



# Religious Differences and Perceptions of Online Dating Among Young Adults

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## Introduction

Young adults are increasingly using online dating websites to expand their pool of romantic partners and to engage in a variety of relationship types. In fact, online dating is the fastest growing method for couples to connect (Kreager, Cavanagh, Yen, & Yu, 2014). Sumter, Vandenbosch, and Lightenberg (2017) suggest that some reasons young adults engagement in online dating is to find companionship, fulfill psychological needs, have a sexual relationship, and/or have freedom of commitment. This study looks at how an individual's perception of their religiosity impacts their usage and perceptions of online dating. It also addresses gender differences in usage and perceptions. Symbolic interactionism (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) was implemented to better understand the meanings and perceptions associated with online dating, and how religiosity plays a role in mate selection.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand how young adults perceive online dating, determine perceived intentions of most common sites/apps, and to examine if there are religious/spiritual and gender differences among these perceptions and usage.

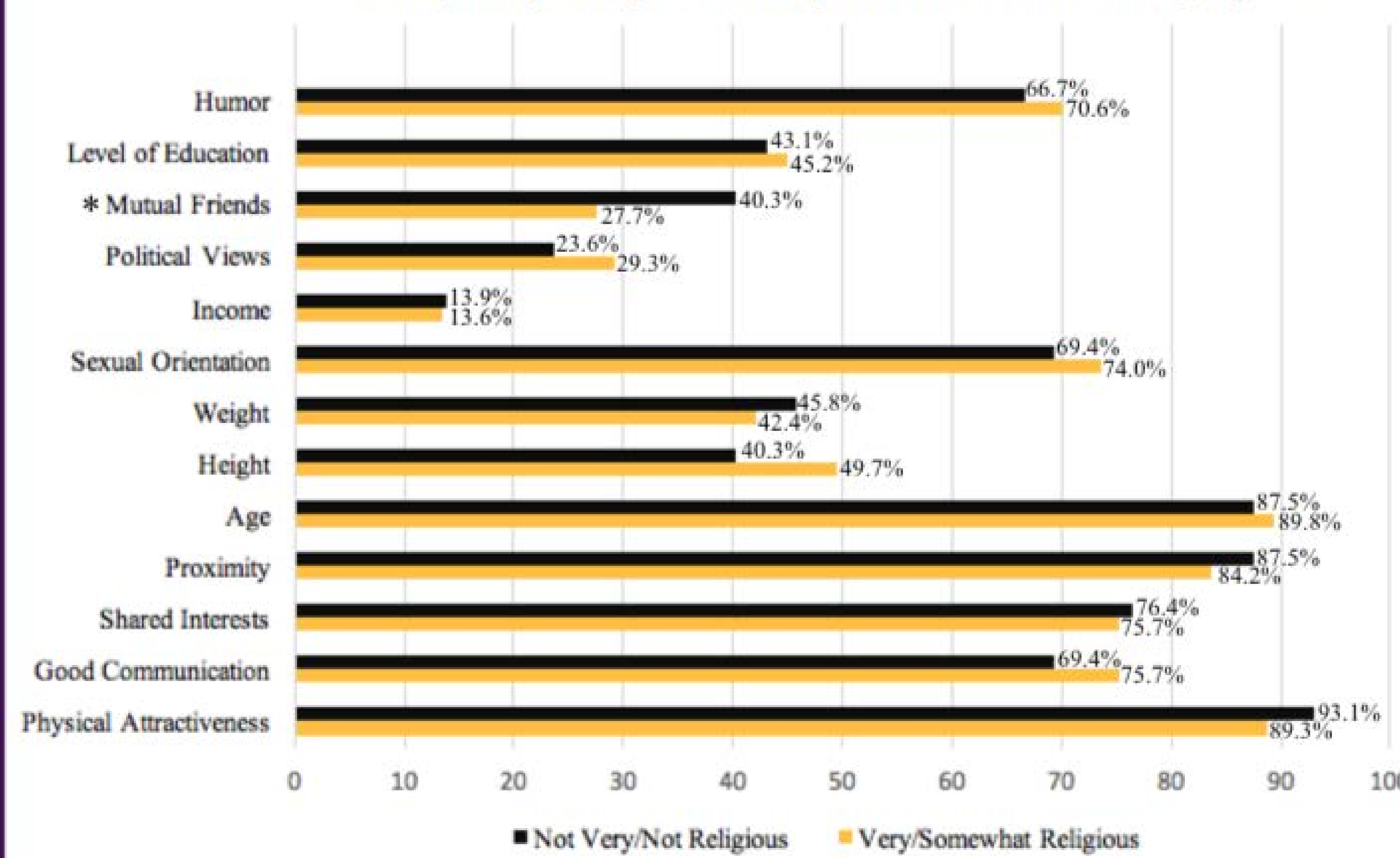
## Research Questions

- Does religiosity influence the perceptions of online dating?
- Does religiosity influence the usage of online dating?
- Does gender influence the perceptions of online dating?
- Does gender influence the usage of online dating?

