



The effect of deceptive online dating profiles

A study on the effect of deceptive online dating profiles on one's own deceptive online dating behavior, and the moderating influence of perceived attractiveness.

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Abstract

This study examined to what extent deceptive online dating profiles affect online daters' own deceptive online dating behavior in constructing an online dating profile. Furthermore, the moderating role of the counterpart's perceived attractiveness was investigated. An experiment was carried out, with in total 102 participants spread across four conditions. Participants were distributed to either instructions to write a deceptive or an honest dating profile, and to either another online dater's deceptive online dating profile or another online dater's honest online dating profile. Study outcomes did not find support for the main research question. The current study did, however, find a significant negative relationship between perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness. Additionally, a significant positive relationship between perceived attractiveness and desirability to date was found. Explanations and implications that can account for the study outcomes are discussed. Although no support for the main research question was found, study results provide a basis for future researchers to build further on.

Keywords: Online dating, deception, deception consensus effect, attractiveness

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Preface

Online dating has piqued my interest for many years. Not only because it is intriguing to observe how people present themselves to others to gain attention and to appear attractive, but also because I met my loving boyfriend through an online dating platform. I never imagined that on a dating site, where it is incredibly easy to pretend to be someone else and manipulate information, you could find someone with whom you could create a genuine, trusting relationship. But, after the best two years with the most loving, sweet, and loyal boyfriend, I have altered my mind. Unsurprisingly, I was excited about being assigned this thesis topic.

Although it was challenging and even frustrating at times, I have truly enjoyed the process of delving into the matter, conducting the experiment, and reporting the results. A sincere thank you goes out to my thesis supervisors. Throughout this project they have been incredibly helpful, patient and kind. Their enthusiasm kept me going. From my point of view, our teamwork was very rewarding. I am very proud of the finished paper. Enjoy reading!

Introduction

When the very first dating website was created back in 1994, no one expected it to become an integral part of the social life of many individuals. With over 50 million users and nearly 8000 different dating platforms it is now considered one of the most common methods for finding a potential love partner (Desrochers et al., 2021; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which social distancing measures were introduced, online dating has become one of the few ways to meet new people and possibly a romantic interaction. Subsequently, the use of these online dating platforms is expected to have increased even further in recent years and is expected to increase even more in the future (Joshi et al., 2020).

Although online dating platforms are widely used by daters to find their mate, the affordances of computer-mediated communication along with the need to convey a desired persona to seduce others, elicits great concerns in online dating. The scarcity of non-verbal cues combined with the fact that one's image and information can be easily manipulated makes the online dating environment a potential ground on which deceivers bloom (Desrochers et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2013; Ward, 2017). Therefore, deception is a frequently used self-presentational tactic in online dating to appear as more attractive, from which online daters could benefit. With 81% of online daters misrepresenting information in their dating profile, deception is indeed found to be a common practice in online dating, emphasizing the significance for practitioners to understand online dating and its implications (Toma et al., 2008).

Besides enhancing one's own appearance in order to seduce others and maximize one's chances of finding a mate online, the perceived attractiveness of a prospective dating partner may serve as a motivator for deceit as well. Previous research on the link between deception and attractiveness in online dating showed that individuals were more willing to lie to prospective dates they evaluated higher in physical attractiveness compared with prospective dates they rated lower in physical attractiveness (Rowatt et al., 1999). Similarly, when communicating with desirable targets on online discussion boards, people spent more time crafting their statements than when communicating with less desirable targets (Walther, 2007). These findings suggest that people are more likely to deceive a more attractive date than a less attractive date, and that people have indeed exploited technological affordances to appear more attractive when conversing with attractive counterparts online. This may imply that online daters present themselves differently in terms of deception in their own communication when presented with an attractive versus a less attractive dating partner,

highlighting the importance of the counterpart's perceived attractiveness in the deception process in online dating.

Additionally, online daters may misrepresent themselves not just to enhance their own attractiveness or because of others' attractiveness, but also because they believe others in the community are doing so, leading them to feel deception is required to be on equal footing (Ellison et al., 2006; Caspi & Gorsky, 2006). An important underlying construct that may help explain this idea is the social contract theory. In the context of online communication, the social contract is a hypothetical contract that lays forth moral and political rules that people believe they have when engaging in online communities, such as employing deception to appear more attractive in online dating (Kruikemeier et al., 2020). The reciprocal deception that results from this can also be referred to as the deception consensus effect. In Markowitz and Hancock (2018)'s study on deception, they provided some of the first evidence for this effect in an online dating setting. More specifically, they found a strong relationship between participant and partner lying rates, which might suggest that the study's participants used deception because they generally believed others in the community were doing so.

The deception consensus effect is a specific case of the false consensus effect, suggesting people perceive their own behavior and judgments as typical, believing these are shared by the majority of the people (Marks & Miller, 1987). In other words, people judge others based on their own actions. Putting this within the online dating context, online daters consider that their behavior, portraying themselves as more attractive by using deception in their profile, would thus be the norm in the online dating community. As a result, online daters adapt to what they think is the community's norm by misrepresenting oneself. They do this by adjusting their own online dating profile adding exaggerations and inaccuracies about for instance one's age, career, relationship status or interests (Whitty, 2008).

To this end, the current study sought to address the deception consensus effect in online dating. To date, deception research in online dating and the deception consensus effect focused primarily on detecting deception, the circumstances for deception and on the outcomes of deception on variables such as desirability to date, likability, and attractiveness (Desrochers et al., 2021; Ellison et al., 2006; Fiore & Donath, 2004). Limited research has evaluated how people adapt their online dating behavior when deceptive behavior is revealed in a counterpart's behavior. Nevertheless, to date, no empirical research has examined the impact of a counterpart's deceptive behavior in an online dating profile on one's own deceptive behavior in constructing an online dating profile, and to what extent the counterpart's perceived attractiveness influences this effect, revealing a significant gap in

both scholarly and practical knowledge. Therefore, the following research question is proposed: *To what extent do deceptive online dating profiles affect participant's own deceptive online dating behavior, as measured by deceptive adjustments made to their own dating profile, and to what extent is this effect moderated by the counterpart's perceived attractiveness?*

Theoretical Framework

Deception in online dating

The use of the internet to engage and meet potential romantic partners is known as online dating (Finkel et al., 2012). According to Smith and Anderson (2015), one-quarter of young adults use online dating platforms to find their soulmate, with this figure nearly doubling for those using same-sex dating platforms (Blackwell et al., 2015). Yet, the rise of this online dating scenario raises concerns.

Chief among these concerns is deception, the act of causing someone to accept information as true or valid, when it is really false or invalid (Levine, 2014; Vrij et al., 2008). Online daters report deception as the main perceived disadvantage of online dating (Brym & Lenton, 2001). Despite this, deception is a frequently used self-presentational tactic by online daters (Toma et al., 2008). Online daters' use of deception as a strategic tool can be characterized in the same way Buller and colleagues (1996) discussed interpersonal deception which emphasizes the communicator's awareness of deception. They defined interpersonal deception as communicators manipulating the information in their communication to convey meaning that differs from the truth as they know it. Although extreme examples such as 'catfishing' may come to mind, the majority of online dating deceit involves exaggerations and inaccuracies of for instance one's age, physical attractiveness, income, interests, occupation, or relationship status (Whitty, 2008). In this study the terms exaggeration and deception will be used in an interchangeable way.

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model can help explain the prevalence of deception in online dating and how online daters may benefit from this. According to this model, the limited cues available in computer-mediated communication might result in exaggerated or idealized perceptions, allowing users to strategically manipulate their self-presentations. Self-presentation in online dating is driven by a set of technical affordances that are typically unavailable in face-to-face interactions but are expected to shape what is presented online. The asynchronicity in online dating platforms, for example, is one of these technical affordances of computer-mediated communication, allowing online daters unlimited time to

carefully and thoughtfully construct their self-presentation. Furthermore, these platforms' editability allows users to alter and revise their profiles until they or someone else might be satisfied with it (Walther, 1996). These technical affordances make it easier for online daters to construct and plan their selective image than it is in face-to-face settings, partially explaining the advantages to users and why deception is common practice online.

Moreover, people try to control others' perceptions of them by engaging in deceptive self-presentation as a tactic to strategically self-enhance (Weiss & Feldman, 2006). Given that impression management goals trigger deceptive tactics, daters will use selective self-presentations in the online dating setting as there are clear impression management goals (e.g., to appear attractive to a possible date). Selective self-presentation can be defined as the process of constructing an image of the self with the goal of conveying a desired impression to others (Schlenker et al., 1980; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). This entails that online daters will strategically disclose positive information, while concealing negative information about themselves by utilizing deception to portray themselves in the best light possible (DeAndrea et al., 2012). Because online dating platforms' technical affordances provide online daters with greater control over their self-presentational claims, these could be highly strategic and in line with the daters' goals which may result in deceptive self-presentations.

If online daters will engage in deceptive self-presentations, depends on how they balance their competing self-presentational goals while building their profiles (Ellison et al., 2006). On the one hand, online daters strive to make themselves as attractive as possible to kindle initial attraction of potential mates. Online daters might accomplish this by using deceptive self-presentations to present a better version of themselves. On the other hand, online daters feel the certain need for authenticity, so they won't be rejected in future face-to-face interactions in which their deceptive self-presentations could be detected. Moreover, daters want to find a romantic partner that accepts and understands them for who they truly are, rather than a deceptive version inconsistent with their true self (Ellison et al., 2006). Online daters can balance these competing self-presentational goals by presenting and exaggerating elements of their 'ideal selves', attributes they wished they possessed, and they could achieve in the future. Such strategic self-presentations are possible because of the affordances of computer-mediated communication, supporting the paradigm of selective self-presentation and partially explaining why online daters engage in exaggerations and deceit in their dating profiles.

