Foundations of Social Research - 10/5/22

Assignment 1 Lab: Social Science in the News

Francine Stephens

Agenda

Tips for finding a news story and referenced academic article

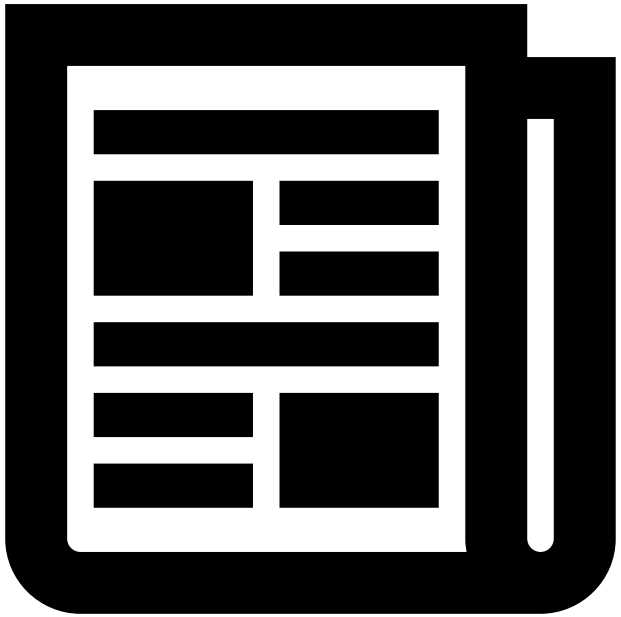
Extracting information from an academic article

