

“...And She Looked Nothing Like Her Profile”: Understanding the Navigation of Awkwardness Within Online Dating

This study explores awkwardness within an online dating context. Despite the pervasiveness of awkwardness in everyday life, scholar attention on the topic has remained limited. While attempting to expand to the academic research of awkwardness, the analysis of awkwardness within online dating spotlights its interactivity with offline and online settings. It is concerned with highlighting the underlying difficulties of building and establishing new relationships through an untraditional dating dynamic. Therefore, the navigation of awkwardness in online dating is addressed by investigating its conceptualisation, how it is dealt with among individuals. This study consists of a qualitative textual analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews. The results showed a strong presence of awkwardness throughout the stages of online dating. Participants were clearly driven by the desire to both conceal, and overcome an awkward situations for the sake of interaction as well as for the protection of the self. Differently to accounts of awkwardness as being a social experience, evidence inner-directed awkwardness showed how awkwardness was able to manifest itself through social interaction, or without it. With the collection of awkward online dating experiences, a typology of awkward social interactions from the connection of social mechanisms such as inauthenticity, uncertainty, blurring of gender roles, mismatches and rejection is suggested to also prevail in a wide range of social contexts.

Keywords: awkwardness, online dating, online communication, interaction, typology

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Introduction

“Well, I went out with this guy. [He was] bragging about how much he earned And then in the five minutes it took to get from the restaurant to my house, I got a text from him saying “Can you pay my Tikkie?” Why brag about how much money you earn and then send me a Tikkie?!”

This is a situation Nara shared when asked about past awkward experiences. Speculatively, it is not a situation many of us would willingly want to be in. However, awkward moments are ubiquitous, and are quite often unavoidable. Nara’s reaction after receiving the unexpected text suggests that awkwardness materializes in many ways. Developing what awkwardness is is a principal aspect of what this study hopes to achieve. Scholars in mainly symbolic interactionism and social psychology traditions have partly captured the essence of awkwardness by outlining its emotional and social impact on the interaction as well as individuals; yet deeper academic exploration and research about it is scarce. Due to its pervasiveness, understanding its impact and navigation in different social structures can expand knowledge about the silent challenges individuals face within them. Furthermore, these insights will allow a closer look at possible solutions for managing stressful occasions of awkwardness.

One area that invites the creation of awkward situations is the world of dating. Romance can be exciting, but the journey leading up to a comfortable position in a new relationship can be rather precarious. Advances in digital technologies have made online dating platforms a popular space to start interpersonal relationships (Hobbs et al., 2016; Dalessandro, 2018; Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). Online dating offers a new spectrum of opportunities that traditional forms of dating cannot provide. For example, connecting with people that otherwise would have never met, a faster and more direct process of establishing contact, and more control over self-presentation. Even though online dating apps are used by individuals of all ages, millennials are the most prominent users (Balbi, 2016). Tinder, the most popular dating app in Western societies has an estimated 50 million users (Duguay, 2016 cited in Ward, 2016); 79% of its users being millennials in 2015 (Smith, 2016).

The main research question concerns how millennials navigate the awkwardness in an online dating scenario, and is addressed through three sub questions. First, it strives to clarify how individuals conceptualise awkwardness. Second is to explore the way individuals define, and deal with awkward situations. Third is to find the extent to which gender plays a role regarding the navigation of awkwardness. This research contributes to the study of awkwardness by exploring the interplay between awkwardness in offline and online contexts. Focusing awkwardness within an online dating context strives to close its academic literature gap by

identifying how different kinds of awkwardness link to different types of social mechanisms; an idea which can also be applied to other social contexts and systems. A further contribution would be the deduction of an inner-directed experience of awkwardness taking the form of an internal, and perhaps confusing, dialogue with the self. Empirically, the study is concerned with the interactional challenges of awkwardness faced in the search for companionship or relationships through an increasingly popular, yet untraditional dating dynamic. In order to do so, the study will address how awkwardness is conceptualised among individuals, and uncover how it is avoided, and dealt with.

Literature Review

Dating & Online Dating

Since the 1910s' "dance craze" (Modell, 1989 cited in Stoicescu, 2019), dating has become a consolidated part of people's lives (Stoicescu, 2019). In traditional dating dynamics, physical proximity is an important starting point for meeting new people; such as in parties or work settings (Rosen et al., 2008). Eventually, compatibility is determined preliminarily, followed by personal disclosure of interest to a person. Traditionally, dating serves to determine whether two individuals are compatible for a committed relationship. In dating culture, dating scripts outline "appropriate" behaviour (Laner & Ventrone, 1998) and are still shaped by stereotypical traditional gender roles, particularly during the first stages of the relationship (Rose & Frieze, 1989; Laner & Ventrone, 1998; Emmer-Sommer et al., 2010). Heterosexual relationships are typically grounded on the performance of gender roles and identity - individuals who identify as women have an inclination to adopt feminine dating behaviors, and vice versa for men and masculinity (Long, 2010). Interestingly, research shows that the standards to "do gender" by men in dating scripts are stricter than those of women. Men feel a higher sense of responsibility to meet the current expectations of masculinity, than women for femininity (Rose & Frieze, 1989; Lever et al., 2015). For example, there are higher expectations for men to take the initiative to ask a woman on a date, and offer to pay (Lever et al., 2015), and thus face higher anxiety of rejection due to the perception of it being easier to "do something wrong" (Rose & Frieze, 1993).

As digital communication developments have spread across the planet, online dating as a medium for finding companionship has increasingly become socially accepted (Cummings et

al., 2002; Hobbs et al., 2016; Dalessandro, 2018; Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). Rather than “dating sites”, online dating platforms are considered better identified as “introducing sites” since “dating” practices only occur once partners have met in person (Sentementes, 2011 cited in Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). Research has shown an appreciation of dating apps for presenting a wider range of available potential partners quicker, a faster cycle of recuperation after a failed connection, and making the process more enjoyable by making the required social and communications skills more manageable (Lawson & Leck, 2006; Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). Users feel less pressure when evaluating the potential of compatibility before investing in face-to-face encounters. Online dating has demonstrated having positive impacts on society and culture in several ways. For example, by facilitating and encouraging the development of interracial relationships and families (Ortega, 2018), helping boost the confidence of those with shy or introverted personalities and empowering stigmatized individuals (Sheeks & Birchmeier, 2007), and enabling connections between individuals unavailable within their own networks; like in the case of members of the LGBT community (McKie et al., 2015). Simultaneously, other studies have focused on its negative aspects such as the potential to encounter dangerous or untrustworthy people (Crouch et al., 2012; Buchanan et al. 2014), its effects of racial exclusion and discrimination (Feliciano et al., 2009; Potarca & Mills, 2013) and as enabling deceptive and unfaithful behaviour (Aviram et al., 2005; Toma & Hancock, 2010; Guadagno et al, 2012). While online dating has been a significant focus area within academic research, the awkwardness that surrounds it has lacked exploration. This study will show the prevalence of perceiving online dating as awkward among individuals at various levels.

