a phase of my life where everything in my environment was new. I was in a new state, I was dealing with the loss of a loved one and I really was not in a place where I should have been dating. I thought I could find the comfort and connection I longed for in the apps, which is why I kept turning to them. I had a pattern where I would download the apps, create a new catchy profile, go out on a few dates, and then ultimately delete apps again. In between each download I would work on becoming a better version of myself. I have been focused on chasing my goals, figuring out who I am, and what I want out of a relationship. The guys that I matched with during that time found that my bios were humorous as I often made jokes about my love/hate relationship with the apps. We were all in the vicious cycle of longing for connection but struggling to find it in person and online.

In a weird way I have formed a small community of men who I only know through the dating apps, men who I have added on social media and have never deleted. Some I will still run into at the bars or see their profile pop back up when I'm swiping. Others I have never met but am so invested in their lives through social media that I can't help but celebrate their successes in life and in relationships. A lot of them have also kept up with my life as well and I will occasionally receive a message or a comment on something I have posted. I thought I was the only one who had this type of community, but it turns out that it is a common theme amongst users that I have shared this with.

Although, I was not able to find research about how often these communities are formed. It would be interesting to later dive deeper and see how often other users keep up with matches they have only met online.

After using the many different apps, I have realized that they all have their own unique features, but the user is the one who has control over the success. Hinge, Tinder, and Bumble can only add so many features to make them stand out. If I am using the app and I am not honest with my intentions or lie about my profile, the app will not work for me. If someone is flakey and doesn't go on dates, then the app is not going to work for them. Being honest, having clear intentions, and going on dates are all things that make dating apps successful (Ward, 2016). Using them when I am bored, but without intending on going on dates is only going to waste my time and the time of the guys I am matching with.

I am not saying that everyone who uses dating apps is going to find love or build long lasting relationships. My relationship with Hailey I thought was going to last for a long time, but shortly after she started dating Jay, he became her priority and she changed as a person. I couldn't count on her the way I wanted to so we both decided to part ways. It was a weird friendship breakup in that we mutually ghosted each other but kept up with one another's lives through mutual friends and social media. Sadly, I  haven't dated anyone who has made me as hopeful as Andrew did on that first date. I have searched for him on social media, but I have yet to be able to find him. It's the connections that I have made though, even if they are as short as one amazing date, that have kept me wanting to continue using the apps. Those connections keep me

motivated to keep improving my profile so that I have a better chance of matching with my future Mr. Right.

Part Two: Expectations

Going on a first date with someone who I met online for the first time is always incredibly nerve wracking. Suddenly this man who I know through text message is coming to life and I will know the sound of his voice, the way he smells, his height, and everything about what he looks like in person. There is so much a dating app cannot tell you about a person. For example, my Tinder profile is not going to be filled with photos of my blotchy red neck which is caused because I rub my neck when I'm anxious or nervous. Everything on the app has been perfectly crafted to show off the best qualities of the user. Sometimes daters are even encouraged to lie on their profiles in order to make them match with more users (Liesel L Sharabi). I do my best to be as transparent as possible when looking for love online, but I have had experiences where I have not lived up to the expectations of my date. I have also been the one who was disappointed when the profile of my date did not match the person I was on a date with.

When I matched with Ben, I was pretty excited, he was the definition of my type. However, he is now what I refer to as my personal walking red flag. He was ex-military, short, tan, and covered in beautiful tattoos. His sense of humor was darker than fresh tar and I loved it. He wanted to take me to Green Lemon and I was excited because I had heard so much about the restaurant. He picked me up in his lifted blue Tacoma, opened the door for me, and played country music as he drove. My jaw dropped at his height, his profile said he was 5'8" and he was 5'5" at best. I am not one to judge a man's height because I am on the shorter side, but even his build was smaller than his

profile showed. Height is one of the most common things men lie about (Hancock, 2007).

I immediately started to feel insecure because I was wearing heels and at this time in my life, I still wasn't confident and comfortable in my own skin. When we got to the restaurant, he ordered a pitcher of margaritas and queso for us to share. I had never had tequila before, and these margaritas were incredibly strong. As we start to eat, Ben takes a few bites of his food and then picks at the chips before declaring that he eats like a bird. He was already done eating and he had hardly eaten anything. We still had half a pitcher to drink, and I was already feeling warm and fuzzy. I knew I should probably eat more if we were going to continue drinking, but I didn't want to appear like a hungry hippo.

After we finish the pitcher, Ben decides it would be a great idea to go bar hopping in downtown Tampa. He drives us downtown, parks his truck and we make our way over to GenX Tavern which was relatively new. The conversation flowed really well, and I found myself belly laughing throughout the evening. He would make comments about needing to see people's hands at all times and how he refused to have his back to the entrance of a restaurant. I had dated cops in the past, so this was not that shocking, but the way he talked made me realize that he still had issues he hadn't worked through. Again, I just ignored it. We went to another dive bar before calling it a night.