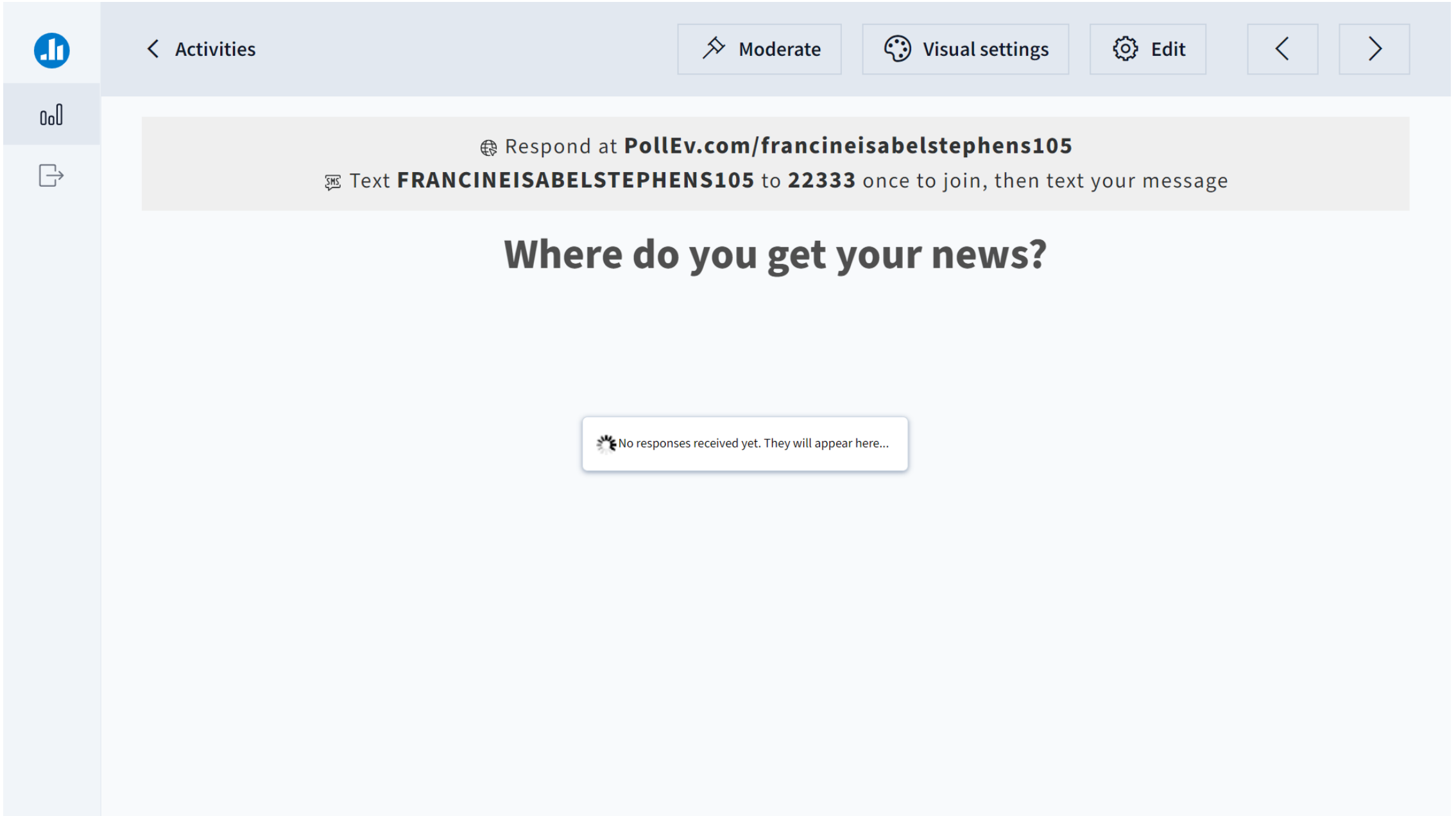
Assignment 1 Outline

1. Find & read news story that cites social science research article.
2. Find & download referenced academic research article.
3. Read academic article & extract key info to answer 6 questions (below).
4. Answer six questions:
    1. Identify research question(s) and state in the form of a question.
    2. Describe data. Explain author's justification of data. Evaluate the advantages & disadvantages of the data.
    3. Identify 1 key concept & how its operationalized. Explain author's justification of this operationalization.
    4. Identify alternative operationalization for concept in question 3. Describe how your alternative operationalization is better at capturing the concept, **and** how it may be worse.
    5. Describe an ethical issue researcher faced before data collection. (Refer to a principle from Belmont Report)
    6. Summarize main finding(s) in research article. Describe what key info from study the news article includes & what it omits. Judge whether the omissions are consequential. **Optional:** evaluate how the research was communicated in the news article.
5. Post news story, academic article, and Word doc. of your answers to questions to Canvas.

Steps 1 – 2

Finding Articles – News & Academic





[Poll Everywhere link]

News Outlets

Do not use PR news outlets/sites or listserv/aggregator sites

(e.g., Stanford News)

Generalist News Outlets:
Washington Post; NYT; The Atlantic; Wall Street Journal; Vox; TV Networks: CNN, NBC, ABC; New York Magazine; USA Today

Topical News Outlets:
CityLab; Wired, Nature; ProPublica; Education Week

Professional Association's Website:

American Sociological Association – Footnotes; American Psychological Association; AERA

Websites & social media of scholars:

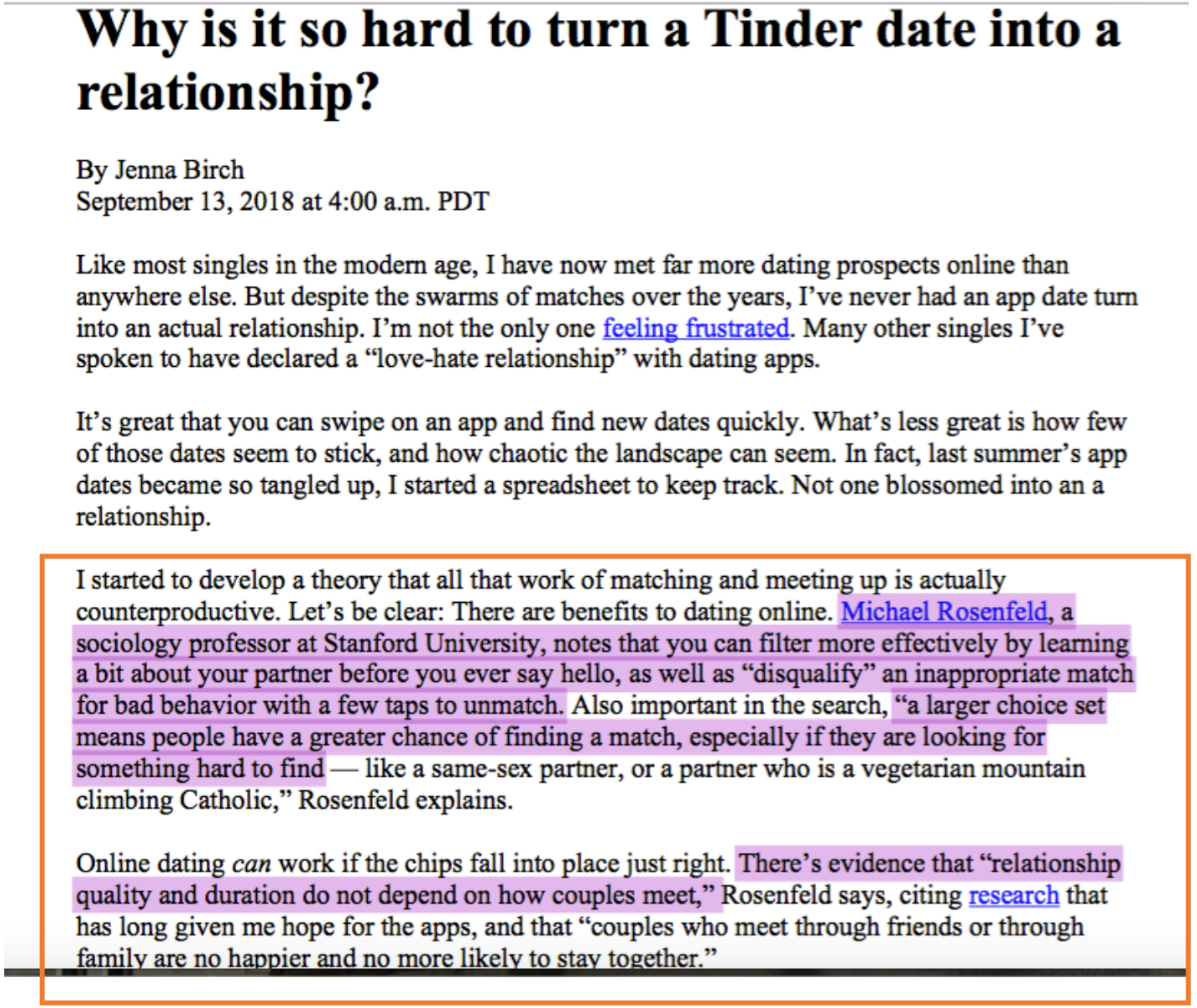
Departmental or personal website; CV; Twitter page