What Is Awkwardness?

While few scholars have empirically studied awkwardness, work in the traditions of symbolic interactionism and social psychology have touched upon this concept. Goffman’s (1959) approach to social interactionism theory is through dramaturgy, and focuses on the social roles that individuals play in their construction of society. Dramaturgy explains the strategies individuals use to present themselves and control the impression they make on others. A competent performance of the self is accepted on behalf of the ‘audience’ it is exposed to and will help carry out the smooth course of interaction. However, an inadequate presentation of the self is bound to have the opposite effect, and disrupt untroubled interaction. With respect to the conceptualisation of awkwardness, dramaturgy can explain how the disruption in interaction can create a sense of discomfort and confusion as its flow comes to a stop. Furthermore, with the disturbance of expectations of unfolding interaction, the absence of

norms that would have otherwise helped define the situation formulates how all integrants of the interaction are left ill at ease and in a clear awkward situation. While symbolic interactionism can outline how awkward situations may effectuate in social interactions, it devotes less attention to how awkwardness may be perceived differently between individuals, and therefore impact participants differently.

Goffman's contributions to social psychology implement the analysis of embarrassment - the consequential social emotion of losing face when one's behaviour is considered 'inappropriate' according to expectations from a certain situation. In the discourse of awkwardness within social psychology, differentiating between embarrassment and awkwardness is important. Embarrassment is, indeed, generally considered a social emotion stemming from a violation of social norms of behaviour according to their contextual constraints (Goffman, 1959). The acknowledgement of one's deviant behavior by others is a cause for embarrassment; playing the role of social control. However, awkwardness is not considered to be an emotion, nor as a belonging property of a socially threatening situation. As Kostko (2010) explains, awkwardness is a social phenomenon that stands for a situation going in the "wrong direction" - as the etymology word indicates. At the same time, there is no indication of what a "right" way for a situation to develop; it merely indicates the violation of unvoiced norms (Kostko, 201).

The loss of self-esteem is the consequential effect of embarrassment from breaching social expectations that delineate fitting behaviour (Edelmann, 1981). Clegg's (2012) social psychological approach to awkwardness provides valuable and complementary contributions to social interactionism and Goffman's analysis of awkwardness. Differently to finding social awkwardness as a danger to social cohesion, it can instead be socially productive depending on the way it is handled. Social psychology theories such as sociometer theory and model of affiliation are used to suggest that awkward situations indicate social disruption, and that expressing socially awkward behaviours and social emotions serves to communicate this disruption. Indeed, successful ameliorative measures are dependent on whether direct acknowledgement of awkwardness is made, rather than avoided. Addressing awkwardness immediately is found to render more stable social interactions, while avoidant behaviours prolong awkwardness into an uncomfortable experience (Clegg, 2012). Kotko (2010) provides a similar account, where overcoming an awkward situation together with the parties involved in the interaction has a unifying effect; resulting in building enriched social connections and senses of community.

Overall, while symbolic interactionism can help provide an understanding of awkwardness as an impactful element of behavior of an individual in front of others, social psychology offers an

extended explanation that focuses on the emotional effects of awkwardness, and on how different measures of ameliorative practices can either productively or negatively impact social interaction, as well as its participants. On the other hand, more in depth research is needed to obtain a more refined delineation of how the experience of awkwardness varies among individuals, and on the elements that its experience is composed of.

Awkwardness in Online Dating

Besides giving strangers the opportunity to connect and interact, the physical distance provided by dating apps allow the 'softening' of awkward situations undergone in its non-digital alternative. Lacking visual cues that mute the feeling of vulnerability from emotional exposure, or rejection anxieties is appealing to many; especially those with socially impeding insecurities (Scott et al., 2006; Whitty & Carr, 2006). However, the 'muted' impact of awkward situations are only replaced by new ones; making awkwardness in the context of online dating still able to manifest itself in many ways. This "muted" sense of awkwardness can eventually have an adverse effect of creating a heightened sense of awkwardness due to the creation, and subsequent destruction of expectations. The online dating process is inherently grounded on the development of expectations formulated by the interactions undergone in the app. Dating apps are the first point of contact strangers have with each other before meeting in person. Conveying a positive impression of oneself and achieving a successful online interaction is important in order for plans to meet in person to go forward. Achieving this while attempting to meet others' expectations in such limited spaces is a challenge in itself, but maintaining the same performance in an offline setting may be a larger one due to the risks involved with unmet expectations. In contrast to cases with little or no expectations, or grounded on more solid affirmations, the experience of awkwardness may sharpen.

The hyperpersonal communication theory and Goffman's (1959) paradigm of impression management is relevant for the analysis of this aspect of the online dating dynamic. Coined by Walther (1996), the hyperpersonal model contends that computer mediated communication allows individuals to better strategize their ways of self-presenting. Consequently, message receivers are more likely to fabricate a romanticized idea of others met online (Walther, 1996). Based on this idealization, the risk of disappointment may increase if expectations of the other are considered deceptive in an offline setting (Lawson & Leck, 2006). Goffman's ideas of impression 'giving' and 'giving off' frames how regardless of the efforts to portray a favourable impression of the self, this impression may be interpreted very differently by others in online and offline scenarios.

Similarly, achieving a sense of “connectedness” through digital interaction is done and experienced differently in a face-to-face encounter. Distance allows users time to think how their words can impact their desired outcome, and plan accordingly. Referring to the subjective reflection of social interaction, Collins’ (2004) concept of emotional energy (EE) is important when gestating the grounds for a productive, and even enjoyable social interaction as it is vital for building social bonds. Due to the potential discrepancy between online and offline interaction (Whitty, 2008; Ellison et al, 2011), failing to maintain the same EE throughout can also potentially generate awkwardness due to unmet expectations, but also in the experience of incompatibility with another individual.

It is clear that the preparatory work prior to an offline meeting is important for the successful creation of connectivity and relationship-building. But the underlying awkwardness of accommodating to the requirements of these online dating platforms and dynamics is yet to be uncovered. On a similar note, with awkwardness being an ever-present element of human life, the conceptualisation of its role and integration in the progress of online dating is also an issue that this study aims to address.