As we walk around Downtown Tampa at 2:00 a.m. we start to realize that we cannot find Ben's truck anywhere. While we wander Ben proceeds to get next level upset. After walking around for a half an hour, he takes his keys and throws them to the ground in a fit of rage. His truck key fob explodes all over the sidewalk. He finally gives

in when I ask him for the fifth time if we can just Uber back to my dorm because I had an 8 a.m. that I shouldn't miss. He comes over and decides to spend the night rather than Uber back to his place, since I was a little drunk, I let him. The next morning, he insists that I drive him around Tampa to help him find his truck.

I skipped class to help him find his truck and after driving around we found it on the street over from GenX. In our slightly impaired states, we must have walked past the street where he parked. To make things even better I then had to drive him back to his house 20 minutes from downtown to pick up his spare set of keys because they were broken on a sidewalk somewhere. After I dropped Ben off, I was still hoping that I would see him again even though he was not what I expected. A week later he drunk texted me, thinking I was his ex and professing his love for her. It is safe to say that we didn't go out again.

I never got mad at Ben for exploding with anger during our date or for drunk texting thinking I was his ex. I realized on that date that he was similar to his profile, but the person I crafted in my head was a toned-down version of who he turned out to be. He clearly had issues he needed to work through in order to be ready to be someone I would want to date and that is okay. Nearly three years later we still keep in touch through social media, and I have been able to watch him grow up. Like Ben, I was still getting drunk and texting my ex at that time even though he lived in a different state. I personally have grown too and would not accept the things that I did when I was dating at that time.

Over the past couple of years, I have changed and grown and so have the different dating apps that I have used. The pandemic pushed to have new features

added to help daters date when they were unable to meet in person. One of the trends that I now normally do before meeting in person for the first time is having a phone call or facetime date first. The apps all added the video call feature during the pandemic, and I think it is a great way to gauge whether or not I am going to get along well enough with someone prior to meeting them. This does not always work though as I learned from my first date with well, I can't remember his name, but he was from Texas. I will refer to him as Texas when I describe the date.

Texas and I had matched on Hinge, we added each other on social media and were quickly setting aside time for our first date. He described himself as a southern gentleman and was tall with a deep southern accent. Texas loved traveling and only worked as a salesman during the summer so that he could travel during the winter. I envied his carefree lifestyle. Apart from that we had very similar interests, laughed at the same jokes and shared a love for country music. He sent me a few of his favorite songs and I couldn't help but listen to them on repeat because I liked them that much. The afternoon before our date he facetimed me and told me he would send me a few options for places to go.

He ended up picking a sketchy brewery on the outskirts of Ybor, in a part of Tampa I had never been to. When I pulled up to the brewery, I immediately knew it was not my scene. It was next to a church and the area it was in made me feel really uncomfortable. I parked next to his lifted truck, we got out and gave each other a hug before walking into this brewery. When we got inside every single person was wearing black leather and it took a few minutes for the bartender to bring us a beer menu. During this time, we both took a moment to observe our surroundings and there is

nothing but awkwardness when we realize we do not fit in with the crowd. We looked at the menu for all of thirty seconds before agreeing that this was not the place we wanted to be.

As we walked out of the bar, he asked where else I would want to go, and I told him that I honestly did not care. He sent the location of a new place and then proceeded to drive in the opposite direction. I immediately thought that it must've been a typo and proceeded to follow him. That's when I realized he was driving towards Brandon, and away from Tampa. At a stoplight I pulled up social media and saw that he had unfollowed me on everything. He ditched me after knowing me for less than five minutes. He never reached out to me to explain why he did what he did, but I have to assume that it had to do with me not being the picture he crafted of me prior to meeting me.

Although I never heard from Texas again, I can't help but thank him for ghosting me in person the way he did. If he had not done that, I would not have gotten mad enough to give a speech about the harsh truths of online dating. The disastrous first date ended up being the driving focus for the rest of my master's program. What stands out to me about that first date is that even though we had facetimed prior, it still was not enough to sell him on who I was. After analyzing the date repeatedly through my head, I have deducted that Texas was looking for a woman to lead him. Over text he insisted that I pick the place for the first date, and I had refused. We both knew in the first couple of minutes being around one another that we did not mesh well together.

He made a conscious decision of not giving me a chance to show him my personality in another setting. Texas did me a favor by ditching me without making me

sit through what would have been a stiff, awkward conversation. I have been on dates with other guys who were so boring that I was counting down the minutes until I could leave. Sometimes the connection is not immediately there, and it is okay to walk away (Markowitz, 2019). What he did was rude, but since we had only known each other for such a short time, it did not hurt as much as it could have. That is the area in ghosting that can be kind of gray. In this case my feelings weren't hurt, and an explanation was not needed. Had I known him longer I would have wanted the explanation for why he left me the way he did and what it was about me that was not what he expected.