Step 1

Review news article that cites social science research article

Find identifying information about the referenced academic study:

- Author(s)'s name(s)
- Journal name
- Year study was published
- Study title
- Links to journal article



Why is it so hard to turn a Tinder date into a relationship?

By Jenna Birch
September 13, 2018 at 4:00 a.m. PDT

Like most singles in the modern age, I have now met far more dating prospects online than anywhere else. But despite the swarms of matches over the years, I've never had an app date turn into an actual relationship. I'm not the only one feeling frustrated. Many other singles I've spoken to have declared a "love-hate relationship" with dating apps.

It's great that you can swipe on an app and find new dates quickly. What's less great is how few of those dates seem to stick, and how chaotic the landscape can seem. In fact, last summer's app dates became so tangled up, I started a spreadsheet to keep track. Not one blossomed into an a relationship.

I started to develop a theory that all that work of matching and meeting up is actually counterproductive. Let's be clear: There are benefits to dating online. Michael Rosenfeld, a sociology professor at Stanford University, notes that you can filter more effectively by learning a bit about your partner before you ever say hello, as well as "disqualify" an inappropriate match for bad behavior with a few taps to unmatch. Also important in the search, "a larger choice set means people have a greater chance of finding a match, especially if they are looking for something hard to find — like a same-sex partner, or a partner who is a vegetarian mountain climbing Catholic," Rosenfeld explains.

Online dating *can* work if the chips fall into place just right. There's evidence that "relationship quality and duration do not depend on how couples meet," Rosenfeld says, citing research that has long given me hope for the apps, and that "couples who meet through friends or through family are no happier and no more likely to stay together."

Step 2

Find and download academic article

Check that the research that was cited is not a report or policy brief.

Follow link in news story

Go to scholar's website/CV

Search for article in a database:

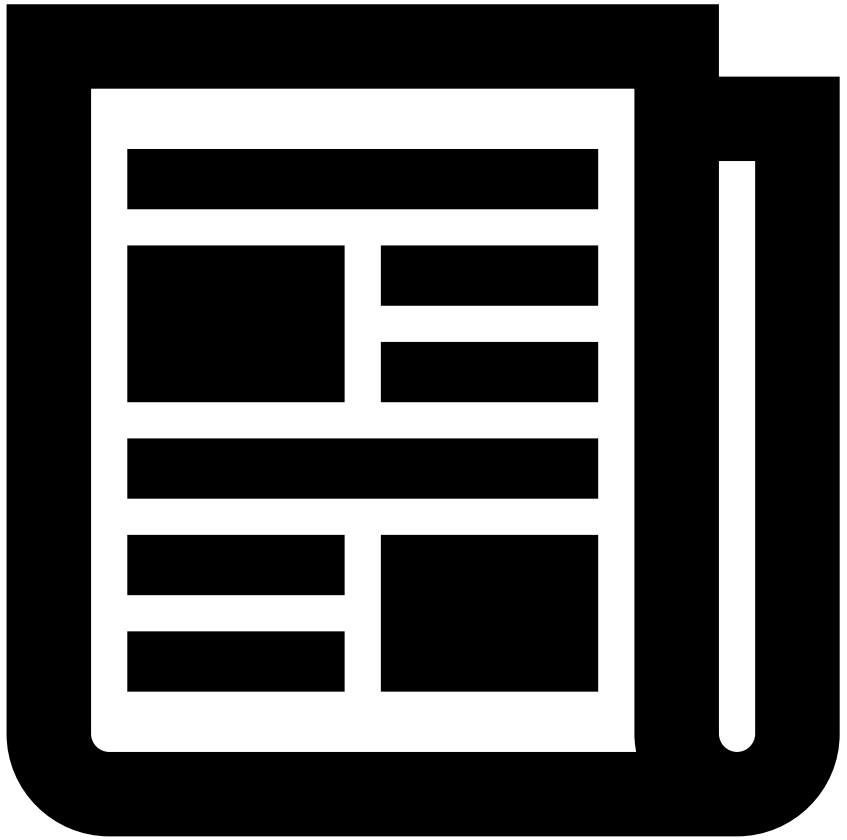
Google Scholar

JSTOR (access via Stanford Libraries)