Dealing and Avoiding Awkwardness

In close association to awkwardness, Goffman (1956) argues that avoiding embarrassment is a central objective during social interaction to ensure every participants’ moral rights of preserving dignity. After awkwardness breaks down social cohesion, a social effort to reconstruct interaction by protecting all participants from embarrassment and slowing an incremental uncomfortable interaction is taken (Goffman, 1956).

Clegg’s (2012) research reveals two primary ways of dealing with awkwardness: active and passive behaviors. The instant response to an awkward situation, particularly through humor, was found to work efficiently to reestablish social harmony. In contrast, avoidant behaviors were found to worsen social tension. In a dating scenario for example, ‘ghosting’ is a common way of avoiding dealing with rejection. This is used to avoid the distressingly confronting awkward situation of rejecting the other, or provoking great embarrassment from being rejected (LeFebvre, 2017). Silence, in this case, can speak louder than words, and is considered enough to communicate a disinterest to further interaction. However, the question of how individuals deal with awkward situations in online dating remains. The substantial differences in online and offline interaction due to distancing factors, limited emotional and interactional cues among others are interesting to observe in terms of awkwardness

navigation; especially in a dynamic like online dating where interaction evolves from an online context to one offline.

Gender

In our contemporary era, the notion of gender is in constant evolution. Performing gender is no longer assumed as a reflection of genetic traits, but as a socially constructed way of producing difference, organizing and structuring social life (Lorber, 2011). In society, everyone is found to constantly “do gender” rather unknowingly, by complying to ascribed norms, expectations and roles according to whether a person is categorized as a woman, or a man (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The ways of “doing gender” have been argued to result from an uncritical patriarchal, and hierarchical gender system that favours masculinity and heterosexuality (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Gender norms are further reinforced by sanctioning “gender-inappropriate” behaviour, by being placed outside of “normality”, or even regarded as “unnatural”. West & Zimmerman (2009) refer to this being accountable to the present cultural notions of behaviour compatible with those of a “man” or a “woman”; where the “naturalness” of masculinity and femininity as being properties of individuals is no longer, and “accomplishing” gender is hence institutional and interactional (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Normative gender roles assign men with more proactive behaviors, while women assume a more passive role (Simon & Ganon, 1986, Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

With gender roles and expectations so deeply embedded into society, staying close to the heteronormative dating script is thought to ensure the delivery of a good first impression (Rose & Frieze, 1993; Laner & Ventrone, 1998). The relationship between performing gender roles and dating can certainly produce awkwardness in different ways - from the inability to meet expectations of femininity and masculinity, to misinterpreting sexual advances. However, it is precisely the different ways men and women navigate awkwardness that are of particular interest to this study.

Methodology

Data Collection & Analysis

Qualitative methods are most appropriate for this research. They are effective for acquiring insights about how individuals make sense of a phenomenon, and deal with it in their personal lives. To best obtain this information, semi-structured interviews consisting of detailed descriptions and explanations were conducted (Flick, 2014). They allow flexibility within a

predetermined interview schedule; permitting themes and sub-themes to unfold through discussion (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). Transcribed interviews were used to conduct a qualitative textual analysis. Open coding allowed the systematic identification of categories and themes in the subjective interpretation of exchanged dialogue (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005 cited in Cho & Lee, 2014). An inductive approach permits condensing data from different individuals' recollections, and organizing it into a larger whole (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Iterative coding ensured that complex connections and patterns in the data are unearthed and simplified (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The intention of this research is to uncover how millennials navigate awkwardness in online dating scenarios. The first objective was to obtain individuals' definitions of awkwardness, and how it had been dealt with within online dating. Second was to explore beyond these explanations, and discover how these accounts contrasted between individuals.

Following similar strategies of Blackwell et al. (2015) and Ward (2016), the participants for this research were recruited from the Bumble Bizz app¹. The platform works similarly to dating apps; users design a profile stating their networking objectives, and are "matched" with like-minded peers willing to connect. The profile built for this research clearly stated its purpose, and provided a brief description of the study's objectives, and interview candidate criteria. The location settings of the profile were set to 160 km from the device's location. The app allowed recruiting a diverse sample population from larger cities and smaller rural areas across the Netherlands with experience on different online dating apps, and with more potential for contrasting perspectives and experiences of awkwardness; providing constructive and enriched findings to the study. . Those interested in participating in the study were able to "match" the profile to enable communication. After answering their questions and explaining more about the study in detail, arrangements were taken to schedule an interview conducted either via phone, or Skype call.

Sampling & Participants

For this study, purposeful sampling was the most suitable method for this research. Participants between 24 and 39 years old and being previously or currently active on an online dating app. In total, 8 women and 7 men were interviewed. To protect the identity of participants, their names were recorded under pseudonyms, and only mentioned when

¹ Bumble Bizz is a social networking app focused on developing career and professional connections. Motivations for joining the app vary from looking to collaborate on projects, to simply looking for mentors specifying on their professional field. Recruiting study participants is also a popular reason for individuals to join the app.

referring to a direct quote. The interviews discussed participant's ideas and formulations of awkwardness, their perspective on the overall online dating dynamic, and dove into specific examples of their awkward experiences and accounts in online dating. The measures taken to deal with such moments of awkwardness and their consequences on themselves and others were also addressed.

Results

Conceptualisation of Awkwardness

Participant's conceptualisation of awkwardness was not too divergent from the existing academic contributions when describing important components of an awkward situation. Being in an unfamiliar situation or with a new person were discussed common occasions for awkwardness to surface. The lack of experience or insufficient insights about a situation required a reflexive thought process that put participants in an uncomfortable position where despite wanting to take action, they were hesitant to do so due to an unclear evaluation of what the appropriate actions to take were. Being unsure about a correct way to act sharpened awkwardness overcoming uncomfortable situations took longer to effectuate. Respondents also strongly associated awkwardness with a sense of insecurity from being disapproved of in case of committing a faux pas. Although awkwardness was primarily described as being caused by social interactions, awkwardness was often expressed as inner-directed.

"In most cases it mostly has to do with emotional stress like anxiety, or the fear of not being accepted by the other [...] In those situations you find yourself doing things that you probably want to bash your head in the wall...like 'Nooo I should not have done that!'"

- William

As William explained, awkwardness stemmed from feeling self-consciousness about failing to satisfying others' expectations through one's actions, or by simply being. One participant illustrated this by comparing it to a situation in the workplace: "An example would be that I have to speak in public about a subject I didn't prepare for and didn't research before [...] so I forget everything and everyone is looking at me" (Joseph).