The deception consensus effect

The fact that deception is a frequently used self-presentational tactic in online dating does not come as a surprise to online daters. Numerous researchers have shown that deception is common practice in online dating (Toma et al., 2008; Desrochers et al., 2021; Markowitz & Hancock, 2018; Drouin et al., 2016). Accordingly, online daters are generally suspicious of others' honesty on these platforms (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018; Caspi & Gorsky, 2006; Drouin et al., 2016). According to Epstein (2007), 90 percent of the participants in his study believed other daters were lying. Similarly, Caspi and Gorsky (2006) showed that 79 percent of their respondents believed interpersonal deception was common practice in the online dating context. A more recent study by Drouin and colleagues (2016) on online deception across different online venues, including online dating, revealed that less than two percent of the participants believed others were always honest on these online venues. These findings support the notion that people believe the online environment is full of deception. More importantly, these findings may imply that a common motivator of online deception may be the assumption that others are lying, which aligns with the deception consensus effect.

The deception consensus effect suggests that people's perceptions of others' false, deceptive behavior are linked to one's own false, deceptive behavior, and is thus a specific case of the false consensus effect. The false consensus effect can be defined as an anchoring bias in which people perceive their own behavior and judgment as typical, believing the majority of the public shares similar beliefs (Marks & Miller, 1987). In other words, people establish a reference point based on their own behavior and alter that anchor to forecast how others in the community would behave. Thus, people judge others based on their own behavior (Epley, 2015). Ross and colleagues (1977) first identified the false consensus effect in an experiment in which college students were asked to promote a campus restaurant by wearing a sign. Students viewed their own actions as typical and believed others would have chosen to behave the same. Students who agreed to wear the sign, believed other students agreed as well. Students who disagreed to wear the sign, assumed other students disagreed to wear the sign too, providing support for the false consensus effect.

Thus, the false consensus effect suggests that people perceive their own behavior as normative behavior. Based on previous research on deception in online dating, deception appears to be one of the norms in the online dating community's common ground that daters frequently engage in (Toma et al., 2008; Desrochers, et al., 2021; Drouin et al., 2016). The communal common ground consists of the facts, norms, procedures, and lexicon that can be

assumed to be known by any member of the community such as slang and jargon (Scheuermann & Taylor, 1997). Online daters are inclined to conform to these norms to fit in. Similarly, in line with the social contract theory, online daters may believe deceptive self-presentations may be part of the rules of the social contract in the online dating community (Kruikemeier et al., 2020). Consequently, online daters consider their behavior, using deception as a self-presentational tactic, as the norm in the online dating community. Based on their own deceptive behavior they judge others in the community, leading them to believe others must be deceptive in their dating profiles as well (Fiore & Donath, 2004). Subsequently, online daters are influenced by the perceptions of others' false behavior and adjust their own dating profile to what they believe is the community's norm, misrepresenting oneself by using deception.

Markowitz and Hancock (2018) provided some of the first evidence of the deception consensus effect in an online dating context, revealing that the perceptions of other's behavior are linked to one's own behavior. They focused their research on deceit employed in text conversations between daters after they matched on dating profiles. The findings of their study revealed a strong relationship between the number of lies participants told themselves and their assessment of the number of deceptive messages they received from their date. When daters perceived their counterpart to be deceitful, they were more inclined to engage in deception in their own communication.

Numerous studies on deception in online dating have yielded similar conclusions consistent with the deception consensus effect. For example, besides measuring the perceptions of other's honesty on online venues, Drouin and colleagues (2016) measured the influence of personal characteristics such as the Dark Triad traits (i.e., Machiavellianism and psychopathy). The perception of other's lying behavior in the online venue was found to be a stronger predictor of their lying behavior than any of the other personal factors studied. In addition, a study by Fiore and Donath (2004) on online personal advertisements used to meet potential dates, showed that the belief that others were lying encouraged reciprocal deception. Users explained they misrepresented, for instance one's age, qualities, lifestyle, attitudes, and career, to the extent they believed others were exaggerating and misrepresenting. Similarly, the online daters in the study of Whitty (2008) exaggerated aspects of themselves (e.g., interests, occupation, and lifestyle), because they believed others in the community were exaggerating too. This pattern of results may imply that, in addition to motivations such as appearing as attractive as possible to maximize the chances of finding a match, contextual

factors such as the general belief others in the community are deceptive, may have a significant impact on deceitful behavior in online dating.

The current study examined this deception consensus effect. This was done in an online dating context during the matching stage, in which online daters are presented with other daters' profiles for the first time. Because of the limited research on the deception consensus effect, the current study's findings will offer a significant contribution to the growing body of deception research in online dating. The following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: The *do as I do* hypothesis: Participants who are instructed to write a deceptive dating profile are more likely to perceive their partner's profile as more deceptive than participants who were instructed to write an honest dating profile.

Besides engaging in deceptive self-presentations to fit in with the community's norm, online daters engage in deceptive self-presentations to gain approval from their potential date by accommodating their behavior to them. The communication accommodation theory (CAT) may help to explain this by elaborating the human tendency to adjust behavior while interacting. People accommodate their behavior to their communication partner to control for social differences and to maintain a positive image in front of the interactant (Dragojevic et al., 2015). Accordingly, when online daters suspect their counterpart employed deceptive self-presentations, they may feel compelled to adapt to this behavior in their own communication, by utilizing exaggerations and deceptive self-presentations, in order to maintain their positive self-image and win approval. In line with this expectation and prior research on the deception consensus effect, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: The *I do as you do* hypothesis: Participants who are presented with a deceptive online dating profile are more likely to adjust their own profile by increasing deception than participants who are presented with an honest online dating profile, independent on whether they wrote an honest or deceptive dating profile.

Perceived attractiveness

In addition to appearing as more attractive and other daters' deceitful behavior in online dating, the perceived attractiveness of the dating partner may motivate online daters to engage in deception. Perceived attractiveness can be defined as the impression of someone to

be appealing, interesting, physically attractive, and relationship worthy (Wotipka & High, 2016). Although there has been a lot of research on the impact of attractiveness in online dating, relatively little is known about the moderating effect of the others' perceived attractiveness on daters' own deceitful behavior in online dating.

One of the few studies that did examine this, was the study of Rowatt and colleagues (1999). In their study on the link between deception and attractiveness, daters had to review dating profiles of potential dates varying in physical attractiveness. Thereafter, daters had to indicate whether they would be willing to make themselves appear more attractive in response to matching these potential dates. Daters were more willing to lie about their appearance, personality, income, past relationships, career, and intelligence to prospective dates who they rated higher in physical attractiveness than prospective dates they rated lower in physical attractiveness. Additionally, even when daters have limited visual and non-verbal cues available (e.g., no profile pictures) leading users to judge their counterpart's attractiveness based on the cues available such as their profile description and language use, it yields similar results. People seem to spend more time crafting their statements on online discussion boards, where there are limited cues available, when conversing with a desirable target compared to conversing with a less desirable target (Walther, 2007). The parallels between these results along with prior evidence suggesting that attractiveness, self-presentation, and deception are tightly linked, emphasize the significant role of the counterpart's attractiveness on one's own deceptive behavior (Desrochers et al., 2021; Fiore & Donath, 2004; Rowatt et al., 1999). Because prior online dating research has primarily focused on the link between deception and physical attractiveness using profile pictures, the current study sought to fill in the scholarly gap by addressing the link between deception and perceived attractiveness in a setting with limited visual cues available (e.g., no profile pictures).

The higher tendency to deceive when confronted with an attractive potential dating partner may be partially explained by the Expectation-Discordance Model of relationship deception (Druen et al., 1998). According to this model, people are motivated to meet the expectations of other people. When they feel it is difficult or impossible to meet these expectations, deception may be used to avoid disappointments or conflicts (Druen et al., 1998). Accordingly, online daters are inclined to engage in deceptive self-presentations to appear more desirable to attractive dating partners to meet their expectations. This line of reasoning supports the notion that online daters are more inclined to modify their self-

presentations deceptively when presented with an attractive dating partner than when they are presented with a less attractive dating companion.

Because of the limited research on the moderating factor of perceived attractiveness of the potential dating partner and its effect on participants' own deceitful behavior in response to it, the current study will further investigate this relationship. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Participants who are presented with an online dating profile of a potential dating partner they rated higher in perceived attractiveness, are more likely to increase deception in their own dating profile in response than participants who are presented with an online dating profile of a potential dating partner they rated lower in perceived attractiveness. This is independent on whether they wrote an honest or deceptive dating profile.

If most online daters are portraying an enhanced and deceptive image of themselves and believe others are doing the same, questions arise to what extent the perceived attractiveness of the prospective dating partner can be trusted. Although, attraction and trustworthiness have long been positively linked with one another, attractive profiles in online dating may raise concerns about authenticity (Dion et al., 1972). For example, Lo and colleagues (2013) found that attractive profiles were evaluated less authentic than unattractive dating profiles. Participants in their study felt like highly attractive dating profiles cannot be trusted in an online dating setting. Despite, the desire to date highly attractive dates was higher than the desire to date potential dates who were rated less attractive. This latter finding may imply that the counterparts' perceived attractiveness has a strong influence on constructs such as desirability to date and can possibly out rule negative attitudes, such as being less trustworthy, toward the prospective date. Additionally, Ellison and colleagues (2012) found comparable results on the link between attractiveness and trustworthiness in online dating. Their study revealed that profiles that scored higher on attractiveness are perceived as less trustworthy than profiles that scored lower on attractiveness. These findings contradict previous positive associations made between attraction and trustworthiness, implying that while online dating users expect to find more enhanced profiles, they may also regard individuals whose profiles appear highly attractive as less trustworthy.

Based on these prior findings on the relationship between attractiveness and trustworthiness and desirability to date, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H4: Prospective dating partners who are rated higher in perceived attractiveness are more likely to be viewed as less trustworthy than prospective dating partners who are rated less in perceived attractiveness.

H5: The higher the participants rate the potential date on perceived attractiveness, the higher the participants' desire to date the potential date.

Method

Design

To assess whether a prospective date's deceptive behavior influences a participants own deceptive behavior an experimental 2 (IV, other dating profile: deceptive vs. honest) x 2 (Moderator, own dating profile: deceptive vs. honest) between-subjects design was conducted. Participants ($N = 102$) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. The current study's independent variable was the counterpart's online dating profile (deceptive vs. honest) participants were presented with. The dependent variable was the adjustment of deceptiveness (more deceptive vs. less deceptive) in one's own profile in response to the independent variable. Deception in own profiles (deceptive vs. honest) and other profile's perceived attractiveness acted as moderators. Figure 1 depicts the current study's conceptual model.