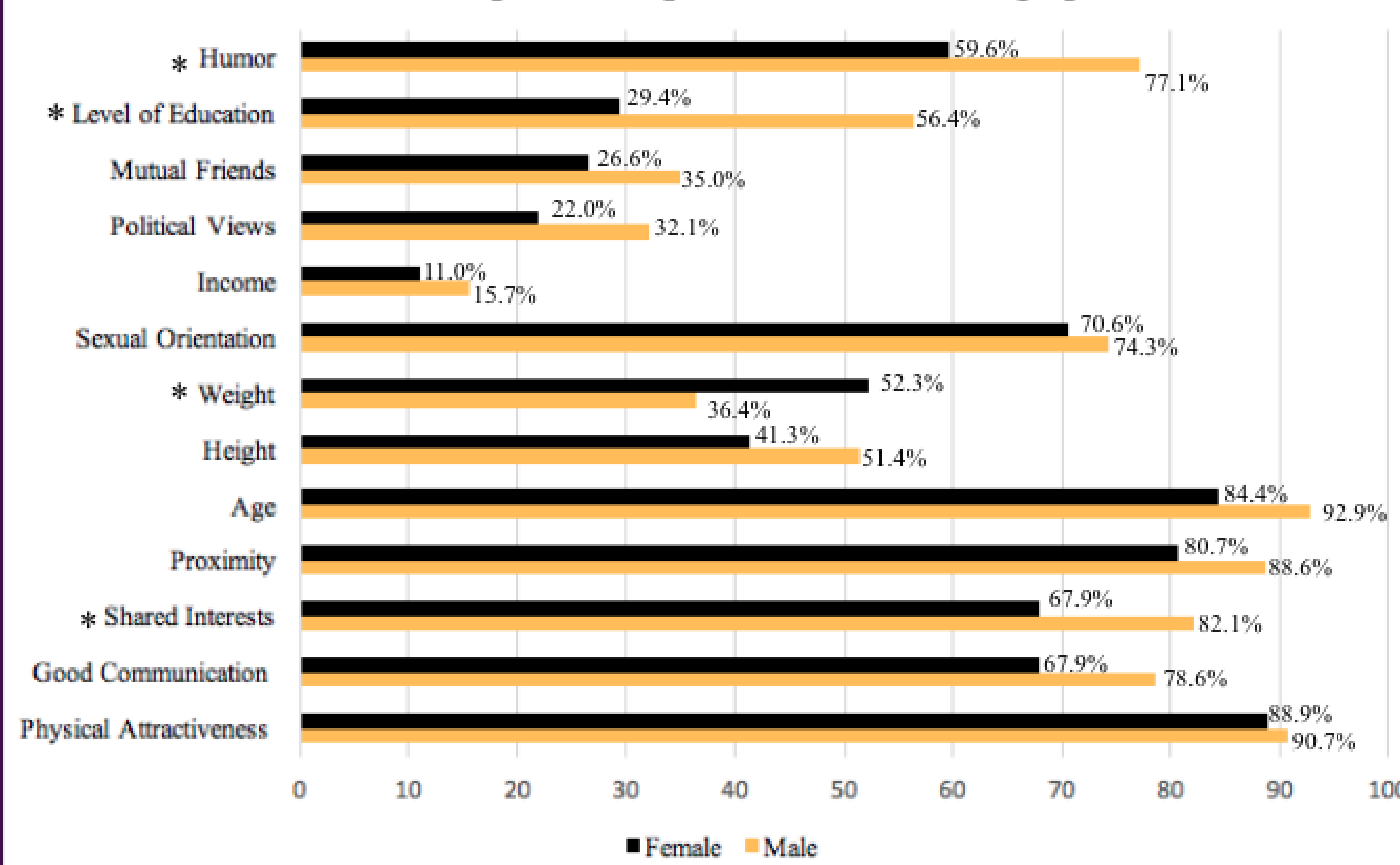
## Participants/Methods

- 529 young adults between 18-30 years of age in the Southeastern region of the United States completed an online survey
- 311 females (58.8%) and 218 males (41.2%). 90.2% of respondents identified as Heterosexual.
- Ethnicity of the sample: 292 (55.2%) Caucasian, 157 (29.7%) African American, 35 (6.6%) Hispanic, 19 (3.6%) Asian, and 26 (4.9%) Other.
- 72.1% of respondents indicated they were very/somewhat religious and 27.9% indicated they were not very/not at all religious.
- Participants responded to Likert-type scales (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)
- Survey questions related to topics such as religious preferences, desired romantic partner characteristics, and usage of preferred online dating site.
- Independent samples t-test and chi-square were used to analyze the data for comparing identification of religiosity and online dating.

### Religiosity's Impact on Important Partner Demographics



### Gender's Impact on Important Partner Demographics



## Results

- (48%) indicated having used online dating currently or in the past, while nearly the same percentage of non-religious respondents indicated the same (50.7%).
- (51.6%) of males and (46.4%) of females reported having used online dating.
- Individuals who identify as religious report stronger perceptions that those who engage in online dating are interested in starting casual, sexual relationships ( $p=.018$ ).
- Many characteristics people look for when searching for a romantic partner do not differ between religious and nonreligious (see table 1). Only mutual friends showed statistical significance ( $p=.049$ ), with non-religious people finding this aspect more important than religious people.
- Pertaining to places to meet a partner, those who identified as religious believed through church/religion ( $p=.000$ ), at a community activity ( $p=.021$ ), and at a sporting event ( $p=.000$ ) were places to meet a potential partner.