The Chronological Experience and Navigation of Awkwardness in Online Dating

Online Awkwardness

Awkwardness in online dating dynamics is split into two time segments: online awkwardness, and offline awkwardness. Online awkwardness is concerned with interactions taking place prior to meeting a match in person. The responses indicated that a large part of online awkwardness was mainly through a form of inner-directed awkwardness. Inner-directed awkwardness was mostly experienced as an awkward interaction with the self through the collection of interpretations, thoughts and internal conversations resulting from some kind of interaction - whether upon exposure to a person's dating profile, to engaging in an actual online conversation. Offline awkwardness will be discussed subsequently.

Awkwardness in the Online Dating Dynamic

Participants experienced a sense of self-stigma when using online dating apps; described as the process in which individuals believe and internalize prejudicial negative stereotypes (Goffman, 1963). For example, seeming desperate, being associated with only pursuing "meaningless hookups" or as lacking sociability skills for finding a partner spontaneously generated a reluctance for downloading the app in the first place, and also created a prevailing feeling of apprehension and awkwardness while using it. As Bella explained: "In the train when I'm on the app I always put the light on my phone lower because I don't want people to see [...] I'm a little bit afraid that people say like "Oh she's desperate" or something". By lowering the lighting of her phone, Bella is showing secrecy as a protective coping mechanism in an attempt to avoid external judgment, and perhaps prevent the spoiling of her identity with stigma - replicating what Goffman (1959) would argue as a face-protecting strategy.

Although self-stigma played an important role in the perception of online dating as awkward, it did not seem to completely overshadow the inclination to use them. Renée expressed this awkward, yet ironic, positioning of the self where although online dating is voluntary, its dynamic made her feel like she was intentionally "selling herself to a meat market" through creating a profile. In fact, the majority of attitudes towards online dating apps tended to be on the negative spectrum. In line with Renée's comparison, many were critical of its superficial

and unromantic dynamic where interest for potential partners was only based on the brief analysis of a highly condensed profile. Nigel and Oscar further expressed an apprehension for the constraining and artificial feel of the dynamic: “Yes, I want to meet them by accident. Like it’s meant to be” (Nigel); “Online dating takes away the excitement” (Oscar). In their eyes, online dating dynamics restricted the romance and excitement that “finding love” and dating are usually connoted with. The amount of imposed planning prior to meeting a potential candidate such as the construction of a profile and “swiping” through available options constricted spontaneity, and thus gave dating platforms an awkward character. Overall, its perception as an awkward dynamic was grounded on the antagonistic relationship between the final objective being to create a genuine emotional connection with another person, and the superficiality of the online dating system to accomplish it.

However, especially among those with more user experience, the assignment of self-stigma seemed to dissolve as the app became more appreciated for its use value - a tool to meet new people. This shows how the perception and experience of awkwardness in something new changes with gained familiarity and hence increased understanding. However, this did not mean that the experience of online dating was more enjoyable, nor found less awkward than traditional ways of meeting others.

Inauthenticity & Awkward Profiles

Participants were aware of the discrepancy between how an image is intended to be portrayed, and how it is perceived by others. This was mostly evident participants’ descriptions of “awkward profiles”. An “awkward profile” was mostly characterized by individuals “trying too hard” in their dating profiles; often described as inauthentic, vain or narcissistic, like William explains:

“[An awkward profile] is someone who is kind of disconnected with who they are as a person, and who the person they want to be...I don't know, like their profile is lacking a mindful connection [...]. Like you can see through the narcissism” - William

Coined by Moore (2002), ‘first-person authenticity’ is useful to understand the intrinsic awkwardness within inauthenticity. In music, ‘first-person authenticity’ refers to the performer’s success of presenting themselves as honest and truthful to an audience. The audience, in this case the viewer of the profile, is actively consuming the performance by evaluating its authenticity. In contrast to the general social construction of authenticity (Peterson, 2005 cited

in Nagy-Sándor & Berkers, 2018), authenticity was not determined by any other relevant other than the participants themselves. As William's quote above indicates, being "able to see through the narcissism" shows the inability of the profile owner to successfully depict an authentic self, and as having an awkward consequence. Indicators of inauthentic and awkward profiles were the promotion of one's physical appearance and stereotypically attractive hobbies over one's intellect and true personality to attract others like Anne and William stated:

"Some guys do feel pressured [and think] 'Oh, am I good looking enough, am I fit enough?' To the point where guys put on their profile status like [I'm a] "gym rat" or whatever...just so they feel attractive or [or to attract others], or like some girls put photos of their body..." - William

"What I also find quite awkward is these people trying to do in their profile quite sexy or over the top. I think like ok, that's not necessary, what are you trying you give off? That's just one part of you, why are you putting that so much in your spotlight?..." - Anne

Anne's quote illustrates how awkward profiles provoked a sense of 'vicarious awkwardness'. The notion of vicarious embarrassment is not uncommon - the idea of one's embarrassment caused by witnessing someone else committing a social fault; particularly when the breacher's is unaware of a threat to their social cohesion (Kratch et al, 2011 cited in Paulus et al., 2013). But 'vicarious *awkwardness*' is less concerned with individuals imagining themselves in the position of the person committing an embarrassing act (Miller, 1986 cited in Crozier, 1990), and more with one's inner discussion that questions and disapproves of the deviance between their own ideas and values of self-presentation with others. Awkwardness in inauthenticity, then, is experienced by the observer, not by the owner of the profile. Nonetheless, vicarious awkwardness surging from interpreting a profile as awkward is, indeed, due to that personal interpretation, not necessarily from the profile being truly awkward.

Although based on the quick interpretation of an image, participants' imagined narratives about the owners of awkward profiles also caused viewers to feel awkward. For example, the lack of emotional substance in the profile, as one participant described it, gave the impression of profile owners being desperate, having low self-esteem and being easily impressionable by superficial standards of beauty or attractiveness - arguably in assigning stigmatised stereotypes of online dating. William's further explanations of awkward profiles reflected this:

"You're supposed to put up photos on yourself. But some women don't [...], they put photos of themselves with other [not good looking] people in it for them to stand out.