Part three: Ghosting

The term ghost used to not mean much to me other than something to fear on Halloween. Listening to my friends share stories today about their experiences with ghosts means something a lot different now than it did when we were sitting around with pillowcases of candy. The aspect of ghosting has changed as dating apps have evolved. It can be seen as the easy way out of a relationship or talking stage. The idea is that when someone is no longer interested in pursuing an individual they simply stop talking and engaging with that person without an explanation (LeFebvre, L.). I personally have been the ghost and the ghosted. Most daters have experienced this in one way or another and personally until I started actively dating, I thought it was one of the worst things a person could do.

When I first matched with Tristian on Bumble, he appeared to be great. He was kind, handsome and driven. He had just gotten out of the military and moved down to Florida to pursue a career in law enforcement. I thought that I had hit the jackpot. The conversation seemed to flow endlessly over the Bumble app, and I was more than a

little excited to meet him to watch the sunset on Indian Rocks beach for our first date. He had mentioned he would bring the snacks and I would bring the beer. It was in theory the perfect date. On the actual date it went smoothly, the conversation flowed and at one point we ran into the ocean to swim at night. It was magical.

I was more than a little excited when he texted me not even five minutes after the date was over about how great of a time he had and how he couldn't wait to see me again. The more I got to know Tristian though the more I learned about how he was financially irresponsible and often would make careless mistakes financially leaving him eating ramen or not eating at all. As a broke college student, I understood his struggle, but it was too early in the talking stage for me to want to be talking about topics such as finances. On our third date when we were hanging out at his apartment, I knew that I did not want to see him again. He was constantly telling me how cute, nice and sweet I was. I realized that he was starting to see a future with me, but I could not see a future with him.

I took the easy, harsh way out and ended up ghosting him. The approach was indirect and self-oriented action rather than one that is direct and other-oriented (LeFebvre, L.). He did not take it well and continued to message me on every social media platform to tell me how mean and horrible I am. I couldn't figure out how to tell him that the reason I ghosted him was because I didn't think they were valid reasons. How could I have told him that I didn't want to see him again because he wasn't financially responsible and didn't see me the way I wanted to be seen? I don't want a guy to tell me how kind and nice I am constantly because those are the last adjectives, I would use to describe myself. I want a man who looks at me and I know that I am

beautiful. I want a man to describe me as sarcastic, witty, loving, and smart. How could I have told him that his financial irresponsibility made me nervous, and I wanted someone who makes smart financial decisions? Frankly hearing about that early on ruined the picture of him that I had developed in my head. He didn't live up to my expectations and we didn't have enough in common for me to want to continue anything further.

I have learned in my time as a dater that there is a gray area when it comes to dating. Not everyone who ghosts is doing it with ill intentions. I didn't ghost Tristian for any other reason other than I didn't think the reasons for me ending the relationship sounded valid. I didn't know how to communicate my feelings to him in a way that would be constructive or well enough to not hurt his ego. He was a nice man, but he wasn't the one for me. I have also learned that sometimes being ghosted is the kinder way to end something or stop communicating with someone after a first date. Personally, hearing about how horrible I am or all the reasons a guy no longer wants to talk to me can hurt more than being ghosted.

When I matched with Jared on Tinder, I couldn't stop smiling as each message popped up on my phone. He was not my typical type physically, but nonetheless I was drawn to him. He was tall, dark, and handsome. Between his muscles, tanned skin and soulful eyes, I was in awe of his handsome features. His appearance is what writers write about when writing about a prince. Jared had a spitfire, sarcastic, fun personality that I couldn't get enough of over text. We were laughing and the conversation seemed to flow well enough that he said how perfect we would be together. I had thought to myself how could we not end up together if we are already hitting it off this well? Before we met in person, I had to go back to Michigan for a bachelorette party and honestly

had forgotten about him. Jared messaged me shortly after I got back and asked me to go kayaking at Weeki Wachee and even though I had forgotten our conversation I was excited. Weeki Wachee was one of the places I had been dying to go to. After going back through our messages, I remembered the fun, flirty conversation we had, and I could not wait to meet him.

We met at Total Wine, and he drove us to the springs. He had his kayaks, a cooler, drinks, and bought food when we stopped on the way. I will never forget walking into Publix behind him. His muscles rippled from beneath his tank top, and even wearing a mask he was incredibly handsome. I felt safe and guarded, he oozed masculine confidence in a way that I had never experienced before. I had gone out with macho men in the past, but this was another level of charisma that I didn't think existed. The whole drive there he kept insulting me and I couldn't tell if he was being sarcastic or if he was meaning what he was saying. Did he really think my voice was annoying? He keeps turning the music up while I was talking so he must have. When we started kayaking, he looked at me like I was disgusting and hardly spoke. The whole date I was second guessing myself and wondering what I could be doing wrong. We had so much in common over Tinder that I was shocked that in person things were going so badly.