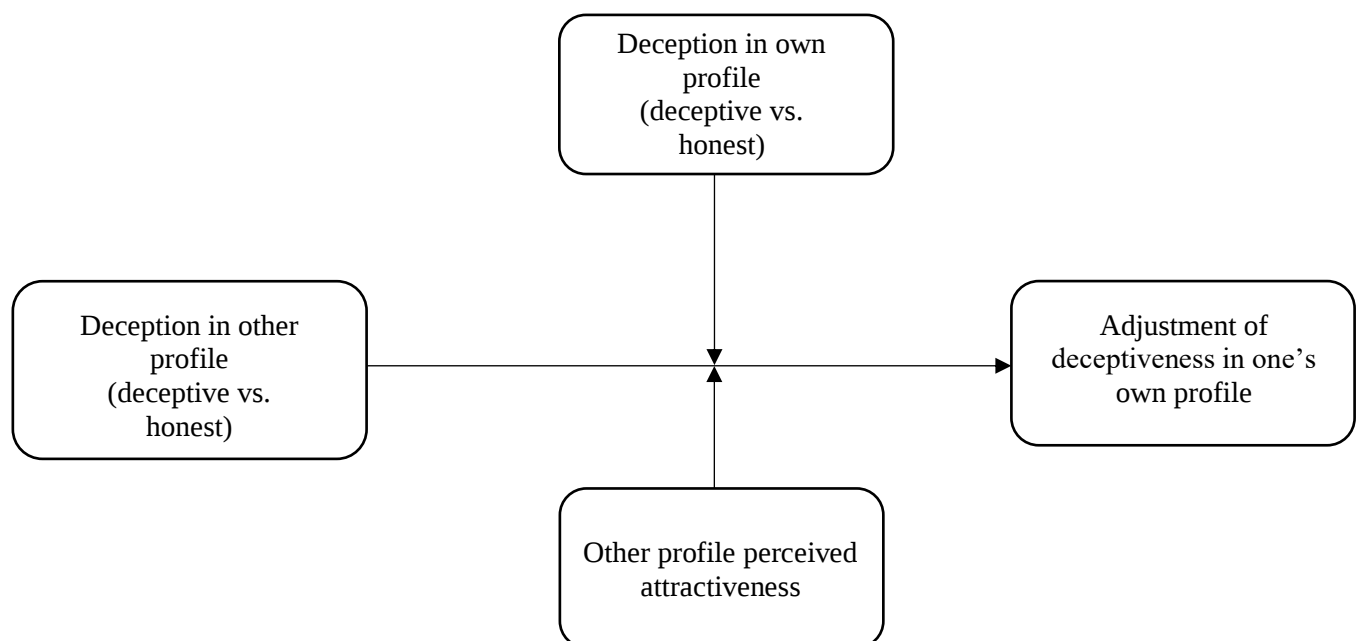


Figure 1. The conceptual model of the current study.

Stimuli

A pretest was conducted to create twelve dating profiles, of which six deceptive and six honest dating profiles, for the current study's experimental stimuli (see Appendix A). Participants ($N = 10$) were instructed to create one honest and one deceptive online dating profile description about themselves. These descriptions included common information typically associated with dating profiles (i.e., demographics, physical looks, hobbies and interests, and what they are seeking for in a companion). Afterwards, participants rated the deceptiveness of their written statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1, not exaggerated at all to 5, extremely exaggerated) for each profile (i.e., deceptive and honest). This was done as a manipulation check. The six best female dating descriptions, of which three were deceptive and three were honest, and the six best male dating descriptions, of which three were deceptive and three were honest, were then used to create dating profiles that resembled the appearance of the profiles from popular dating websites. These twelve online dating profile descriptions were used in the second phase of the current study's experiment as the study material.

Participants

For this study a quantitative research was conducted among 200 participants. Of the 200 participants, 98 participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not grant consent or did not complete the questionnaire completely and accurately. For that reason, the results are based on 102 participants. Of the participants, 22 were male ($M_{age} = 24.86$, $SD = 5.46$) and 77 were female ($M_{age} = 23.18$, $SD = 1.83$). Two participants identified as non-binary/third gender ($M_{age} = 23.5$, $SD = 0.71$) and one 32-year-old participant preferred not to say. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45 years ($M = 23.63$, $SD = 3.15$). The majority, 97.1% of the participants, have completed higher education (i.e., HBO, WO, master, post-master, and PHD). Participants were asked to indicate their sexual preference (i.e., male, female, both, non-binary or third gender, and prefer not to say) to assign them profiles of their preferred gender. Participants who selected both, non-binary/third gender or prefer not to say as their sexual preference were randomly assigned to one of the 24 online dating profiles. 61 participants evaluated a male profile, 30 a female profile, 9 chose both (i.e., male and female) as their preference and were randomly assigned to one of the 24 dating profiles, and 2 preferred not to say, which were then randomly assigned to one of the 24 dating profiles as well. Besides, participants needed to indicate their relationship status. 51 participants were single, 40 participants were in a relationship, ten participants were dating

someone, and one participant preferred not to say. Participants were sampled via convenience sampling.

Measures and procedure

Participants were gathered via social media and the researcher's network. The experiment was conducted via Qualtrics. Before the experiment started, the participants provided informed consent. Each participant received information outlining the goal of the study, how the data would be managed and stored, and who to contact if they had any issues (see Appendix B). After giving informed consent, participants answered a set of questions that included basic demographic information and sexual orientation (i.e., gender, age, education, sexual preference, and relationship status) (see Appendix C). After answering these questions participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (i.e., condition 1: create honest and rate honest; condition 2: create honest and rate deceptive; condition 3: create deceptive and rate deceptive; condition 4: create deceptive and rate honest). Participants read a scenario in which they were asked to imagine that they had just signed up for an online dating website. Participants were asked to write a brief description for their online dating profile consisting of information typically associated with dating profiles (i.e., demographics, physical looks, hobbies, and interests, and what they are seeking for in a companion). Participants were either instructed to write an honest description of themselves or to exaggerate their description of themselves for their online dating profile (see Appendix D and Appendix E). After completing their dating profile description, they were asked to rate the deceptiveness of their statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1, not exaggerated at all to 5, extremely exaggerated) as a manipulation check (see Appendix F).

After creating their own online dating profile description, participants were presented with an online dating profile of a prospective date. They were either presented with an honest online dating profile or a deceptive online dating profile, but at this stage this was unknown to the participants. Participants had to rate the counterpart's profile on the following measures:

- **Trustworthiness.** The perceived trustworthiness of the potential date depicted in the online dating profile was measured using four items adopted from McCroskey and Teven (1999) and McKnight et al. (2004). The items were modified to fit the context of the current study. The items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 7, strongly agree). The scale included the following items: "I feel like this person is trustworthy", "I feel like this person is honest", "I feel like this person is

credible”, and “I feel like this person has written his/her dating profile with good intentions”. The four items formed a scale with excellent reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .95$.

- **Perceived attractiveness.** The perceived attractiveness of the potential date was measured by using the following three determinants retrieved from McCroskey and McCain (1974) and Campbell (1999): physical attraction, social attraction, and romantic attraction. Perceived attractiveness was measured using three items, one for each determinant. The scale included the following items: “I think this person is good-looking” for physical attraction, “I think this person and I could be friends” for social attraction, and “I would not want a relationship with this person” for romantic attraction. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 7, strongly agree). The three items formed a scale with an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .73$).
- **Desire to date.** The participant’s intentions to date the potential date depicted in the online dating profile was measured using four items, adapted after the measuring instrument created by Campbell (1999) and McGloin and Denes (2018). Items that were used included: “I would not like to chat with this person”, “I would like to know more about this person”, “I would like the person in the profile to ask me out on a date”, and “I do not need to meet this person in real life for a date”. The items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 7, strongly agree). The four items formed a scale with good reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .81$.

After completing the rating task of the counterpart’s online dating profile, participants either found out they saw and rated an honest or deceptive online dating profile (see Appendix H). Participants who discovered that they were lied to were shown the true and honest profile of the online dater. The other group of participants that saw and rated an honest dating profile, were presented with this same honest dating profile again. Participants were then given the opportunity to adjust their own online dating profile they created at the beginning of the experiment. After adjusting their profile description, participants were asked to rate the deceptiveness of their written statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1, not exaggerated at all to 5, extremely exaggerated) as a manipulation check. Lastly, participants were debriefed (see Appendix I). The researcher’s contact information was provided for further questions about the experiment. In total, the experiment took about ten to fifteen minutes. Figure 2 shows the procedure of the current study.

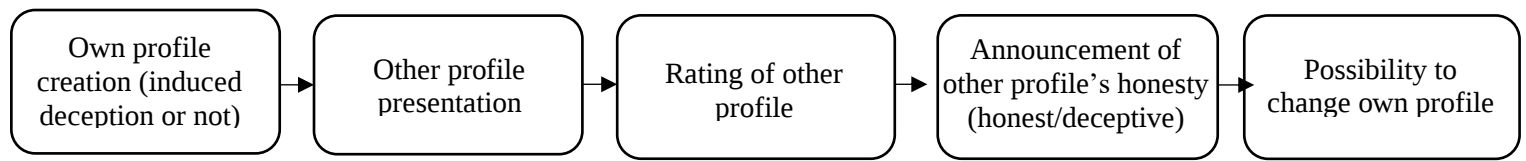


Figure 2. Procedure of the current study.

Results

Preliminary checks

To assess whether a prospective date's deceptive behavior influences a participants own deceptive behavior and if the counterpart's perceived attractiveness moderated this effect, five hypotheses were formulated, which were assessed based on different statistical analyses. Firstly, as described earlier, participants were instructed to construct either an honest online dating profile or an exaggerated online dating profile. Afterwards, participants indicated to what extent they exaggerated the statements in their online dating profile on a 5-point Likert scale (1, not exaggerated at all to 5, extremely exaggerated). This was done as a manipulation check to see if, as expected, the participants who wrote an honest online dating profile evaluated their statements as not exaggerated and if participants who wrote an exaggerated online dating profile rated their statements as exaggerated.