Steps 3 – 4

Read & extract information from academic articles

- Review the six questions before you start reading your article.



Anatomy of an Academic Journal Article

Abstract & Key Words	Offers clues about research question(s), data/method, results, key concepts; findings.
Introduction	Presents background context & motivation for study. Pay attention to **first few & last few paragraphs** **Look for**: research question(s), key concepts & definitions, maybe a dataset (if novel/special)
Literature Review	This section is for subject-matter experts. **DO NOT READ closely**. Just skim/look at sub-headers for topics. **Look for**: sub-headers for topics, hypotheses.
Data & Methods	Identifies name/type of data and details of data collection. Describes sample – size and composition. **Look for**: type of data/method(s) used; sample size and composition/site description; a justification of data used.
Results/Findings	Sub-headings organize the key findings. Graphs and tables are visual representations of the key findings.
Discussion/Conclusion	Connects results back to the research question. **Look for:** how the author describes the importance of key concepts and the contribution of the research.

Anatomy of an Academic Journal Article

with Suggested Reading Order

1	**Abstract & Key Words**	Offers clues about research question(s), data/method, results, key concepts; findings.
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3	**Discussion/Conclusion**	Connects results back to the research question. **Look for:** how the author describes the importance of key concepts and the contribution of the research.

Abstract provides clues for answering many of the questions

Find information about the:

- Research question (Q1)
- Data (Q2)
- Results/Key findings (Q6)
- Key concept (Q3)

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Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary

Michael J. Rosenfeld[a] and Reuben J. Thomas[b]

Abstract

This article explores how the efficiency of Internet search is changing the way Americans find romantic partners. We use a new data source, the How Couples Meet and Stay Together survey. Results show that for 60 years, family and grade school have been steadily declining in their influence over the dating market. In the past 15 years, the rise of the Internet has partly displaced not only family and school, but also neighborhood, friends, and the workplace as venues for meeting partners. The Internet increasingly allows Americans to meet and form relationships with perfect strangers, that is, people with whom they had no previous social tie. Individuals who face a thin market for potential partners, such as gays, lesbians, and middle-aged heterosexuals, are especially likely to meet partners online. One result of the increasing importance of the Internet in meeting partners is that adults with Internet access at home are substantially more likely to have partners, even after controlling for other factors. Partnership rate has increased during the Internet era (consistent with Internet efficiency of search) for same-sex couples, but the heterosexual partnership rate has been flat.

Keywords

couples, dating, Internet, search, thin markets

Question 1

What research question(s) does the article ask? What are the authors trying to find out?

Introduction – Research Question

- The research question is not always stated in the form of a question.
- Deduce research questions from phrases like:
  - “we explore …”
  - “This study seeks to understand how …”
  - “The paper address a gap in our knowledge of …”

In this article, we exploit unique features of a new nationally representative dataset to analyze not only how Americans meet their romantic partners (which has been studied in the past), but also how patterns of meeting have changed over time, which has not been previously studied. The first wave How Couples Meet and Stay Together survey fielded in 2009 (HCMST, see Rosenfeld and Thomas 2010) has a longitudinal component and replicates the wording of relevant questions from the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (see Laumann et al. 1994). We use forward and backward comparisons to supplement a retrospective history of how Americans met their partners. HCMST included open- and closed-ended questions about how respondents met their current partner, which together allow a more accurate picture of how couples met than has previously been available. Because HCMST postdated the Internet revolution by more than a decade, the data offer a unique opportunity to assess the Internet's impact on the way Americans meet their romantic partners.

The fact that Americans use the Internet to meet romantic partners has been documented before (Madden and Lenhart 2006; Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan 2010) and is not in itself surprising. The Internet has become almost ubiquitous for most Americans. We go beyond previous analyses to explain which subgroups of Americans are more likely to meet their partners online, and why. Specifically, we show that gays, lesbians, and middle-aged heterosexuals—three groups who inhabit thin markets for romantic partners—are particularly likely to find their partners online. Individuals are in a *thin market* for potential partners when the cost of identifying multiple potential partners who meet minimum criteria

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Q1 Response

- How has the Internet changed patterns of meeting romantic partners over time?
- Which groups of people experienced changes in how they met romantic partners and why?