[Other] people put likes and interests they don't even do or are interested in. Like, why are you trying to do that?" -William

Perceiving others' confidence levels seemed to influence how comfortable individuals felt around them; mirroring the effect of 'emotional contagion' (Hatfield et al., 1992). Emotional contagion is the emotional synchronization to others' expressions and vocalizations (Hatfield et al., 1992). Therefore, interpreting others as uncomfortable with themselves may incite beholders to also feel uncomfortable and awkward "around" them. Inner-directed awkwardness here is created from an internal contemplation about the perceived insecurities of an awkward profile owner, and manifesting them onto the beholder. Awkward profiles were clearly not considered eligible for potential partners, yet participants addressed them in a humorous way, many finding them funny. Dealing with awkwardness humorously has previously been found as a rather habitual way of dealing with it (Clegg, 2012). Both men and women valued authentic profiles, and showed similar outlooks about the characterizing elements of awkward profiles - obvious and exaggerated efforts to attract the other .

Initiating Conversation

Initiating conversations with a match was often expressed an awkward process among participants; particularly women. In this section, awkwardness will be discussed within two aspects surrounding the initiation of awkwardness: the initiator of conversation, and how the conversation starts.

The "duty" of initiating a conversation was often assigned to men. While men did not necessarily express a responsibility or enjoyment of doing so, women showed a preference or expected men to take initiative, like Amy and Rose shared: "I still have no clue how I should start the conversation myself. I feel a bit lost...Somehow I feel like they [men] should be doing this instead of me doing this" (Amy) ; "I feel like the man should take the first step. So for me it was a bit against my nature of sending out the first message." (Rose). Rose and Amy's quotes express an expectation of men to start the conversation, and awkwardness in taking initiative in the absence of others' initiation. The grounds on which we 'do gender' are based on socially constructed expectations long embedded in our way of living and understanding society (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In online dating mechanisms, 'undoing gender' implies a destabilising feeling from leaving familiar ways of behaving, and assuming a role arguably

contrary to what one is accustomed to. Interestingly, the preferred dating app for some of the women who shared these regards was Bumble².

Although online dating has been appreciated for allowing participants to portray themselves in a favourable light (Walher, 1996), some participants shared that such control also carried pressure to think more uniquely and creatively when interacting. Rose and Renée for example, showed their concerns when texting online matches: “[Making sure that the message] is still fun and they don't think you're boring but at the same time you're not too flirty or saying the wrong message” (Rose).

“[In real life] you could create a conversation within seconds, but now you actually have the time to think about what you're going to say, so it makes it more “perfectionistic” to say the right thing” - Renée

Here, the experience of awkwardness came from struggling to craft a “good” message. The idea of the “right thing to say” was prevalent, although an explicit example of what that would be remained unknown, and could also possibly differ between individuals. Therefore, although some were more hesitant than others, the anticipatory tension of writing the “right” message was a salient source for inner-directed awkwardness. However, this did not mean that women were less assertive and willing to initiate conversation first. As Anne explained: “Well, I like that in Bumble we [women] have to pick. Because sometimes you also have horrible conversations if someone [else] starts, but [here] you have the power”. Although initiating conversation is awkward, acquiring control over the encounters and interactions they have is a way of refining selectivity, affirming compatibility, and reducing the chance of unwanted interactions - including the possibility of awkward encounters.

Here, awkwardness lied in sets of expectations. The way dating apps have ‘weaved in’ ways to ‘undo gender’ can spark a certain disorientation or insecurity about how to start or proceed interaction. The assignation of roles for the initiation of conversation become blurred and relatively become equal; making assuming responsibility to initiate contact more striking for women than for men.

Playing Hard To Get

² On Bumble, communication can only be initiated by women.

In online dating, being sceptical about matches' true identities was prevalent as in other research on online dating (Lawon & Leck, 2006; Ellison et al., 2006; Whitty 2008). But a pertinent experience of awkwardness was found in the uncertainty of one's position in relation to a match, and in the emotional investment made for matches prior to offline meetings. Taking too long to respond to texts, difficulty in interpreting flirting advances, or being unclear of others' intentions for using the app, are examples of situations where participants felt unsure, and thus uncomfortable about their position. This was especially apparent in cases where one's perception of the other evolved past only peripheral attraction. Taking action to clarify such doubts, however, was considered awkward due to feeling like there were no substantial grounds to do so. As some participants stated: "...So maybe the dynamic is a bit uncomfortable, right? Because you don't really know what the other person is doing besides talking to you" (Anne) ; "[Asking about where one stands] just becomes more awkward because you get this type of awkwardness where you're just going ranting at someone you don't even really know." (Renée). Here, inner-directed awkwardness concentrated on feeling uncertain about their position and of the direction of still developing relationship; yet feeling like it is inappropriate to take action to define it. Like Anne and Renée demonstrated, there is awkwardness in the motionlessness of what should ideally be a congruous process.

In seeking more information about the other, it seems inevitable for curiousness and doubts about the match and developing relationship to accumulate, while remaining unresolved due to the potential risks to the self for asking about them. Ironically, participants agreed open communication and honesty were practica and appreciated ways to decrease anxieties from uncertainty. But it seemed like potential cost of being judged for showing too much interest and weakening one's image prevented participants to do so. In relation to this, participants showed a clear navigation strategy by engaging in "game-playing" as part of the online dating script: "Because I don't want to be clingy, I don't want to be....come across as crazy or...I don't know. I believe there's a thing of...kind of like an unwritten competition of who cares less you know?" (William) ; "Yes that's true. There's this thing of the first one that falls in love loses or something like that and it's so toxic" (Stephan).

William and Stephan's quotes outline the rules of the game: showing too much interest or attention towards a potential partner would result in indicating negative attribution about a person such as being "clingy", "crazy", "weak" or "desperate". In fear of coming across as any of these descriptions, many, though not all, admitted to adopting "hard to get" attitudes. However, the game would eventually create a tense competition of "who cares less" that carried with it heavy with feelings of confusion, more uncertainty and insecurity. Although this is not exclusive to online dating, the reluctance to show interest is driven by the the desire to

protect oneself emotionally and socially, while reducing the impact of emotional distress in case feelings are not mutual: "... It's awkward to bring up confrontation like that because we are not there yet to have this understanding" (Stephan).

" [I think] he's not into you because if you would be, he would ask. And sometimes I think wait, maybe he is shy, or he is also afraid to be rejected, or maybe someone is waiting for me to do it so... like what is the person thinking or what am I supposed to do..." - Bella

Stephan and Bella show the awkwardness within the transitional phase of interaction. The interplay of being uncertain about one's place in regards to a match, feeling of inadequate to pose questions about it and the measures taken to protect one's self-perception create an uncomfortable veil of awkwardness that awkwardly stirs interaction into a direction where one's goals are fulfilled. Ironically, however, participants did not indicate that receiving signs of interest from a match would entail connotations of weakness or desperateness; unless they came from an unwanted match. Men and women acknowledged the ineffectiveness and pointlessness of this competitive strategy of navigating awkwardness rather agreed that it worsens it. On a further note, inner-directed awkwardness appears to intensify according to how much one interprets an uncertain situation and the possible risks of taking action to resolve it, rather than simply acting, and handling the following set of circumstances later.