Therefore, to test if there was indeed a difference in the deceptiveness score between these two groups, an independent samples t-test was performed. The data for the group who was instructed to write an honest online dating profile was not normally distributed (z-score skewness = 6.67 and z-score kurtosis = 5.52). Therefore, the p-value may not be reliable, and more weight should be placed on the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that will be provided. On average, the score on deceptiveness was higher for participants who wrote an exaggerated online dating profile ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.06$) than for participants who wrote an honest online dating profile ($M = 1.42$, $SD = .70$). This difference was significant ($Mdif = -1.60$, $t(100) = -9.12$, $p = .000$), as the bootstrapped 95% BCa CI [-1.95, -1.25] does not cross zero. The difference represents a large-sized effect, $d = 1.78$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the instructions performed as intended, with participants directed to write an honest dating profile having a lower deceptiveness score and individuals instructed to write an exaggerated online dating profile having a higher deceptiveness score. Thus, participants who wrote an exaggerated dating profile did indeed exaggerate more in their dating profile, and

participants who constructed an honest dating profile were indeed more honest in their statements.

To ensure that participants completed the questionnaire correctly and to avoid straight liners, an attention check was used between the items about attractiveness (*Choose the option "somewhat agree" here*) and a control question was asked (*What was the last information discussed in the dating profile of the other online dater you saw?*). Overall, most of the participants answered the attention check and control question correctly. The frequencies on the attention check and control question are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies on the attention check and control question that was answered correctly ($N = 102$).

	Frequency	Percent
Attention check	89	87.3
Control question	87	85.3

Model fit

A multiple stepwise linear regression was carried out to investigate whether a prospective date's behavior and perceived attractiveness could significantly predict participants' own behavior in constructing an online dating profile. The overall model was not significant, with $r = .30$, $r^2 = .09$, AIC = 305.51, BIC = 321.26, RMSE = 1.02, $F(4, 97) = .06$. However, the intermediate model taking one's own deception in online dating behavior and the other's deception in online dating behavior significantly predicts the increase of one's deceptiveness, with $r = .29$, $r^2 = .09$, AIC = 301.81, BIC = 312.39, RMSE = 1.02, $F(2, 99) = .01$. Similarly, the intermediate model considering the other's deception in online dating profile and the moderating role of the other's profile attractiveness to predict one's own deception in online dating profile was significant, with $r = .30$, $r^2 = .09$, AIC = 303.53, BIC = 321.26, RMSE = 1.02, $F(4, 97) = .06$. Nevertheless, that model did not differ significantly from the previous significant one, with $\Delta r^2 = .00$, $F(1, 98) = .56$. Table 2 provides an overview of the model fit measures investigated in this stepwise linear regression.

Table 2. Model Fit Measures.

Model	R	R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	.14	.02	2.10	1	100	.151
2	.29	.09	4.60	2	99	.012
3	.30	.09	3.16	3	98.	.028
4	.30	.09	2.35	4	97	.059

Note. Model 1: Other dating profile > Difference, Model 2: Own Dating Profile * Other dating profile > Difference (Moderation 1), Model 3: Attractiveness * Other dating profile > Difference (Moderation 2), Model 4: Attractiveness * Own Dating Profile * Other Dating Profile > Difference (Moderation 3). With Difference being the difference between the deceptiveness score before and after seeing the other daters' profile.

Hypothesis testing

Table 3 provides an overview of the means and standard deviations of the variables per condition (i.e., condition 1: create honest and rate honest; condition 2: create honest and rate deceptive; condition 3: create deceptive and rate deceptive; condition 4: create deceptive and rate honest). Trustworthiness, attractiveness, and desirability to date were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 7, strongly agree). Deceptiveness 1 is the manipulation check before participants were presented with the counterpart's online dating profile and deceptiveness 2 is the manipulation check after participants were presented with the counterpart's online dating profile (1, not exaggerated at all to 5, extremely exaggerated).

Table 3. The means (min. = 1, max. =7) and standard deviations in parentheses of the variables per condition (N = 102).

	Condition 1 (N =27)	Condition 2 (N = 28)	Condition 3 (N =22)	Condition 4 (N= 25)
Trustworthiness	5.25 (1.05)	3.95 (1.52)	4.30 (1.68).	4.85 (1.41)
Attractiveness	4.42 (1.21)	3.83 (1.08)	3.65 (1.44)	4.32 (1.44)
Desirability to date	4.46 (1.22)	3.76 (1.26)	3.52 (1.60)	4.37 (1.13)
Deceptiveness 1	1.35 (.63)	1.48 (.77)	2.86 (1.20)	3.16 (.92)
Deceptiveness 2	1.26 (.60)	1.41 (.82)	2.01 (1.03)	1.76 (.87)

The first hypothesis, the *do as I do* hypothesis, entailed that participants instructed to create a deceptive dating profile were more likely, than those instructed to write an honest dating profile, to consider their partner's profile as more deceptive and thus less trustworthy. To examine this hypothesis an independent samples t-test was performed. This was measured using the four items constructed for trustworthiness on a 7-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 7, strongly agree). The data was not normally distributed with a significant skewness for both the honest (z-score skewness = -2.27) and deceptive condition (z-score skewness = -2.05). Therefore, the p-value may not be reliable, and more weight should be placed on the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that will be provided. On average, there was no difference between participants who wrote an exaggerated dating profile ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.55$) and participants who were instructed to write an honest online dating profile ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.46$) on their perceived trustworthiness of the other online dater they were presented with ($Mdif = -.004$, $t(100) = -.014$, $p = .989$, with 95% BCa CI [-.55, .613]). Thus, contrary to what was expected in hypothesis 1, participants who were instructed to write an exaggerated online dating profile did not perceive their counterpart's profile as more deceptive compared to participants who were instructed to write an honest online dating profile.

The second hypothesis, the *I do as you do* hypothesis, entailed that when participants were shown a deceptive online dating profile, they were more likely to change their own profile by increasing deception than when they were shown an honest online dating profile. To investigate the hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was performed. The data was not normally distributed for both the counterpart's honest dating profile (z-score skewness = 4.73, z-score kurtosis = 2.35) and the counterpart's deceptive online dating profile (z-score skewness = 3.62). As a result, the p-value may not be reliable, and the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that will be presented should be given more weight. Overall, people who were presented with a deceptive online dating profile increased deception in their own profile more ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .96$) than participants who were presented with an honest online dating profile ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .78$). However, this difference was not significant ($Mdif = -.175$, $t(100) = -1.02$, $p = .312$, with 95% BCa CI [-.50, .16]) crossing zero. Contrary to hypothesis 2, it cannot be concluded that participants who were shown a deceptive online dating profile increased deception in their own profile more than those who were shown an honest online dating profile.

Additionally, a second analysis was conducted to examine if participants presented with a deceptive online dating profile and participants presented with an honest online dating profile behaved differently in their own deceptive behavior because of the other dater's deceptive or honest behavior. An independent t-test was conducted with the difference between the deceptiveness score before participants were presented with the other dater's profile and the deceptiveness score after participants were presented with the counterpart's dating profile. The data was not normally distributed for both the counterpart's honest dating profile (z-score skewness = -3.71) and the counterpart's deceptive dating profile (z-score skewness = -5.15, z-score kurtosis = 5.90). Therefore, the p-value may not be reliable and more weight should be placed on the 95% confidence interval. Overall, participants presented with a deceptive online dating profile were more deceptive in their own behavior ($M = -.42$, $SD = .97$) than those presented with an honest online dating profile ($M = -.72$, $SD = 1.15$). This difference was, however, not significant ($Mdif = -.31$, $t(100) = -1.45$, $p = .143$, with 95% BCa CI [-.69, .12]) crossing zero.

To investigate the relationship between the perceived attractiveness of the potential date and the score on deceptiveness, as expressed by hypothesis 3, a regression analysis was performed with the perceived attractiveness as the predictor ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.31$) and the score on deceptiveness as the outcome ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .87$). The regression analysis showed that the score on deceptiveness cannot be predicted by the counterpart's perceived attractiveness ($R^2 = .01$, $F(1, 100) = .80$, $p = .37$, $b = -.13$, $\beta = -.089$, $t = -.897$, $p = .37$). As a result, it cannot be concluded that participants were more likely to increase deception in their own profile when they rated their potential date more attractive than those who rated their potential date less attractive.

Hypothesis 4 entailed that prospective dating partners who were rated more attractive are more likely to be seen as less trustworthy than those who are rated less attractive. To investigate if there is a relationship between the prospective dating partner's perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness, a regression analysis was performed with the perceived attractiveness as predictor ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.31$) and trustworthiness as outcome ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.49$). The standardized residual was not normally distributed (z-score skewness = -2.05). Therefore, the p-value may not be reliable, and more weight should be placed on the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that will be provided. The regression analysis showed that the potential date's trustworthiness can be predicted by the potential date's perceived attractiveness ($R^2 = .34$, $F(1, 100) = .50.62$, $p < .001$, $b = .51$, $\beta = .58$, $t = 7.12$, $p < .001$). The

model explains 33.6% of the variance. As the bootstrapped confidence interval does not cross zero (95% BCa CI [.37, .65]) the results can be generalized to the population. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis 4 is supported by the data. Thus, the potential dates who were rated more attractive were more likely to be seen as less trustworthy. Figure 3 depicts the relationship between trustworthiness and attractiveness of the prospective dating partner.