Question 2

Describe the data the authors use to answer their research question.

How, if at all, do the authors explain why these are appropriate data for answering their question?

What do **you** see as the advantages and/or disadvantages of using these data to answer the authors' research question?

Data

- Description of data
  - type of data/method;
    - Mode of collection – online, in-person, via phone
  - Sample size, sample composition, (interviewees, site description)
- Identify justification for using this type of data.
- Note strengths and limitations of data that the authors emphasize.

DATA

This article uses data from waves I and II of the How Couples Meet and Stay Together (HCMST) survey (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2010). HCMST is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of 4,002 English literate adults, of whom 3,009 had a spouse or romantic partner. Data, codebooks, frequencies, and documentation are publicly available at http://data.stanford.edu/hcmst. HCMST has new and better data on how Americans met their romantic partners, and it

The HCMST survey is an Internet survey, implemented by Knowledge Networks (KN). Unlike most Internet surveys whose participants are composed of a self-selected or opt-in sample of volunteers, KN panel participants were initially recruited into the panel through a nationally representative random digit dialing (RDD) telephone survey, so the KN sample is nationally representative. Respondents with Internet access at home used their own computer to answer the surveys. Respondents who did not have Internet access at home were offered Internet access and a WebTV in exchange for participating regularly in surveys. Research has found that the quality of data derived from representative Internet surveys such as the KN panel is equal to or exceeds the quality of data derived from the previous industry standard RDD surveys (Baker et al. 2010:743; Chang and Krosnick 2009; Fricker et al. 2005).

Respondents who previously had answered "yes" to the question, "Are you yourself gay, lesbian, or bisexual?" were oversampled for the HCMST survey. Of the 3,009 partnered adults in the survey, 474 had a same-sex partner.

"How did you meet" is a simple sounding question that turns out to be quite difficult

because of the ambiguity of "how" with respect to where, when, and with whom. In in-depth interviews that preceded the main survey, we discovered that people have stories—usually well rehearsed and oft-repeated—about how they met their spouse or partner, but they may not be able to pigeonhole those stories into predefined categories. In addition, the number of possible venues where couples meet, and the types of different intermediaries, are too numerous for a closed-ended question to effectively cover all the possibilities. For this reason, HCMST gathered respondents' stories of how they met their spouse or partner in an open-ended text box (average response length was 342 characters), as well as respondent answers to closed-ended questions. Data from different kinds of overlapping questions allow for inconsistent responses to be corrected in the analysis.

pp. 527-528

Q2 Response

Data Description:

This study draws on two waves of data collected from an Internet survey called How Couples Meet & Stay Together.

HCMST is a longitudinal, nationally representative survey with a sample of 4,002 English speaking adults, of whom 3,009 had a spouse. LGBTQ individuals were oversampled in the survey (474 respondents).

Justification:

The longitudinal design of the survey allows researchers to address changes over time in romantic partner searches and the launch of the survey postdates the rise of the Internet, so its influence can be assessed.

Advantages:

The longitudinal design allows the researchers to analyze the influence of the Internet on romantic partner searches.

The survey contains open and closed ended questions that provide greater detail about search and can be used to check against the partner's recollection of the search.

Oversampling LGBTQ individuals gives researchers the leverage to statistically compare the partnership trends of heterosexual and homosexual individuals before and after the advent of the Internet.

Disadvantages:

There are limitations in capturing the full complexity/nuance of the search. The data have a limited accounting of prior search history

Question 3

Identify **one** of the study's key concepts and how the study's authors operationalize that concept.

Describe how, if at all, the authors justify operationalizing the concept the way they do. (Note: Chapter 4 of the textbook may be helpful for answering these questions.)

Introduction - Concepts

- Thin market is a key concept.
  - Appears in abstract and intro.
- Defined and operationalized in the introduction

The fact that Americans use the Internet to meet romantic partners has been documented before (Madden and Lenhart 2006; Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan 2010) and is not in itself surprising. The Internet has become almost ubiquitous for most Americans. We go beyond previous analyses to explain which subgroups of Americans are more likely to meet their partners online, and why. Specifically, we show that gays, lesbians, and middle-aged heterosexuals—three groups who inhabit thin markets for romantic partners—are particularly likely to find their partners online. Individuals are in a *thin market* for potential partners when the cost of identifying multiple potential partners who meet minimum criteria may be large enough to present a barrier to relationship formation. We propose that for single adults in thin dating markets, improvements in the efficiency of Internet search may be especially useful and important. Conversely, single people (e.g., college students) who are fortunate enough to inhabit an environment full of eligible potential partners may not need to actively search for partners.

p.524

Q3 Response

- Individuals in thin markets have few people who meet their criteria for a romantic partner in their community (254). Thin markets represent a barrier to relationship formation. The authors use it to differentiate different subgroups in their analysis.
- Individuals in thin markets who are included in this analysis are gays, lesbians, and middle-aged heterosexuals.
  - The counter-example of college-aged students helps explain the operationalization of thin markets.

