



BACKGROUND

While much online dating research focuses on representation (Ellison et al, 2006; Hancock et al, 2007) and selection of profiles (Fiore et al, 2008; Sritharan et al, 2010), less work examines how users define a successful relationship. Many popular dating sites offer successful users the opportunity to share their stories. These stories typically include location, status (Dating, Engaged, or Married), and details about the initial meeting and the relationship. As part of a larger study examining the concept of success across dating sites, we examined the locations of profiles from a sample of user-submitted success stories contributed to Match.com and eHarmony. This novel, cross-site comparison of location and success yields new understandings about online dating behavior in the United States.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Where do successful online daters live?
- Is there a difference between the locations of successful Match.com couples and eHarmony couples?

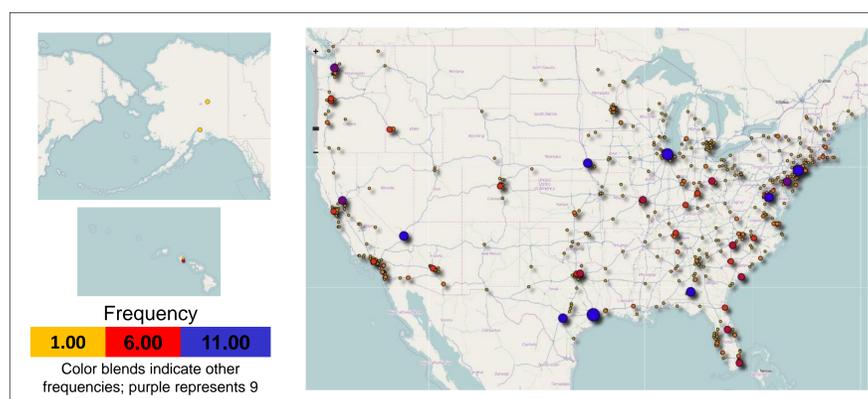
METHODS AND SAMPLE

The researchers collected a systematic random sample of success stories from the publicly available dating success sites affiliated with Match.com (n=541) and eHarmony (n=213). These constitute approximately 20% of the available success stories. The locations of successful couples were visualized with www.openheatmap.com. The locations were then coded into U.S. Census regions and analyzed in SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

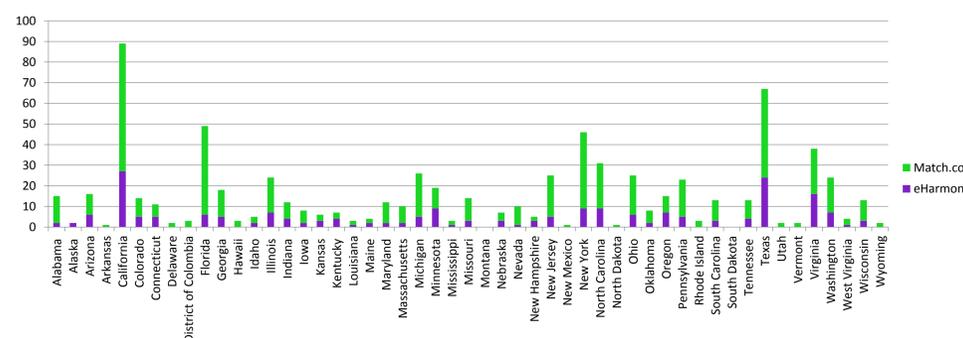


FINDINGS

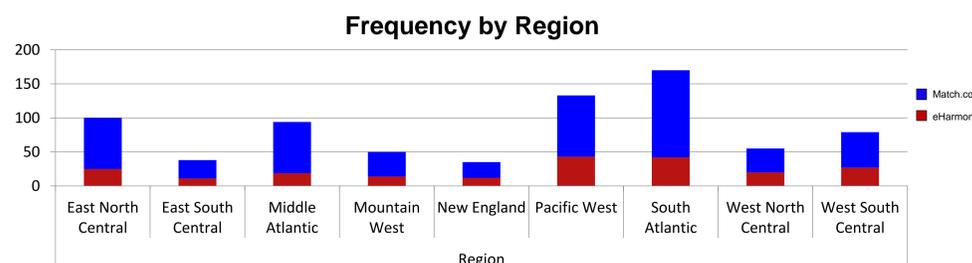
The locations of successful daters are spread throughout the country, with higher populations of successful daters appearing in more densely populated areas including the larger cities throughout the US. There do appear to be low density population islands, especially in the southeast and middle of the country.



In addition to the frequency map, we examined the number of success stories by state and site. California has the highest (n=89), with Montana and South Dakota tied for lowest (n=0).



Using Chi Square analysis we found no significant difference in dating site utilization by region. The South Atlantic region has the highest frequency (n=170).



DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate that population density may be a good predictor of overall dating site adoption, as there is an increased likelihood of overall site use as population density rises. The low density population islands may be a result of traditional social network diffusion of technology. Additionally, our findings demonstrate that there is no significant difference in the distribution of successful couples who used Match.com versus eHarmony; there is no regional bias in site use.

FUTURE WORK

What, if not location, contributes to dating site adoption? This work informs future qualitative analysis of the success stories themselves. Additionally, the researchers plan to interview successful couples not reflected in the current sample to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations for dating site adoption and ultimately, what constitutes success in the world of online dating.

Important questions include:

- What prompts individuals to begin the process of online dating?
- Why do individuals select one site over another?

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