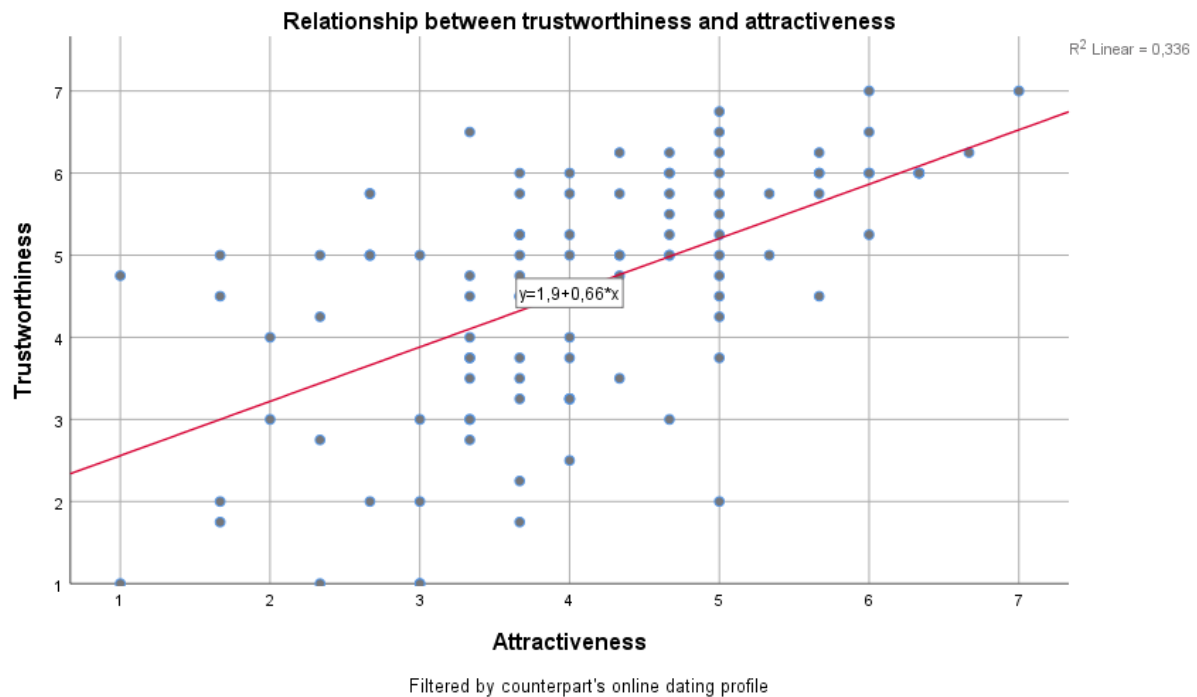


Figure 3. Relationship between the counterpart's trustworthiness and perceived attractiveness.

Lastly, to test the positive relationship between perceived attractiveness and desirability, as expressed by hypothesis 5, a regression analysis was performed with the perceived attractiveness as a predictor ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.31$) and desirability to date as outcome ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.34$). The regression analysis showed that the prospective date's desirability to date can be predicted by the prospective date's perceived attractiveness ($R^2 = .65$, $F(1, 100) = 184.70$, $p < .001$, $b = .79$, $\beta = .81$, $t = 13.59$, $p < .001$). The model explains 64.9% of the variance. As a result, the data confirm hypothesis 5, stating that the higher the participants rate the potential date on perceived attractiveness, the higher the participants' desire to date the potential date. Figure 4 depicts the relationship between the desirability to date the potential date and their perceived attractiveness.

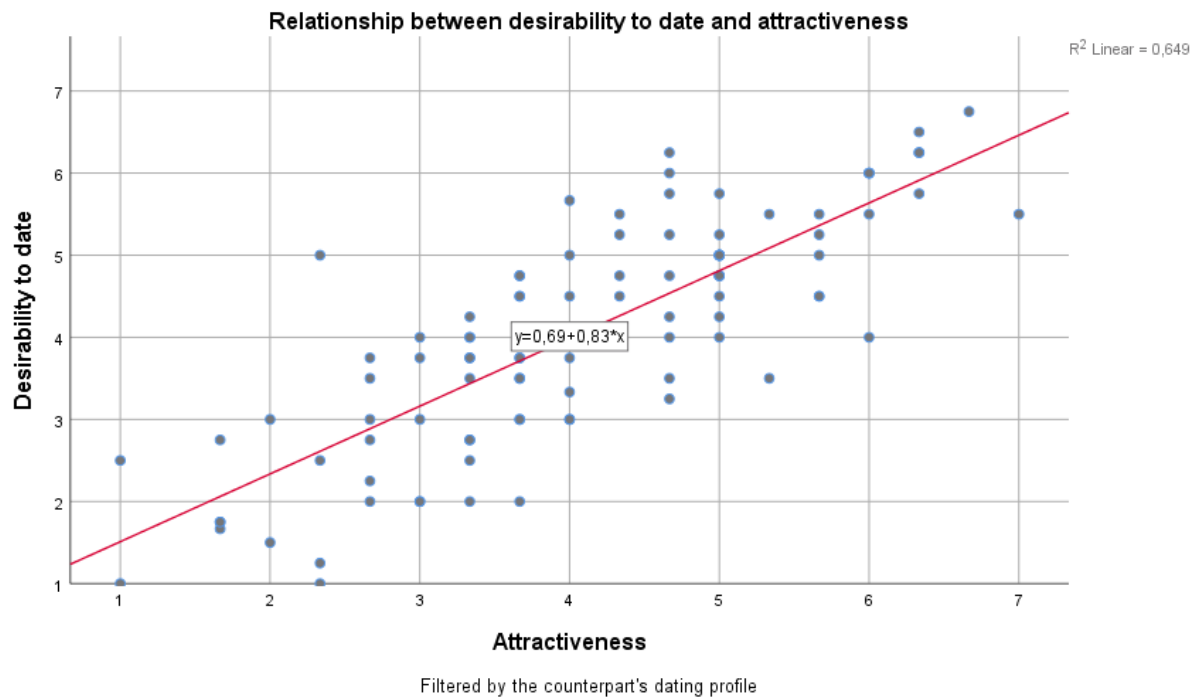


Figure 4. Relationship between the counterpart's desirability to date and perceived attractiveness.

Discussion

The current study examined the impact of deceptive dating profiles on one's own deceptive online dating behavior in constructing online dating profiles. In addition to that, this study analyzed the moderating role of the counterpart's perceived attractiveness on one's own deceptive online dating behavior. Deception research has primarily considered how to detect deception and the circumstances for deception in different online environments. Also, it focused on the outcomes of deception on factors such as desirability to date, likability, and attractiveness, but it has been less concerned with how deception is related to perception biases (Desrochers et al., 2021; Ellison et al., 2006; Fiore & Donath, 2004). Accordingly, the main goal of this study was to add to the expanding body of research on the deception consensus effect in online dating, which has, to date, received little attention.

Hypotheses and research question

In line with the aim of this research, five hypotheses were formulated, predicating the outcome of the study. Considering the first hypothesis, assuming that participants instructed to write an exaggerated online dating profile were more likely to perceive their partner's profile as more deceptive compared to participants instructed to write an honest dating

profile, no effect was found when comparing these two groups. This indicates that the predicted effect in line with Markowitz and Hancock (2018)'s study, which found some of the first empirical evidence for the deception consensus effect in online dating, revealing a strong relationship between one's own deceptive behavior and one's counterpart's deceptive behavior, is not supported. Not only did outcomes of hypothesis 1 not indicate a significant effect, but when the means of the two groups were compared, the results showed that there was no difference between the groups. Therefore, the false consensus effect, generated by judging others based on one's own behavior, did not appear in the current study's online dating scenario.

A possible explanation for the similar perceptions of participants who wrote an honest dating profile and participants who wrote an exaggerated dating profile on the other dater's trustworthiness, might be that the perception of the community's norm is a stronger predictor for behavior than one's own behavior. Past research revealed that daters believe deception to be one of the norms and part of the social contract in the online dating community, leading online daters to question other daters' honesty on these platforms (Toma et al., 2008; Desrochers, et al., 2021; Drouin et al., 2016). Therefore, it might be possible that daters simply expect others to be deceitful in their dating profiles regardless of how they present themselves in their profile (i.e., being honest or being deceptive). Accordingly, the perception of the online dating community's norm (i.e., exaggerating to appear more attractive) might be shaping one's behavior more than the anchoring bias people establish based on their own behavior on these platforms. Drouin and colleagues (2016) found comparable results. The findings of that study showed that the perception of others' lying behavior was a stronger predictor for one's own lying behavior than any of the other personal characteristics investigated (i.e., Machiavellianism and psychopathy). Thus, these findings could imply that the perception of the community's norm (i.e., online daters misrepresent themselves to appear more attractive) is a stronger predictor for one's behavior in that community than any other personal characteristics or behavior.

However, a surprising finding is that the counterpart's trustworthiness is rated fairly high across all conditions (see Table 3). This implies that most participants generally trusted the other online dater and did not regard them as particularly deceptive, contrary to previous research suggesting that online daters generally believe others in the community are mostly deceptive (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018; Drouin et al., 2016; Fiore & Donath, 2004; Whitty, 2008). Subsequently, in this study's online dating situation, the Truth-Default Theory, rather than the false consensus effect, may be given greater weight (Levine, 2014). To assess

whether someone is deceitful or trustful, people employ contextual information (e.g., prior knowledge and information about the communicators), because they often do not have enough cues available to make an accurate judgement about one's trustworthiness. Because most people believe lying is socially unacceptable, people often assume that their partner is truthful in their communication as proposed by the Truth-Default Theory (Street, 2015). Consequently, this perspective might govern how people judge other online daters during the matching stage, that has limited cues available, presuming the other is honest rather than deceitful, possibly explaining this study's findings.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that participants presented with a deceptive online dating profile were more likely to adjust their own dating profile more deceptively than participants presented with an honest dating profile. Although those who were presented with a deceptive profile increased deception in their own profile more than those who were shown an honest dating profile, the difference was not significant. Interestingly, the results of the current study tend towards the opposite direction. Participants across all conditions decreased their deception use in their dating profile after seeing the other online dater's dating profile (see Table 3). In other words, participants adjusted their dating profile more honestly. This is the opposite of what was expected from earlier research (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018; Drouin et al., 2016; Whitty, 2008; Dragojevic et al., 2015).