Question 4

What is an alternative operationalization for the concept?

What are its advantages & disadvantages?

Q4 Response

- Alternative operationalizations could focus on other types of subgroups that may face difficulties in the romantic partner search. Instead of defining thin markets by sexual-orientation and age, the researchers could define people in thin markets as having preferences based on particular tastes/personal qualities (e.g., veganism). In today's polarized political climate, researchers could consider geographic-political mismatches like liberal people living in predominantly conservative areas.
- One advantage of defining thin markets by tastes is that it would reflect the personal interests that people care about in their search for a romantic partner. On the other hand, defining thin markets by tastes can pose challenges for sampling. Sampling on tastes may require more time and resources. Additionally, obtaining adequate size sub-groups for statistical comparison may be difficult.

Additional Tips:

- *Think about different groups or phenomena that would represent or be described by the concept.*
- *You may need to slightly redefine the concept from how the author(s) did.*

Question 5

What is an ethical issue that researchers grappled with before collecting the data?

Q5 Response

- In-line with the ethical principle, respect for persons, researchers on the HCMST survey team likely devised plans to protect the privacy of survey respondents such as password protecting/encrypting the survey link and deidentifying responses. To maintain the trust that respondents have placed in the team, the researchers must keep respondents' identities and the information they share in the survey private and confidential.

Additional Tips:

- *Select a principle from the Belmont Report that applies to the data collection: Respect for Persons, Beneficence, Justice.*
- *Explain why this ethical issue needed to be considered by the researchers.*

Question 6

What are the main findings of the academic article?

What, if any, parts of the academic article did the news story leave out that might have been useful to include?

OPTIONAL: What other thoughts do you have about how this research has been translated for public consumption?

Results – Sub-headings

Sub-headings indicate the findings that the researchers want to draw your attention to.

How Heterosexual Couples Meet

How Same-Sex Couples Meet

Assessing the Possibility of Couple Dissolution Bias

The Association between Meeting Venue and Mate Selection Outcomes

Age and Meeting Online for Heterosexuals

Results - Graphs

Titles and labels on the graphs hint at the key takeaways.

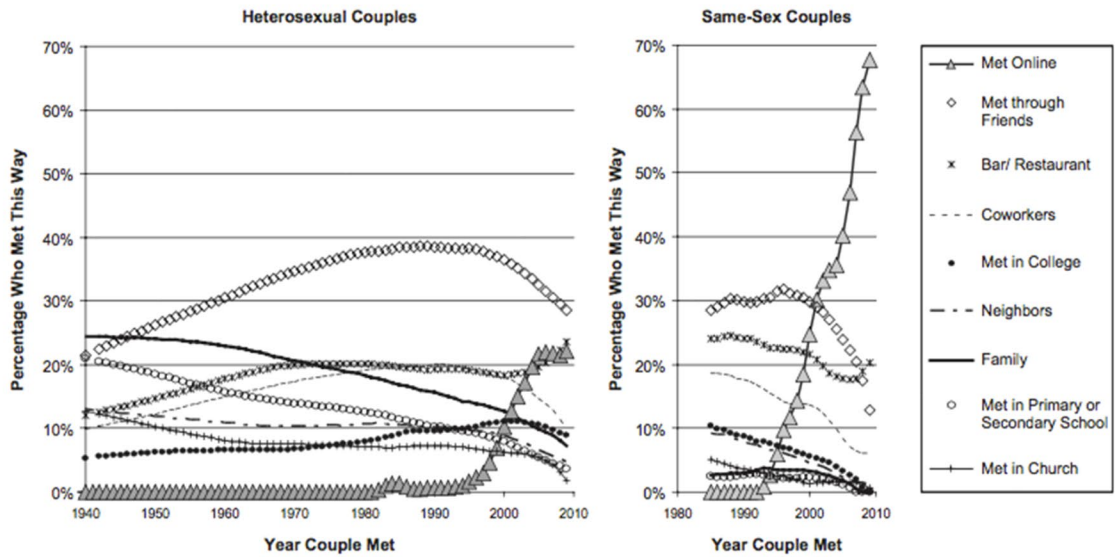

Figure 1. The Changing Way Americans Meet Their Partners
Source: How Couples Meet and Stay Together, Wave I, variables derived from question 24 (open text answer box: "How did you meet partner_name") (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2010).
Note: $N = 2{,}462$ for heterosexual couples, $N = 462$ for same-sex couples. Because of smaller sample size, the figure for same-sex couples does not extend as far into the past. Respondents are age 19 years and older. Data smoothed with lowess regression, bandwidth = .8, except for "met online" category, which is smoothed with a less aggressive and more faithful five-year moving average, because "met online" applies only to the most recent years couples met, which is the more data-rich part of the dataset. Friends, family, and co-workers can belong to either respondent or partner. Percentages do not add to 100 percent because more than one category can apply.