Oddly enough though, I was drawn to him throughout the whole date. Maybe it was because I was intimidated, that I liked the thrill of the attention he was giving me, even if the attention made me feel insecure. Kayaking, seeing manatees, and getting the opportunity to swim in the spring are all things I will think fondly of. At one point he encouraged me to stand up on the kayak since it was a hybrid. As I was paddleboarding down the spring, I missed a tree stump, hit it, and fell into the water. He sat on his

kayak, proceeded to laugh at me and tell me how this was the highlight of the date for him. I have thick skin so even as I awkwardly climbed back up onto the board, wiped the mascara that was dripping down my face, I joined in on the laughter. At the end of the date, he drove back to Total Wine and proceeded to continue to insult me. He told me about all of the things I needed to do in order to grow as a person. As if moving across the country alone, chasing my dream, and working two jobs was not enough. He gave me a hug and said goodbye, then proceeded to peel out of the parking lot in his truck.

Even though he was rude, insulted me, and treated me like I was gum he got on the bottom of his shoe I was still infatuated with him. I wanted him to text me again, I wanted to see him again and to laugh with him again. Looking back, I think I was more excited about the idea of dating him, rather than him. He ended up not texting me again. I was so confused because I thought maybe he was joking when he was being insulting. Over the next year he would proceed to keep up with me on social media. One day I posted a photo of myself on my Snapchat story holding a flight of wine. He messaged me to see how I was doing. Then after I joked about him ghosting me and now messaging me, he asked me if I wanted to know why he ghosted me. I told him that I did not, it had been a year and frankly I did not want that negativity in my life.

Jared really did not care about whether I wanted to hear his reasoning or not. He was more focused on his own personal needs and desires than how I might feel receiving his texts (Navarro et al., 2020). He felt as if it was his duty to warn me that other guys who went on dates with me would feel the same way he did, and he explicitly said that. The notifications on my phone started pinging as he sent paragraph after paragraph explaining how fat and disgusting my body was. Accusing me of editing my

photos and saying how I shouldn't blame him for being mad when he saw me in person when I looked nothing like my photos. That I looked absolutely disgusting in person. When these messages were going off, I just happened to be at a work event and training a new intern. I wanted to drive my golf cart into a wall, throw up and cry. I was shocked, hurt, and felt as if I had been slapped. When I was initially ghosted, I didn't feel that way. I was bummed he didn't message me, but I was ignorantly blind to the reasons he had ghosted me, and I was more than okay with that.

Sometimes being ghosted is for the best. When people decide to leave for superficial, nasty reasons, leaving someone in the dark can be for the best. I personally would have rather not read those messages from Jared. I also don't think Tristian would have responded too well to me messaging him telling him that he was too nice, financially irresponsible and did not connect with me on an intimate level. Both examples of ghosting relate to what many other daters are going through. If there has been little contact prior to the meet up or even just minimal dates in general, daters like me don't always feel the need to provide an explanation (Timmermans, E., Hermans, A.-M., & Oprea, S. J. 2020).

Conclusion:

If dating apps are as bad as I have described, it can be hard to understand why I would still want to use them. Although I have had some horrible **dates**, that have led to some amazing stories, I have also met some incredible people and had **great** experiences. These apps have taken me on a roller coaster of emotions that I am blessed to have gone through. The biggest takeaway I have gotten from meeting people online is that everyone has a story to tell, and no one is going to be exactly like they

present themselves to be online. It is up to the person going on the date to decide if the differences are significant enough to stop pursuing a relationship.

I have also learned a lot from what some might view as the negative aspects of online dating. Being able to take a step back and see why someone might have ghosted me has been incredibly beneficial. Recognizing that some people may have gained a few pounds, doesn't mean they were lying to me on their profile. Knowing that most people are nervous on a first date is also something I have taken into consideration. I know that when I go on a first date, I tend to be more uptight and can have a hard time relaxing due to nerves. It is okay for someone to not match their profile exactly if they are subtly different. It is also okay to not have a second date with someone even though they seemed perfect over text message.

Online dating is all about trial and error. When I go to the ice cream shop, I often try different samples before finding one I love. Online dating can be seen in a similar way. It is perfectly acceptable to go out on lots of dates with different people in order to find the perfect match. The thing that is important is to ensure that the intentions of finding the flavor is clear and the communication is with the intent that you are looking for your favorite one. Teaching daters how to effectively communicate is crucial when it comes to finding long lasting, meaningful connections. I might not have found my Prince Charming yet, but I am hopeful that he is one swipe away.



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