Overall, online awkwardness is largely due to the personal interpretation of potential risks to the self. The self-imposed restrictions to act and make decisions comfortably could be said to allocate an awkward characterization to online dating dynamics. Although this idea may also be present in other instances of relationship-making, the lack of visual cues that have been thought to decrease chances of interactional awkwardness, may indeed contribute to an encasing of awkwardness within online dating system that impacts the self by provoking feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. One participant provided a condensed this idea well:

"Yeah it's like really being in your head and thinking about what you have say to make it less awkward but it's only making it more awkward. I think if you think too much, you'll have a more awkward situation than if you're not thinking enough" - Nigel

Arranging a Meeting

In contrast to traditional forms of dating, the lack of physical interaction and visual cues about a match only add to one's perception awkwardness - particularly about having a certain gradual emotional connection towards a match that, until that point, has only *really* existed digitally. Collins (2017) arguments of face-to-face interaction being irreplaceable by digital interaction rituals were highly reflected in participant's decision-making process for determining the potential of an online match in an offline scenario. Like William and Nathan stated: "So obviously before I do connect [offline] with someone I read their profile and see [their] likes and stuff and make sure that I don't put myself in a situation that's gonna awkward" (William) ; "I liked to have a phone call...the voice can confirm a lot of ways you thought about someone" (Nathan).

Participants attempted to gain as much information about a match's personality and essence. More cues about a match served to test further the sense of compatibility already experienced digitally, and to confirm whether the impression of a match created so far is close to reality. This further mirrors Collin's (2004) arguments of physical co-presence being important for the exchange of emotional energy, and establishing social bonds. Doing so also made it possible to "weed out" and reject partner candidates who, while having matched online, would not have resulted to be compatible in the long run. Similarly, taking measures to avoid mismatches in expectations were also taken: "So it's important to make it clear from the beginning. To avoid complications" (Stephan). As Stephan explained, clarifying and ensuring compatible companionship or relationship objectives were ways of avoiding unanticipated awkward situations of unmet expectations manifesting in as deception or disappointment, especially in face-to-face encounters.

Online Rejection

To participants, the idea of rejection was never considered to be pleasant nor entirely comfortable. But the perception of digital technologies providing a distance from reality gave respondents reason to believe that the awkwardness of rejection, whether it was being done or done to, was much easier to handle while on the app. As Nara explained: "...I think that breaking up with someone digitally, like through text or whatever, or ghosting, makes it very easy. It's very easy to forget about it. And you don't have to deal with like...human consequences", digital technology managed to dissolve the of feeling responsibility for any distress caused by the rejection of the other, and facilitated the process of moving forward. Similarly, the "digital distance" was considered to generate a disassociation between a real person, and the online profile one is communicating with. Therefore, in conjunction with the

preexisting feeling of incompatibility, this type of detachment is helpful in the rejection process within online dating.

"[It's easier to reject people on the app] because if you know someone personally, you don't want to disappoint. But if you're talking to a computer, in a way you're not seeing the person or you haven't actually met." - Richard

In relation to Goffman's ideas on embarrassment and saving face, digital mediums were used and appreciated for their functioning avoid the full experience of awkwardness. In the majority of responses, the awkwardness of rejection came from the reluctance to cause the others to lose face, or hurt their feelings. In contrast to men, women showed more inclination to navigate the awkwardness of rejection by avoiding addressing the issue directly. For example, by letting the conversation "fizzle out" or by shifting the tone of communication into one that conveyed friendliness rather than flirtation. Amy's quote illustrates this idea "So I try to convert the whole flirting part to be more friendly. So at least it tells the other party that you're not very keen on developing any further." In comparison to ghosting, like in the findings of Sprecher, et al. (2001 cited in LeFebvre, 2019), letting a conversation purposely "fizzle" as a way to communicate the incompatibility between matches, without having to make a clear statement of rejection and potentially risking causing embarrassment. Amy showed how In fact, 'ghosting' was generally frowned upon among especially women participants, and was a rejection method that was not highly implemented by men either.

Offline Awkwardness

As Wagner (2011) suggests, once an offline meeting is arranged, participants are faced with having to handle awkward situations that are relatively similar to those in traditional forms of dating. Unmet expectations were the core of offline awkward situations described by participants, and were showcased in different aspects. In contrast to online awkwardness, the physical presence and interaction between individuals brought to light new kinds of ways of experiencing and navigating awkwardness.

Unmet Expectations and Breaking The Dating Script

Getting to know each other is an important part of the dating script, a typical activity in first dates which men and women have been shown to expect (Rose & Frieze, 1989). For two

potential partners to confirm their impression of “good chemistry” with a match and potentially deepen their relationship, a face-to-face interaction is the next step. The most common awkward experiences that participants described about offline meetings were concerned with the interplay of two elements illustrated by Renée, Richard and Joseph: “Yeah, it was awkward because the person in text was way more sociable than in real life. So you know, you can have a good chat, but actually meeting a person is a different story.” (Renée) ; “To me, the fact that she spoke a lot through online messaging but not in real life was a real confusion” (Richard).

“Um, it's awkward [when the interaction does not flow] because if it's a first meeting, you're expecting to getting to know the other person, [but] there's no interaction. It's just silence and you cannot advance in whatever your purpose is” - Joseph

First, the sense of confusion and disorientation from having expected the same level of energy and magnetism, but encountering a much slower and muted exchange. Secondly, the disruption of dating script expectations; where the anticipation for a spirited dynamic for discovering more about each other was not met.