- When assessing reasons for not using online dating, those who identified as religious cited a mistrust of technology ( $p=.029$ ), religious reasons ( $p=.045$ ), and catfishing ( $p=.035$ ) more than nonreligious.
- Females more so cited fear of dangerous situations ( $p=.000$ ), perception of people having different intentions ( $p=.006$ ), and unsafe (.001) as reasons they did not engage in online dating.
- When using online dating, males reported having more intentions of casual, sexual relationships ( $p=.000$ ) and more results of casual, sexual relationships ( $p=.020$ ) than females.
- Characteristics that people look for in a romantic partner do differ between males and females. Males look at weight ( $p=.011$ ) more than females, and females look at humor ( $p=.004$ ), level of education ( $p=.000$ ), and shared hobbies and activities ( $p=.016$ ) more than males (see table 2).

## Discussion

- The findings suggest a difference in perception and usage for online dating depending on self identified religiosity and gender.
- There were not many differences found in the characteristics that religious and nonreligious individuals look in a romantic partner; however, mutual friends was more important for religious individuals. Mutuality may show importance again here due to similar religious values and beliefs. This idea of mutuality in a romantic partner amongst religious individuals is supported through research conducted by Braithwaite et al. (2015).
- Characteristics for a romantic partner did differ between males and females. Females placed more emphasis on humor, level of education, and shared hobbies, while males places more emphasis on weight. This finding contributes to the literature on what each gender looks for in a romantic partner while using online dating.
- In line with previous research, those who identify as male reported more intentions and results of casual, sexual relationships from their online dating usage (Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Lightenberg, 2017). This supports female's reasons of not engaging in online dating due to a perception of people having different intentions than them.