A reason for this can be given using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Bandura, 1977; Ajzen, 1991). The TPB links beliefs to behavior, suggesting that the three core components attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control together shape an individual's behavioral intention. In turn, an individual's behavioral intention is the strongest predictor for actual behavior. The deception consensus effect supposes that individuals infer the lying of others, but this does not imply that they will act on it. Therefore, it might be the case that this study's participants lack the intention to perform the actual behavior (i.e., using deception in their dating profile). This could be because daters view deception as a socially undesirable act (i.e., personal attitude), or because they believe others will disapprove of it, especially when future face-to-face interactions are proposed in which they could be caught in the act of misrepresenting (i.e., subjective norm). Furthermore, this could be because someone is simply unable to lie due to internal motives, for instance, to maintain a positive self-worth, or because someone is technologically not capable of doing so (i.e., perceived behavioral control). Therefore, the participants in this study may not have had the intention to engage in the act of deception, leading them to be more honest in their dating profiles rather than deceitful. Furthermore, this study was assessed using a questionnaire, so the answers are

influenced by social desirability. Subsequently, participants might have changed their dating profile to be more truthful in the end, since lying is seen as a socially undesirable behavior. Thus, the outcome of this study's results show that the need for authenticity surpassed the need to appear more attractive (Ellison et al., 2006). Contextual factors, such as the belief others in the online dating community are deceptive, do not have a significant impact on participant's own deceitful behavior. Therefore, the current study did not find significant support for the deception consensus effect.

Furthermore, the contradictory results of hypothesis 1 and 2 could be partially explained by online dating experience. Many authors suggest that an individual's online experience is a determinant for a person's deceptive behavior online. For instance, Caspi and Gorsky (2006) found in their study on deception that frequent users deceive more online than infrequent users. Similarly, Hancock and colleagues (2004) found that more experienced users of an online communication technology are more likely to deceive with that technology than less experienced users. Moreover, prior research on dating deceit revealed that a person's level of online (dating) experience influences not just their deceptive behavior, but also their perception of their own and other users' lying online (Drouin et al., 2016). Highly experienced users regard themselves as less honest and other users as being more honest than users with low experience. These differences between daters having low and high levels of online dating experience might provide evidence to believe that online dating experience has a moderating impact on deception in online dating, partially explaining this study's results.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a relationship between the counterpart's perceived attractiveness and deception in own online dating behavior. More specifically, the hypothesis assumed that participants are more likely to lie in their own online dating profile when they rated their potential date high in attractiveness than when they rated their potential date low in attractiveness. This study's results reject this hypothesis. A reason for this might be that there were no stakes for the participants in this study because it was 'just' an experiment for them. These stakes, however, are potentially important in deception. A widely accepted assertion in deception research is that high-stakes lies distinct significantly from minor, everyday lies (Levine & McCornack, 2014). High stakes are those in which a liar stands to earn a lot from successful deception but stands to lose a lot if the lie is detected. For this study's participants the stakes for lying in their dating profile were low, they did not gain anything from it, but did not lose anything from it as well. When the stakes are low, the emotional difference between honest and deceitful communication is minimal (Levine & McCornack, 2014). This might have explained the lack of results. Thus, it cannot be

concluded that participants were more likely to increase deception in their own profile when they rated their potential date more attractive than those who rated their potential date less attractive.

Hypothesis 4 assumed that there would be a relationship between the other dater's perceived attractiveness and their trustworthiness. More specifically, it was predicted that when participants rated their date high in attractiveness, the potential date was more likely to be viewed as less trustworthy. The results of the current study confirm this hypothesis. This is in line with previous studies on the link between attractiveness and trustworthiness (Ellison et al., 2012; Lo et al., 2013). Online daters are often dubious when they see a highly attractive dating profile, because technological affordances in online dating make it easier for online daters to manipulate their self-presentations, which is a well-known widespread practice in the online dating community (Desrochers et al., 2021; Ellison et al., 2006; Fiore & Donath, 2004). Subsequently, online daters assume that highly attractive dating profiles have taken advantage of these technological affordances and are perceived as highly enhanced and 'too good to be true'. This might explain why the current study's participants trusted highly attractive dates less than less attractive dates.

Lastly, the fifth hypothesis focused on the relationship between the potential date's perceived attractiveness and the desirability to date the potential date, suggesting participants were more likely to date their potential date when they were rated higher in perceived attractiveness. This study's results confirm this hypothesis. Similar to previous research, perceived attractiveness has a significant impact on desirability to date and can even outweigh unfavorable attitudes towards the prospective date such as being less trustworthy (Lo et al., 2013). The attractiveness stereotype might explain some of these findings. The more attractive individuals are rated, the more likely they are to have socially desirable personalities and be more successful in life than less attractive individuals. In addition to that, attractive individuals are judged more positively in general, as well as being more socially competent, powerful, clever, healthy, honest, and humorous (Dion et al., 1972; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004; Hassin & Trope, 2000). The attractiveness stereotype draws upon the halo effect, which refers to the cognitive bias that the first feature people notice in another person influences how people perceive them afterwards (Bar et al., 2006). When perceived as attractive, inferences are drawn with respect to the person's other traits as being positive as well. Putting this within the context of the current study's dating scenario, when participants rated their potential date high in attractiveness, assumptions are formed of the other attributes

the potential date possess as being positive as well. Consequently, the potential date becomes even more attractive, leading to participants having a desire to date the potential date.

Theoretical implications

First and foremost, this study showed that there is a significant negative relationship between perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness. Furthermore, this study showed a significant positive relationship between perceived attractiveness and desirability to date. In earlier studies on deception in online dating, the focus was mainly based on dating profiles including profile pictures of individuals in varying attractiveness, that was controlled for, along with textual descriptions (Rowatt et al., 1999; Lo et al., 2013; Ellison et al., 2012). Only textual descriptions in dating profiles were not taken into consideration much since most online dating websites put great importance on photos and physical attractiveness (Lo et al., 2013). As a result, little is known about the impact of online dating deception and the influence of perceived attractiveness in profiles that solely contain textual information and have few visual cues. In addition to that, prior research on the deception consensus effect conducted their research during the discovery phase. This is the phase of message exchange after people have established mutual interests during the profile stage and after they matched. Research of the deception consensus effect during the matching stage has been very limited. The current research builds on these earlier studies by offering new insights into the effect of deceptive dating profiles on one's own deceptive behavior in constructing a dating profile, as well as the influence of perceived attractiveness in this. The finding of a negative relationship between perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness, and the finding of a positive relationship between perceived attractiveness and desirability to date during the matching stage based on solely textual information can therefore be added to the earlier studies on deception in online dating.

Moreover, contrary to what the majority of research suggests, when an online dater is deceptive in their own dating profile, they will not perceive the other online dater as more deceptive than when an online dater is honest in their own dating profile. In addition to that, when an online dater perceives the other online dater to be deceptive, they will not increase deception in their own profile more than when they perceive the other online dater to be honest. These results are an important contribution to the literature, as they are in contrast to what was expected in previous studies. Markowitz and Hancock (2018) revealed the first empirical evidence for the deception consensus effect in an online dating context, revealing a strong relationship between one's own deceptive behavior and that of the counterpart. The current study contradicts this finding, showing that this study's online daters rate the other

dater's trustworthiness fairly high and adjusted their dating profile more honestly, across all conditions, suggesting no deception consensus link between one's own deceptive behavior and that of the counterpart. However, results might indicate a 'honest consensus effect'.

This study fills a gap in the literature on the deception consensus effect by adding perceived attractiveness as a moderator. Despite the fact that earlier studies found that people are more likely to deceive a more attractive date than a less attractive date, no relationship was found between perceived attractiveness and deception in one's own dating profile (Rowatt et al., 1999; Walther, 2007). These new insights can serve as starting points for further research in the field of deception in online dating and the moderating role of perceived attractiveness in this.

In addition to that, where earlier research focuses primarily on traditional constructs such as likability, willingness to date, attractiveness, the circumstances for deception and detection of deception, this research also pays attention to perception biases (Desrochers et al., 2021; Ellison et al., 2006; Fiore & Donath, 2004). The reason for taking perception biases into account is because of the limited knowledge on this, but the importance of this construct based on prior research (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018). Perception biases of others in the community are an important element in explaining online dater's behavior, and therefore an important aspect to consider.

Practical implications

From a practical point of view, the results of this study are relevant to online daters as well as creators for online dating applications. This research shows that online daters generally seem to trust others in the community, despite them being deceptive in their dating profile. For online daters, this means that they can be easily manipulated. Therefore, it is crucial that creators for online dating applications actively think about new features to ensure safety and reliability in their community. The dating application Tinder, for instance, just added a new feature in which online daters, at random times while using the app, are asked to take a photo of themselves to see whether it matches the profile pictures they included in their profiles. Daters obtain a verification symbol, that can be seen by other daters, when the same person is detected in the photo as in the profile pictures included in the dating profile. This way Tinder promotes trustworthiness, making it more difficult for online daters to mislead others. Thus, creators for dating applications should actively think about ways to prevent deception. This study's results may help with this, by giving new insights into online daters' behavior on these platforms.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This research has some important limitations that should be considered when reviewing the outcomes. First of all, the gender distribution of the study should be noted. Out of 102 participants, 77 were female. This can be explained by the researcher's convenience sampling strategy, which included more females in the network than males. The unequal gender distribution in this study could have hampered the generalizability of the findings, as it is possible that feminine features took precedence in the outcomes. For example, previous studies on gender differences on deception found that men and women have different strategies to appear attractive (Yarosh, 2019). Additionally, women are better in detecting deception than men (Schmitz et al., 2013). These features could therefore have influenced the current study's results. Future research could therefore focus on gender differences and how they affect the impact of deceptive dating profiles on one's own behavior, as well as the significance of perceived attractiveness in this.

Moreover, this study had a small sample size due to the elimination of a major portion of the participants, either because they did not grant consent or because they did not complete the survey correctly. Therefore, it would be recommended for future research to gather more participants as this could have led to a stronger establishment of the results, as well as ensuring that the sample is representative of a population and that statistical results can be generalized to a broader population.

This study's third limitation relates to the fact that the current study was not able to simulate a real-world setting in using an online dating app, which could have influenced the study's validity and reliability. In a typical setting, online daters would swipe right (i.e., interested) or left (i.e., not interested) through various dating profiles based on profile pictures and mostly only read profile descriptions when interested to know more. In this study, however, only one text-only dating profile description was shown to participants. Future studies should provide a more realistic dating environment in which participants can swipe through various dating profiles. By doing this, participants are more likely to feel as if they are actually on a dating application, which better reflects reality.