p.530

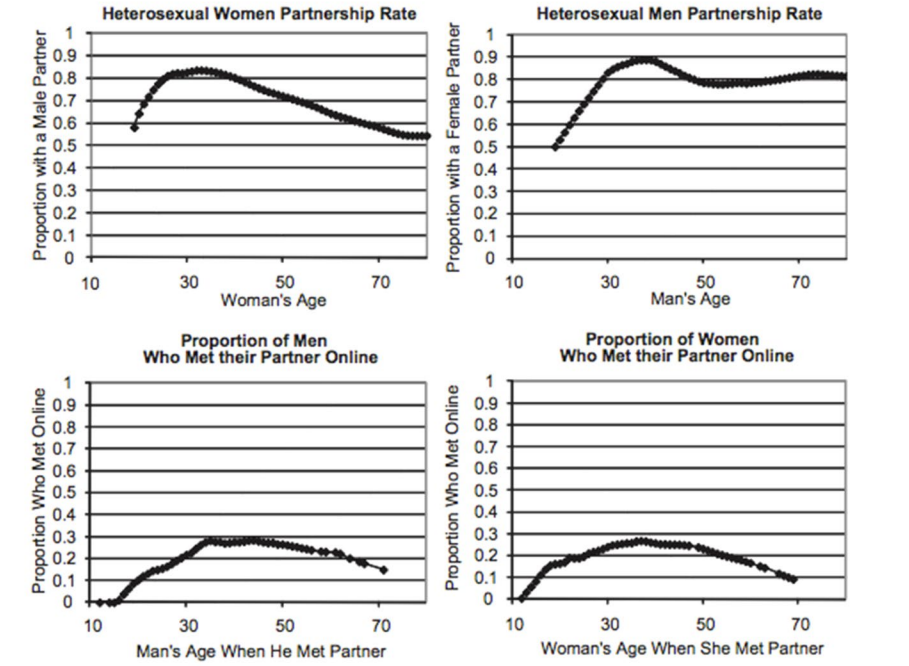

Figure 2. Relationship between Partner Availability and Meeting Online
Source: HCMST survey, Wave I (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2010).
Note: Graphs smoothed by Lowess local regressions, bandwidth .5. Proportion partnered is graphed against current age. Proportion meeting online is graphed against respondent's age when the respondent first met the partner, for couples who met between 2000 and 2009.

p.539

Results - Tables

Again, titles hint at the key takeaways.

Table 2. Relationship Satisfaction Only Marginally Related to How Couples Met

	Mean Relationship Quality (1 to 5 scale, 5 is best)	OLS Coefficient for Each Way of Meeting's Effect on Relationship Quality (with controls)
Met through family	4.40*	−.12
Met through friends	4.47	−.09
Met in a bar, restaurant, or other public entertainment space	4.47	−.07
Met through or as neighbors	4.48	−.03
Met online	4.51	.09
Met through or as co-workers	4.51	.05
Met in college or university	4.57*	.08
Met in primary or secondary school	4.59**	.15*
Met in church	4.67***	.13*
All couples	4.47 (SD = .75)	

Note: $N = 2{,}865$ for all couples, excludes 28 respondents whose partners were already deceased, and excludes 108 respondents who did not have a physical or sexual relationship with their partners. N varies for the other categories. Means weighted by weight2. Family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers may belong to either respondent or partner. Weighted OLS regressions with robust standard errors control for relationship duration, respondent race, respondent's coresidence with partner, and parental approval. $N = 1{,}975$ for the regressions, because parental approval was only asked of respondents who had at least one living parent.
*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests, comparing each group to all others).

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Table 3. Breakup Rates Not Much Influenced by How Couples Meet

	One Year Breakup Rate (percent)	Raw Odds Ratio	Adjusted Odds Ratio
Met Online (met within past 10 years)	15.6	.86	.69
Met Offline (met within past 10 years)	17.8		
Met through Family			
Yes	8.7	1.01	1.25
No	8.7		
Met through Friends			
Yes	9.6	1.20	1.41*
No	8.1		
Met in a Bar/Restaurant			
Yes	7.3	.81	.96
No	9.0		
Met through or as Neighbors			
Yes	7.6	.86	.94
No	8.8		
Met through or as Co-workers			
Yes	6.3	.66	.66
No	9.2		
Met in College or University			
Yes	6.5	.72	.90
No	8.9		
Met in Primary or Secondary School			
Yes	5.2	.55*	.58
No	9.2		
Met in Church			
Yes	1.4	.14**	.27
No	9.2		

