

## ANALYZING DATING BEHAVIOR ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

UNC Social Software Symposium  
Abstract Submission  
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### ABSTRACT

How do people use social networking sites (SNS) for dating? How do strategies, rules, and norms for dating on these sites differ from sites specifically designed for dating purposes? The common practice of dating on SNS brings with it new areas worthy of study. While online dating sites have been studied for behavior patterns and articles written about rules, tips and strategies for finding potential dates, none have focused specifically on SNS use for dating.

We are interviewing MySpace and Friendster users to understand how they use the sites' tools and features to accomplish their dating goals. We explore how features unique to SNS, such as public display of social connections and the ability to comment on profiles influence how users search, contact, and communicate with potential dates. We have conducted four interviews with more scheduled through the end of December.

Although our research is early in the process and preliminary findings are still being investigated, several interesting observations have emerged regarding how people form and express relationships on SNS. A hallmark feature of MySpace is the public display of social connections in their top friends list, which is a selected subset of all friends in a user's profile. Thus, being included in the top friends list is meaningful to the user and the people in it. Our interviews reveal users look to this list to better understand their ongoing dating status with their partners. They feel synchronous reciprocity is an indicator of relationship authenticity. For example, users not only expect to see their profiles on their partners' top friends list, but also expect to occupy a high position on it. As one user stated, "The top friends list tells me where I stand." A great deal of tension is caused when the top friends list is asymmetric between people who are dating.

Order change hints at a gain or loss of affection. Users have taken cues from order change (i.e., from the first position to the last position or completely off the top friends list) to question relationship commitment levels. Another way to express relationship status is to display it outright by changing one's status from "Single" to "In a Relationship" which is also expected to be reciprocated. Not doing so also causes tension between couples, which sometimes results in deleting each other from their friends list.

We hope this symposium helps us gain a better understanding of how people manage and express relationship reciprocity. When people are added to users' friends list, the connection is mutual, or reciprocated. But how do users negotiate when to add a new romantic relationship in their top friends list? Is the reciprocity synchronous or asynchronous? What are the expectations of those romantically involved on SNS and how do these expectations alter users' relationship expression behaviors? How might our study expose design implications that allow non-verbal expression of relationship type and hierarchy?

## **ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS**

**Addy Lee** (<http://www.addylee.com>) is a second-year Human-Computer Interaction Masters student at the Georgia Institute of Technology. She is currently studying dating behavior on social networking sites, MySpace and Friendster. Her goal is to understand how public display of social connections and the ability to comment on profiles influence how users search, contact, and communicate with potential dates. Addy received a BA in Psychology from Vanderbilt University.

**Amy Bruckman** (<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb>) is an Associate Professor in the College of Computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology. She and her students in the Electronic Learning Communities (ELC) research group do research on online communities and education. Amy received her PhD from the MIT Media Lab's Epistemology and Learning group in 1997 and her AB in Physics from Harvard in 1987.