Lastly, the survey took about ten to fifteen minutes to complete. As a result, participants may have lost attention near the end of the survey and rushed their responses due to a lack of patience. This could have influenced this current study's results. Future research should include more attention check questions throughout the survey to ensure that participants are still paying attention and consciously filling out the questionnaire.

Conclusion

Concluding, this study gives important insights concerning the deception consensus effect in online dating. The results show that there is a significant negative relationship between perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness. In addition to that, a significant positive relationship between perceived attractiveness and desirability to date was found. Furthermore, it can be suggested from the results that online daters seem to generally trust other online daters in the community and are more likely to adjust their dating profile more honestly rather than deceptively after presented with another online dater's profile.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Stimuli

Female 1, deceptive dating profile

Ava, 27

Child Doctor
Dutch

This is me!

I am 27 years old, born in The Netherlands but currently living in Australia. I have obtained a bachelor and master's degree in medicine, and I am currently working as a Child Doctor.
I am 1.70 meters tall, and I weigh 60 kg. I have long, brown, curly hair and bright blue eyes. My skin is a bit tinted, and I get tanned very easily in the summer.

I am super creative. I love making drawings and paintings a lot! Also, I love watching series, this is what I do a lot of times during my spare time. Next, I am a cyclist who cycles many kilometers during the week. Next to that, I party every weekend, preferably as much as possible. I have two cats who I love a lot! Also, I love horse riding. My parents have two horses and I try to visit them at least once a month.

I am looking for a tall, muscular guy with blond hair who is creative and loves art. I love it when you also love animals a lot and especially when you are willing to ride horses with me. I am looking for an international oriented person who, just like me, wants to live all over the world. I don't like somebody that is too extravert, since I am also a quite introvert person. I love to have good laughs together, but I also love it when we can just be together and enjoy the time without talking a lot.



Female 1, honest dating profile

Ava, 25

Master student Communication- and Information Sciences
Dutch

This is me!

I am a 25-year-old woman from The Netherlands. I have obtained a bachelor and master's degree and am currently doing my second master study in the field of Communication & Information Sciences. Next to that, I have a side job as an online marketer at ICM Opleidingen & Trainingen.

I am 1.67 meters tall and have a 'petite' posture. My hair is dark blond and I have blue eyes (one of my eyes has two colors in it :)). I have a lot of freckles, which makes me unique in my opinion.

I love to cook good food and enjoy a good glass of wine while having a qualitative conversation. Also, I loooooove good coffee, especially in the morning in the sun. Next, I love to spend time with friends & family and do all kind of social activities with them, like parties, festivals, going out for dinner and more. Next to that, my biggest passion is traveling. I have already made some amazing trips and want to make many more. Also, I loooooove being outside. The nature is my favorite spot! I am a very enthusiastic and spontaneous woman who loves to have good conversations and enjoy the little things in life.

I am looking for a social, sweet, spontaneous and energetic guy who is willing to have good conversation with me about all kinds of subjects. Also, I look for somebody with a good feeling of humor. You fit me if you want to do a lot of (social) activities with me and especially if you are willing to travel with me and be in the nature whenever it is possible. I really need somebody who can share my enthusiasm for little and big things in life. But, at the same time, somebody who has the strength to calm me down whenever needed and makes it possible for me to take some rest and relax, since this is something I am not doing enough most of the times.



Female 2, deceptive dating profile

Hanna, 23

Fulltime student & part-timer in the hospitality
Dutch

This is me!

I am in my early twenties, a white female who has obtained her master's degree. I am a student fulltime and work part time in the hospitality. I am living in the city center of Breda.

I am a gorgeous tall blond woman of 1.74 cm. I always wear heels, so I look taller. I have great boobs that are not too big or too small. I have eyes that are as blue as the water of the Maldives, hopefully you do not drown in them.

I enjoy travelling: I am rather at the other side of the world than I am here. Hopefully I am able to work so hard so that I can take time off and stay on the other side of the world. I enjoy partying but I also enjoy being at home.

I am looking for someone who is tall, dark & handsome :)



Female 2, honest dating profile

Hanna, 24

Student Master of Science
Dutch

This is me!

I am 24 years old, caucasian woman who is currently finishing her Masters of Science. I am working part-time in the hospitality. I have been living in Breda for over the past 5 years and I absolutely enjoy and love the city.

I am 1.74 cm tall, so I am still able to wear heels when I am standing next to you :). I have dark blond hair and blue eyes. I tan easily so you can find me outside when the sun is out :).

I enjoy spending time with my family and friends: chilling on the couch and chatting, having some wines, or going to the city to show our dance moves. In addition, I really enjoy travelling. I have lived in Bangkok for 6 months and I have seen several Asian countries throughout the years. I plan on seeing more in the future.

When I see a guy, one of the first things that I notice about them is their genuine smile, sparkling eyes, and a nice lower jaw. The hair or skin color does not matter to me as long as the above matches my expectations I am fine :). Also, a guy who enjoys travelling as much as I do would be great. Going on adventures together or riding a motorcycle on Asian roads would be fantastic. As I also enjoy spending time at home, someone who enjoys this too would be amazing. Hit me up for the next Netflix binge-watch series ;).



Female 3, deceptive dating profile

Emma, 25

Tour manager
American, New York

This is me!

I'm a 25 year old American female. I live in New York, graduated college and am now working as a tour manager for a band. I have brown hair, green eyes and I have an average height.

In my spare time, which I don't have a lot, I play ice hockey and I like to bake.

I am looking for a man who often goes to the gym and who likes to go on lots of adventures.



Female 3, honest dating profile

Emma, 24

Student at Tilburg University
Dutch

This is me!

I'm a 24 year old woman from the Netherlands. I study at Tilburg University and work at the e-commerce department of a pharmaceutical company.

I'm tall, I have blonde hair and blue/grey eyes.

I like to go to rock concerts, play video games, and watch movies. I also like photography. So, sometimes I go on a walk and take pictures of nature and animals.

I am looking for a tall man who would like to go to the same concerts and play video games with me. Someone who is funny is always appreciated.



Male 1, deceptive dating profile

Michael, 24

Trainer FC Twente

A quarter Mexican, Cuban, Colombian, and Dutch.

This is me!

My name is Michael, 24 years old and i am a quarter Mexican, Cuban, Colombian, and Dutch. I am a male who completed Econometrics and am trainer of the football club FC Twente.

I am a 1.85, white-skinned, dark-haired male who likes to go to the gym a lot.

I like to go to the gym, Kitesurfing, football, party, and have a passion for painting and playing the piano.

I am looking for a short, fit blonde girl who has roots outside of the Netherlands. I want to have a steady relationship where we can go to a lot of family reunions together.



Male 1, honest dating profile

Michael, 25

Student at Tilburg University & cook

Dutch

This is me!

My name is Michael, 25 years old and I live in Tilburg, The Netherlands. I am Dutch from origin and was born in Maastricht. I am a male who is currently studying at Tilburg University and work as a cook. I have three sisters and one brother who all live across The Netherlands.

I am a 1,85M, white-skinned, dark-haired male who has a 'normal' posture. I have brown eyes, a big nose, with a little scar below my left eye.

I don't really have clear hobbies & passions. I enjoy gaming, however, I used to enjoy it more. Nowadays, hanging out with friends is my number one hobby and I started to do more sports. I am into padel and fitness now (but calling this a hobby is a bit extreme).

What am I looking for in the other? Well, intelligence is very important to me, combined with humor (preferable sarcasm). In addition, I have a weird preference for blonde girls under 1.7m (it makes them automatically cute). It's not a must, but it is a pre thought. In addition, I would like someone who does not want to text 24/7, but still texts enough to keep me interested. As last, I would like someone who wants to go on a date almost immediately, because I kinda hate texting/whatsapping.



Male 2, deceptive dating profile

Noah, 23

Master of Business Communication and Digital Media
Dutch

This is me!

I am almost 24 years old, 100% Dutch, and of the male gender. I'm finished as we speak one of the most interesting masters at TiU, the Master of Business Communication and Digital Media. Currently I am unemployed, however, I will soon be working in a big marketing consultancy company.

I am tall, around 6 feet and 1 inch. I have brown wavy hair and never experience a bad hair day. Physically, I am muscular since I hit the gym multiple times a week.

I am a traveler, meaning I visit cities occasionally by public transport. Besides, I like to take pictures while traveling. In addition, podcasts are my favorite kind of entertainment, and I listen daily to them.

I look for the ideal girlfriend. For me, that is a blonde girl, around the age of 23, who's tall and skinny.



Male 2, honest dating profile

Noah, 24

Student Master Communication Science
Dutch

This is me!

I am a 24 year old male, born and raised in Eindhoven but now studying in Tilburg. Previously I completed my bachelor ICT & Media Design in Eindhoven, and now I am exploring the world of communication during my master Communication Science. Since the start of my master I am unemployed, because I wanted to fully focus on school and develop myself.

Physically, I am in confident shape. That is, I am healthy and satisfied with my physical shape. Although going to the gym does not excite me, I try to go three times a week to stay fit.

One of my passions is exploring cities throughout the Netherlands. Once a month I take the train and visit one of the beautiful cities in the Netherlands. In addition, I like to take pictures (although I do this too little). Another hobby is listening to podcasts, especially about my favorite Dutch soccer club PSV Eindhoven. I can listen to podcasts for hours.

On this dating app, I am looking for a best friend that I happen to be in love with. Someone who shares the same passions or brings me new ones. I generally fall for intelligent (although education level doesn't matter), blonde, and tall girls. My friends would describe my taste in women as the typical Dutch "Marie-Claire".



Male 3, deceptive dating profile

Lucas, 25

Art director
Dutch

This is me!

I am a 25-year-old male, I went to University in Arts, INFP, and am working as an Art director.

Physically, I am long, masculine, mesomorph. I have dark eyes, a Strong jawline, and black hair.

My hobbies and passions are playing electric guitar, snowboarding, going to the gym, playing golf, Whiskey tasting, and traveling.

I am looking for someone who is slim, beautiful, smart, blond, fit, and into sports



Male 3, honest dating profile

Lucas, 26

Concept Artist
Dutch

This is me!

I am a man, 26 years old, INFP, HBO bachelor's degree in visual arts, and I am working as a Concept Artist.