Despite finding awkwardness in unmet expectations and disappointment, participants showed a desire to work around it by attempting to contribute in making the interaction enjoyable regardless of it. One way was to implement standards of politeness. Even if wishes to continue the relationship were nonexistent, men and women showed evidence of respecting others' time and feelings by sitting through the date for a ‘decent’ amount of time until it seemed appropriate to leave:

“So when you meet for real, you know right away “This is not a good match”, but you still need to go on a date, because you can't really stop a date [...] You're a total asshole, if you say “Okay, now that I see you let's not do this”. I would never do that.” - Oscar

“ I have a rule that it doesn't what matter, when you first meet a person, I always give an hour of my time because that person came to meet you so [...]I feel it's very rude to say like “Oh, I have to go” and leave...” - Joseph

Primarily due to unexpected low social skills from a match, some participants expressed that they felt a responsibility to deal with the awkwardness of a slow and tedious interaction by taking initiative to mobilize it. For example, Carla expressed she felt a “pressure to keep the conversation going”, and as a result of his date being shy, and Joseph felt like he “should put more effort than [his date]”. However, taking initiative to suppress awkwardness and work

towards an - at least - orderly interaction was not done without struggle. Taking action to navigate around awkwardness was often considered to perhaps worsen the invisible, yet enduring presence of awkwardness as Joseph stated: "I found myself asking questions like and interrogatory situation and I would ask a question, and the person would answer the question with very simple words and also not even ask me back."

On one hand, as participants indicate, following certain measures of politeness are used to assist in dissolving the appearance of an awkward situation. Being cautious about how others may be emotionally impacted by one's actions in managing an internally awkward situation (in the case of perceived one-sided disappointment) reflect both Goffman's (1959) and Collin's (2004) ideas about the maintenance of social interaction - one that attempts to pull together the elements that contribute to a positive exchange of energy, and avoid the risk of provoking shame or embarrassment in others. On the other hand, in prevention of being interpreted as rude or impolite, participants preferred adopting polite customs to protect their own selves and image. Overall, adhering to their understanding of acceptable social behaviour and politeness could be taken as a preventive form of action against creating or worsening an awkward interaction. However, taking responsibility for maintaining interaction afloat was nevertheless considered to place participants in an awkward position. In particular, the unexpected - and often unwanted - pressure of adopting an active role to maintain a solidary interaction dynamic was found to be create a sense of inner-directed awkwardness that frequently resulted in a negative perception of the encounter as a whole, like Oscar and Christina explain: "In real life when you have to wait until the date will end and ugh...it prolongs awkwardness!" (Christina) ; "f you really don't match, it just feels awkward to talk to someone, even though you are not interested in them... yeah, you just want to go home." (Oscar).

Awkwardness of Offline Rejection

In most scenarios, the disappointment from unmet expectations was enough for participants to no longer be interested in a match; and would consequently end in an either a one-sided or mutual rejection. Although the great majority of participants agreed on rejection being an awkward and uncomfortable situation to be in, perceptions and ways of managing rejection were divided among the responses.

Some participants' rejection methods were inexplicit. They were strongly framed by ideas constructing a smooth social interaction and which evaded the risk of causing awkward friction as much as possible. These strategies were in close association with using standards of politeness and norms of courtesy. For example, participants would invent excuses for leaving

the date early, or attempted to reduce the impact of the awkwardness by addressing future plans to meet again in a digital space, rather than face-to-face, like Renée and Bella explained: “Yeah, I guess I do have like a codeword work with like a housemate where we would say like pineapple. And she would call me and so I can make an excuse to leave secretly.” (Renée) ; “ I always feel awkward and I would never...I don't think I could do it in someone's face. Like so far it's always online” (Bella)

Employing indirect forms of rejection was recurrent among participants, but it was not claimed to be more successful in saving face or avoiding awkwardness as much as direct forms of rejection. Although having open and clear communication within rejection after an in-person encounter was considered highly uncomfortable and awkward for both parties, participants considered it was worth undergoing to avoid larger risks in the long term. As Anne explained: “Yeah, it feels a bit... 'should you tell or should you not tell'? ...My mom always tells me it's good to express your feelings, with respect of course [...], but at least that's healthy.”, if rejection was not addressed clearly, the potential harm to others as emotional distress or the risk of facing an escalation of awkwardness from prolonging uncertainty in the long run was worrying, and worthwhile avoiding by confronting an awkward moment of rejection on the spot. Reflecting Clegg's (2012) findings on social awkwardness, some participants indicated that adopting avoidant and hesitant responses to the already uncomfortable situation of rejection resulted in a negative social outcome - whether it triggered a sense of self-consciousness, hurt others' feelings more than intended, or created an unnecessary amount of uncertainty. For example, some participants indicated that taking indirect forms of rejection resulted in more awkward circumstances in the future like meeting each other again by accident and pretending to have never met before (Joseph), or having the impulse to hide when running into each other by chance in public (Bella).

In contrast to indirect ways of rejecting others, the idea of being polite remains, although approached differently than in indirect forms of rejection. The essence of politeness within direct rejection is founded on ideas of morality rather than being preoccupied with the upkeep of harmonious interaction, even if this means a heightened intensity of awkwardness. However, expressing honesty with tact and thoughtfulness is considered useful to maintain interaction as pleasant as possible. In the case of being rejected themselves, addressing it openly and with honesty was appreciated among men and women, as Nathan and Nara showed: “ I'm not interested saying, and being like “I don't know, let's see, let's talk about it next week...” You know like all these make up excuses. Yeah. I really don't like it.” (Nathan) ; “Like just be honest, like maybe he met someone else, or talking to someone else...but don't [reject without a true explanation] that's not cool.” (Nara).

Overall, finding awkwardness in rejection was inevitable due to the elevated risk of damaging other's feelings and self-esteem. However, the way the awkwardness of rejection is navigated - directly, clearly and tactfully - is paramount for creating a positive social outcome for both parties involved; especially in the long run. Especially for the individual carrying out a rejection, using this strategy could also contribute to a favourable presentation of their personality and image; one that is reinforced by taking "morally correct" actions and measures. In contrast, failing to address the desire to no longer continue a relationship directly, especially if the feeling was not mutual, was considered to prolong the awkwardness and create an overall negative experience.

Conclusion and Discussion

It is clear that awkwardness is deeply incorporated in many stages throughout the online dating process. Awkwardness was found to be experienced, and dealt with differently according to whether an individual was situated in the online, or offline segment of the online dating dynamic. Generally, the potency of awkwardness grew in accordance to the amount of interaction and connectivity exchanged with a match, and in how new participants were to the whole online dating dynamic. It is clear that the majority of courses of action taken when undergoing an awkward situation were focused on ensuring a positive outcome whether the intention was to maintain a positive impression of the self or uphold an interaction's undisturbed fluidity.

Awkwardness was mostly associated with negative connotations. It was conceptualised as a reflexive process of feeling of self-consciousness within unexpected or unfamiliar situations, and as nervousness from external judgment or public disapproval from failing to meet expectations.