Source: How Couples Meet, Waves I and II, met via Internet indicated either on open-text q24 or itemized list q32, merged in the variable either_internet_adjusted (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2010).
Note: $N = 2{,}520$ for individuals who responded to the one-year follow-up survey. Excluding respondents whose partners were already deceased or who did not have a physical or sexual relationship with their partners at wave I yields an N of 2,429. Among these, 775 met within 10 years prior to wave I. Means weighted by weight2. Family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers may belong to either respondent or partner. Each of the odds ratios is computed via separate logistic regressions. Raw odds ratios take no other factors into account. Adjusted odds ratios control for respondent's marital status at wave I, coresidence with partner at wave I, the presence of children in the respondent's household at wave I, respondent race, respondent religion, and relationship duration.
*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

p.535

Discussion

- The discussion/conclusion sections will also reiterate the main findings to takeaway.
- This section also presents broader implications of the results (e.g., intersection of digital inequality and age in dating/relationships).

renders the Internet's search advantages mostly irrelevant. In environments rich with potential partners, old fashioned face-to-face socializing still trumps online search. Furthermore, even when one meets a partner online, one still needs friends and family to integrate that new partner into one's social life.

The power of Internet search is especially important in identifying potential partners for individuals who face a thin dating market. Gays, lesbians, and middle-aged heterosexuals all face thin dating markets, and these are the groups most likely to rely on the Internet to find their partners. Additionally, traditional relationship brokerage institutions of family, the church, and the workplace were never remotely as useful to gays and lesbians as they were to heterosexuals.

In in-depth interviews conducted to supplement the HCMST survey, interviewees explained how the Internet became important in their search for partners. One lesbian woman living in the South knew of no way to find other gay women nearby. She had tried the one gay bar and the one gay church that she knew of, with disappointing results. When she discovered America Online and realized she could search personal ads in her own zip code, she was able to identify a new pool of potential partners she would not otherwise have met. The gay bar plays a large role in the social history of lesbians and gays in the United States (Chauncey 1994; D'Emilio 1998; Kennedy and Davis 1993), but gay bars have not always been safe or pleasant, and bars inevitably reach only a small percentage of the local gay and lesbian communities. Compared to the gay bar, the Internet provides a substantially safer, potentially more discreet, and more anonymous way to meet people (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005).

Finally, because the Internet is such an important social intermediary for romantic couple formation, individuals with Internet access at home are substantially more likely to have a romantic partner. We hypothesized that efficiencies of Internet search for romantic partners should lead to a higher partnership rate in the United States, but aside from same-sex couples, the data show no change in the partnership rate of U.S. adults. We suspect one reason the partnership rate in the United States has not risen is that older heterosexual women, who number in the millions and face a decidedly thin dating market, are constrained by a lack of Internet access. As more technologically savvy generations of women age into late adulthood, Americans' overall partnership rate, which seems to have been flat for some time, may rise.

Funding

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Sara Bloch and Ron Nakao for their help and collaboration, and to the helpful suggestions of anonymous reviewers. Kristen Harknett and Rachel Lindenberg provided helpful comments. Prior versions of this article were presented at the Population Association of America meetings in Dallas in 2010, the Center for the Study of Demography and Ecology at the University of Washington in 2010, and the 2010 American Sociological Association meetings in Atlanta, Georgia.

Notes

1. Gale and Shapley (1962) originally imagined mate search as analogous to applying to college. The weakness of the analogy is that the set of U.S. colleges is relatively small and stable, and information about most colleges was fairly easy to find even in the days before the Internet. Unlike the set of colleges, the set of potential mates is large, membership in the set is regularly changing, and information about the great majority of potential mates cannot easily be gathered.
2. Castells (2000) notes that, paradoxically, the great centers of Internet technology are highly geographically concentrated in areas such as Silicon Valley, California, because face-to-face networks are crucial for the cross fertilization of ideas.
3. Although there are only 16 black-white marriages among non-Hispanics in HCMST, those 16 cases are approximately what we would expect to find. According to the 2008 ACS, the United States had 334,000 black men married to white women, and 154,000 black women married to white men (all non-Hispanic). According to HCMST, in the United States in 2009, 403,000 (11 unweighted) black men were

p.544

Q6 Response

- The Internet has become a major method for searching for romantic partners. For people in thin dating markets – LGBTQ+ and middle-aged heterosexuals – the Internet is especially important for facilitating romantic relationships. Even for heterosexual individuals, the use of the Internet for romantic relationship searches has increased, while use of traditional modes/institutions has declined or plateaued. Overall, adults with Internet access at home were significantly more likely to have romantic partners than those without access. There is no evidence of major differences in relationship satisfaction or break-up rates based on method of search/meeting.
- The study's findings are accurately presented in news story as a counter-example to the writer's theory and experiences with online dating.


Questions, concerns, or comments?

Email with questions about the assignment or visit us in office hours.