Physically I have a long slender and athletic posture. I have brown eyes, black hair, a patchy beard, and slanted eyes.

My hobbies and passions are drawing, painting, photography, playing guitar/piano, going to the gym, walking in nature, snowboarding.

I am looking for someone who is kind, caring, not too similar like me but not too different either, has pretty eyes, and is adventurous.



Appendix B: Survey introduction and informed consent

Welcome,

Thank you for participating in this study of Tilburg University! Below you can read all the information necessary to start the experiment, so please read it carefully.

We are currently conducting research to learn more about the way people create an online dating profile as well as how people rate the profiles of other online daters. That is why we will ask you to create an online dating profile description in this study. Furthermore, we ask you to rate an online dating profile of an online dater.

Participation in this research lasts about 15 minutes in total. The experiment consists of several elements, such as writing a dating profile and rating another online daters' profile on certain characteristics.

There are no risks associated by participating in this study. Data collection is in accordance with the new GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and the Research Ethics and Data Management Committee of Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences has given permission for this research to be carried out. Data will be processed completely anonymously and treated with utmost confidentiality. Under no circumstances will your name be associated with the results, as you will be assigned a unique code at the start of the experiment. This study's anonymized data can be shared with other researchers and will be saved for ten years.

The study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time during the experiment, for any reason possible and without detrimental consequences. If you have any questions about the study at a later moment, you can contact Amy Balemans via the email address a.j.balemans@tilburguniversity.edu or the principal investigator Frédéric Tomas via the email address f.j.y.tomas@tilburguniversity.edu.

Thank you and enjoy the experiment!

When you indicate that you wish to participate in this study, you indicate:

- that you have carefully read the above information;
- that you are older than 18 years old;
- that you are a student at Tilburg University and if not that you have obtained a HAVO, VWO or bachelor diploma;
- that you know that you can withdraw at any time and without giving a reason;
- that you agree that your anonymized data will be stored for ten years;
- that you agree that the anonymized data can be used for possible follow-up research or scientific publications;
- that you agree that the anonymized data can be shared with other researchers.

Note: If you do not agree to participate in this study, you can close the browser window.

Appendix C: Survey questions on demographics



To which gender identity do you most identify?

- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Non-binary / third gender
 - ☐ Prefer to self-describe
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
-

What is your age?

What is your highest completed or current level of education?

- ☐ Elementary school
- ☐ Lower secondary education (VMBO)
- ☐ Higher secondary education (HAVO or VWO)
- ☐ Vocational education (MBO)
- ☐ Bachelor at a university (of applied sciences) (HBO or WO bachelor)
- ☐ Master, post-master or PHD

I am romantically interested in ...

- ☐ Men
 - ☐ Women
 - ☐ Both men & women
 - ☐ Non-binary / third gender
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
-

What is your current relationship status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Dating / seeing someone
- ☐ In a relationship
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Appendix D: Survey instructions to write an online dating profile

Instruction to write an honest online dating profile description:

Thank you again for participating! We will now start with the experiment. Please read the following information and instructions carefully.

We want you to imagine the following: you just signed up for an online dating website to meet new people and possibly find a mate. Before you can get started you need to create an online dating profile that other online daters in the community might see. Based on your online dating profile, online daters can decide if they would like to get to know you better and start a conversation.

An online dating profile description includes common information such as gender, age, ethnicity, employment, hobbies and passions, and what you are seeking for in a companion. Below, you can create your online dating profile by filling in the text boxes.

Most importantly, make sure your online dating profile only contains **honest information** about yourself. This indicates that you should avoid exaggerations, avoid making things look better than they in reality are, no inaccuracies and no misinformation. **We want you to be as honest and raw as you can be about yourself.**

Instruction to write an exaggerated online dating profile description:

Thank you again for participating! We will now start with the experiment. Please read the following information and instructions carefully.

We want you to imagine the following: you just signed up for an online dating website to meet new people and possibly find a mate. Before you can get started you need to create an online dating profile that other online daters in the community might see. Based on your online dating profile, online daters can decide if they would like to get to know you better and start a conversation.

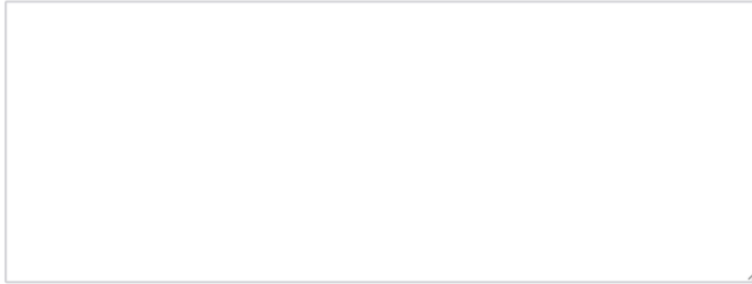
An online dating profile description includes common information such as gender, age, ethnicity, employment, hobbies and passions, and what you are seeking for in a companion. Below, you can create your online dating profile by filling in the text boxes.

Most importantly, we want you to create an online dating profile that contains **mostly exaggerated information** about yourself. You can do this by using inaccuracies and misrepresentations. Make sure your online dating profile is primarily **made up of false information in order to present better.** **We want you to lie as much as possible in your online dating profile, to make yourself look more attractive** to increase your chances of success in the dating world.

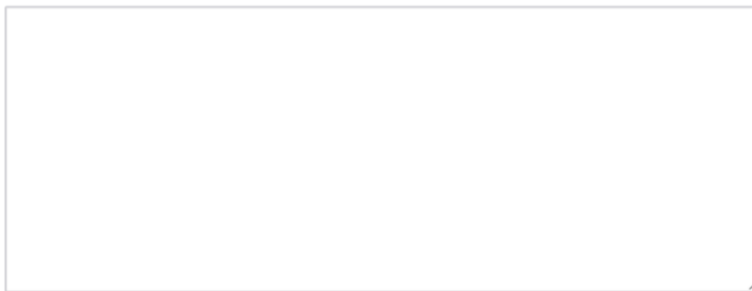
Appendix E: Survey questions on creating the online dating profile

Note. Example of instructions to create an exaggerated online dating profile. Instructions on creating an honest online dating profile contains the same information without the last underlined sentence in the example below.

Describe yourself in terms of demographics (for example: age, ethnicity, gender, education, & employment) by exaggerating positively certain aspects:

A large, empty rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for a user to describe their demographics by exaggerating positively certain aspects.

Describe yourself physically by exaggerating positively certain aspects:

A large, empty rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for a user to describe their physical appearance by exaggerating positively certain aspects.

Describe your hobbies & passions by exaggerating positively certain aspects:

A large, empty rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for a user to describe their hobbies and passions by exaggerating positively certain aspects.

Describe what you look for (in the other) by exaggerating positively certain aspects:

A large, empty rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for a user to describe what they look for in a partner by exaggerating positively certain aspects.

Appendix F: Survey questions on deceptiveness score as manipulation check

Please indicate below the exaggeration of your statements in your created dating profile.

	Not exaggerated at all	Somewhat exaggerated	Moderately exaggerated	Largely exaggerated	Extremely exaggerated
The statements on my demographics were...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The statements on my physical appearance were...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The statements about my hobbies & passions were...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The statements about what I am looking for were...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix G: Survey questions on trustworthiness, perceived attractiveness, and desirability to date

Have a look at the dating profile above. Indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel like this person is trustworthy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel like this person is honest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel like this person is credible	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel like this person has written his dating profile with good intentions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think this person is good-looking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think this person and I could be friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Choose the option "somewhat agree" here	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would not want a relationship with this person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would not like to chat with this person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to know more about this person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like the person in the image to ask me out on a date	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I do not need to meet this person in real life for a date	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix H: Survey reveal of which condition the participant was in

When participants were presented with an honest online dating profile:

The dating profile you just saw and rated was an honest dating profile, that **only contained honest information** about the online dater. There were no inaccuracies, no misrepresentations and no exaggerations made in the profile you just saw. **This was a raw and completely honest description about the online dater.**

Here is the honest online dating profile again:

When participants were presented with an exaggerated online dating profile:

Because it is fairly easy to manipulate information online, such as in online dating platforms, deception is a frequently used tactic in online dating. In fact, a previous study on online dating found that 81% of online daters are not completely honest about the information they share online. Online daters seem to misrepresent themselves by adding exaggerations and inaccuracies about for instance one's age, career, and interests. All to appear as more attractive to increase the chances of finding a mate.

The dating profile you just saw and rated was a **deceptive dating profile**, that mostly contained **exaggerated information** about the online dater. There were inaccuracies and misrepresentations made in the profile you just saw. **This dating profile was primarily made up of false information** about the online dater.

The following profile is who they actually are and is their real and honest dating profile:

Appendix I: Survey debriefing

This is the end of this study. Thank you for participating!

This study was about creating a dating profile and how this differs between people who create an honest dating profile and people who create a deceptive, exaggerated dating profile. When people create an online dating profile, they sometimes add deceptive information, such as pictures which are edited or writing down information about themselves that is exaggerated or even false (for example, exaggerating certain characteristics).

In this research project we are interested to see whether people who have rated an honest dating profile adjust their own dating profile differently, such as more honest, than people who have rated a dating profile that contained exaggerated information. We will also look into the effects of the perceived attractiveness of the online dater being assessed on this. We will look into these effects by instructing participants to design honest dating profiles, while the other group of participants were instructed to add exaggerated information to their dating profiles. After creating their dating profiles, participants rated a dating profile of another online dater. Some participants rated an honest online dating profile, while other participants rated an online dating profile containing mostly exaggerations. Lastly, participants got the opportunity to adjust their own created dating profile in response to revealing to them if they rated an honest or exaggerated dating profile. We are interested to see how individuals will adjust their own profile after they were lied to or not.

Because little is known yet about the effect of honest or deceitful dating profiles on one's own honest/exaggeration behavior when it comes to designing an online dating profile, we tested this in this study. Your results contribute to that!

Do you have any questions or comments? Please contact lead researcher Amy Balemans (a.j.balemans@tilburguniversity.edu) or principal investigator Frédéric Tomas (f.j.y.tomas@tilburguniversity.edu).