Inner-directed awkwardness was mostly found within the digital spaces. In contrast to interactional forms of awkwardness, inner-directed awkwardness was unlikely to make itself known to others, and did not necessarily require social interaction to occur; such like in cases of exposure to 'awkward profiles'. Prior to an offline meeting, dealing with the awkwardness of uncertainty often entailed engaging in a strategic game-playing; one where individuals would perform rather uninterested or non-invested roles when relating or communicating with the other. However, this form of 'game playing' was recognized to only prolong the awkwardness further; but remained an ironically popular navigation strategy that many users made reference to when facing awkward scenarios. Offline forms of awkwardness consisted discrepancies

between the impression one had of a match, and the underwhelming reality. Navigating awkwardness in mismatched and unmet expectations depended greatly in the practice of politeness and respect for the other. For example, many would endure the date until an 'acceptable' time, or would the responsibility to take charge in smoothing interaction to make it as enjoyable and worthwhile. In dealing with the awkwardness of rejection, some participants preferred to avoid it by employing indirect rejection methods like finding an excuse to leave the date early, or waiting to communicate their true feelings through a more distanced medium, like texting. Others preferred to accept the awkwardness of rejection, and address it on the spot as a way to demonstrate their respect for others, and ensure the avoidance of possible misunderstandings and possibly more awkwardness to resolve in the future.

The diffusion of gender roles were particularly awkward for women in regards to online communication and initiation of contact. Some women were vocal about feeling out of place or uncomfortable about assuming the responsibility of a more active role, although this did not obstruct their assertiveness in doing it regardless. Overall, there were no salient differences between men and women about their experience of awkwardness in unmet expectations and the consideration of others' emotions and potential embarrassment in their choices for methods of rejection.

The different accounts of experience of awkwardness from respondents allowed the development of a typology of awkwardness. Awkwardness in inauthenticity was driven by deeming a performance claimed to be authentic, as inauthentic. The awkwardness lied beyond performers' inability to give a convincingly authentic performance, and in the imbalance of awareness between actors and audiences concerning how much an actor's image is being damaged, and rather perceived as inauthentically awkward - manifested as 'vicarious awkwardness'.

Uncertainty as awkwardness was evident in the absence of definition and knowledge about one's position in relation to something or something else. This loss of direction involves difficulty in determining an appropriate way of acting and behaving, and thus generates an awkward feeling of self-consciousness among individuals. The risk of sabotaging interaction or one's image by mistakenly committing a social fault causes individuals to feel uneasy, and awkwardness is prolonged as the flow of interaction is interrupted by hesitant pauses and doubts. This aspect of awkwardness in uncertainty is closely tied to the awkwardness of 'mismatches'. The blurring of gender roles may fall closely under the awkwardness of uncertainty due to a loss of guidance of 'appropriate' ways of behaving, or even showing desirable forms of femininity or masculinity.

Unmet expectations render a sense of instability from the unexpected detachment of the emotions, behaviors and actions one planned to undertake in regards to an encounter with a

person or situation - especially if one is unfamiliar with them in the first place. Furthermore, in the journey towards attaining a particular goal, the inconsistency between *what* the goal is and *how* it is attained was another aspect of awkwardness in mismatch. Following storyline with stages relating incongruously to each other throughout its development makes participating in it an awkward process and experience.

Indeed, the study revealed an alignment of Goffman's (1959) and Collins' (2004) ideas when navigating awkwardness across the different stages and interactions within online dating. Participants showed the desire to achieve a congenial experience of sociability by defeating threats imposed to the interaction by prioritizing practices of politeness and tact to attenuate the impact of emotional distress on themselves and others, the maintenance of one's own image in a good light, and to upkeep interaction as congenial as possible. Although being with the intent to ameliorate an uncomfortable situation, participants showed being uncomfortable with having to take remedial practices or responsibility for the management of awkwardness. However, one of the main additions to these theories was the introduction of inner-directed awkwardness. It is concerned with an internal debate that struggles to make sense of an uncertain or uncomfortable interaction. In contrast to the idea of awkwardness being a social experience (Kotsko, 2010), inner-directed awkwardness is experienced at an individual level. Individuals take measures to restrict their experience of awkwardness within themselves to maintain the positive flow of interaction, and avoid being embarrassed in public. The typology of awkward interactions suggested also exists in many other social contexts that may be worth exploring in further research in order to unearth more underlying factors involved in both quotidian and specific contexts.

Focusing the study around online dating highlighted a range of awkward social mechanisms shown to impact the way individuals start and build new relationships in the digital era. Particularly concerned with inner-directed awkwardness, a large part of negative outlooks on online dating dynamics are strongly based on individuals' own insecurities, self-imposed uncertainties and the influence of stigma. Since awkwardness is essentially the result of the disruption of *constructed* norms and expectations, gaining confidence in one's natural ways of communicating and interacting with others online may be an efficient way to eradicate the unnecessarily fabricated awkward game of seduction nobody wants to play. Even though it is unlikely that online dating apps will completely overtake non-digital forms of socialising and meeting new people, it may be worthwhile to study online dating apps further as they become more responsive to the demands of today's society, and incorporate themselves incrementally in our contemporary culture and ways of interrelating to each other. Therefore, in contrast to younger generations who are less impacted by this infiltration of technology in everyday life, a challenge that millennials face is having to detach themselves from their own ascriptions of

awkwardness in the system, and perhaps view it for their use value - a tool serving to introduce and connect strangers who otherwise may had never met. Conducting more research about the substance of inner-directed awkwardness is needed to gain clarity of how individuals differ in its construction, and to understand how differing accounts of inner-directed awkwardness further impact the overall awkwardness of exercising sociability and forming new relationships. This study has shown that yet again, the ability of awkwardness to permeate silently and unexpectedly is still strong, even within a platform relatively designed to avoid it - confirming the idea that awkwardness is, indeed, quite unavoidable.

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Appendix

1. Demography of Participants

| Participant Pseudonym | Gender | Nationality |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Renée | Woman | Dutch |
| Nathan | Man | Dutch |
| Amy | Woman | Chinese |
| Nara | Woman | Dutch |
| Nigel | Man | Dutch |
| William | Man | Dutch |
| Oscar | Man | Dutch |
| Joseph | Man | Mexican |
| Rose | Woman | Dutch |
| Carla | Woman | Dutch |
| Anne | Woman | Dutch |
| Christina | Woman | Polish |
| Bella | Woman | Dutch |
| Stephan | Man | Vietnamese |
| Richard | Man | Dutch |

2. Coding Tree



