

# **Are We Still Friends: An Interactive Photo Journal about the Impact of Dating Apps in Modern Filipino Society**

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## **Abstract**

This research is to explore how the online dating phenomenon has contributed to individuals from the modern Filipino culture. As convenient virtual interactions may initially seem, young individuals' understanding of love and romantic relationships has found to become more complicated than ever reported in recent findings which could be linked to the rise of social phobia and decrease in physical interactions in modern society.

In order to explore this further, I will first conduct qualitative interviews to gather data on young individuals' experiences on dating in the modern landscape to see the difference and its impact on their emotions and self-esteem.

Based on the interviews, the goal of this study is to understand the link between social media like dating applications and social phobia and assess if re-education is necessary for dating app users on how to properly use such sites by providing a valuable understanding of its culture that has been brought to modern society through a series of portraits collected in an interactive zine.

**Keywords:** virtual interactions, social anxiety, documentary, dating app, re-education

## **Introduction**

I was exposed to using dating apps and other social media to look for new friends and potential romantic partners during the lockdown in the middle of 2021.

After a certain amount of failed attempts in finding genuine human connection that affected my social anxiety, and eventually learning about other people's experiences on online dating which partly had the same theme, I got the thought of "Is dating difficult

these days? Do the methods we use in meeting potential matches make it more complex?"

I want to analyze how courtship evolved throughout time and mainly explore the culture that online dating has formed.

This is to reflect on how social media has impacted young individuals' perspective on romance, relationships, sex, marriage, and family planning. This study is to assess if online dating has benefits and harmful effects for society.

Dating applications is not inherently a bad option in finding potential mates but the lack of proper education with users could complicate personally connecting with other individuals which may cause social anxiety and depression.

For my project, I will create a series of portraits that will act as a documentation for the respondents. It will feature 10 respondents — a mix of college students and young professionals with different personalities each from different social groups about their personal experiences using such apps and other social media sites. They will be interviewed and recorded for research purposes with a given set of questions that are specifically relevant to the topic.

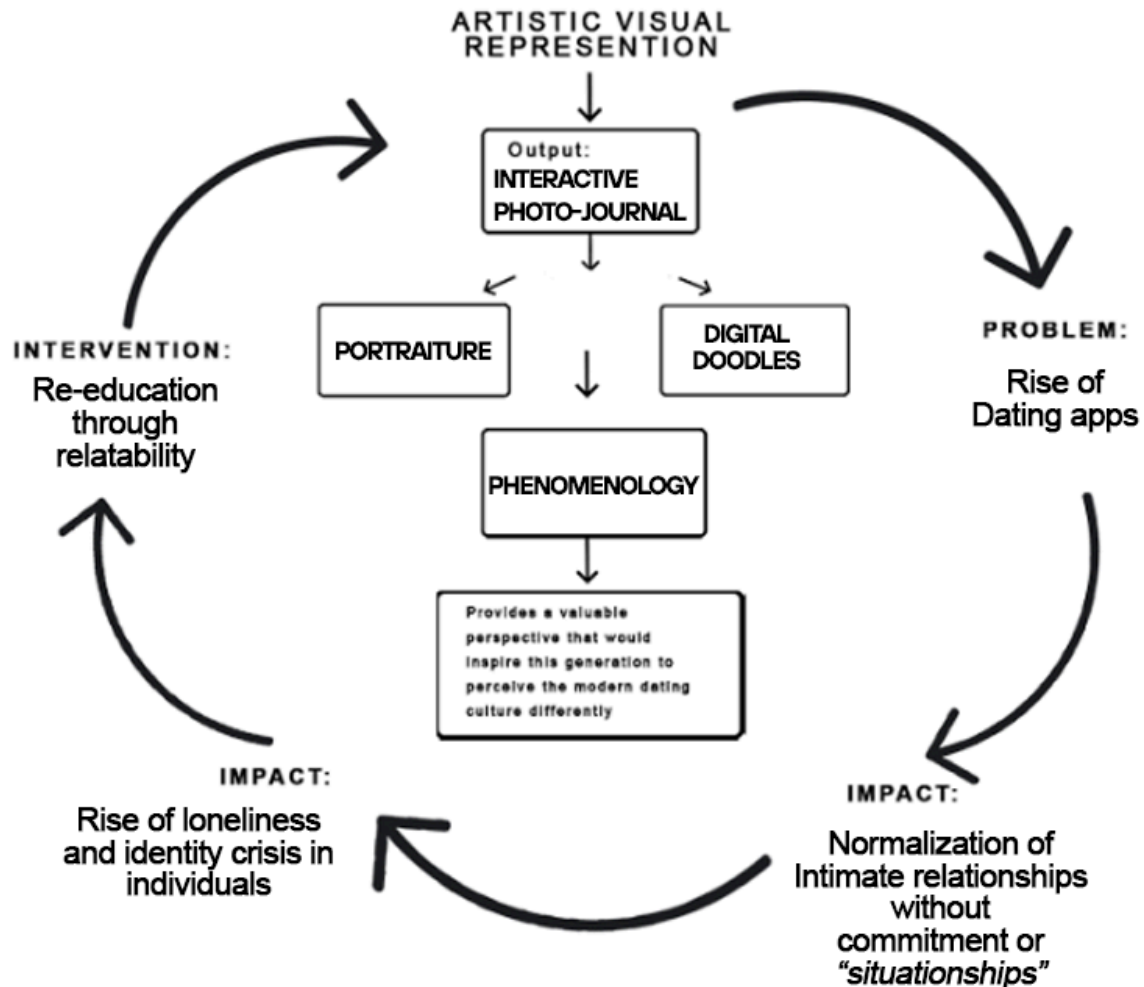
The flow of each interview starts with the respondent telling their story of how they ended up using social media to find connections. The camera that I will be using is a Fujifilm Simple Ace Disposable Film Camera with 400 ISO and 27 exposures.

The research I will do for my thesis would be a mix of articles from credible online sources and qualitative interviews with Gen Z individuals. I will use journals and books to back up my information to support the theory of phenomenology.

The creative output would be an interactive zine composed of a collection of portraits, scribbles, and doodles which feature the research respondents. Every respondent will have feature a set of 5 portraits taken of them — 4 shots taken by a Canon 700D Digital Single Lens Reflex, and 1 shot taken by a Fujifilm Simple Ace Disposable Camera which will be the “main photo” that will be featured on the first “photo page”. Before that “main photo” there will be a clear page made that will feature a “clown face” digital illustration that covers the face of the “main photo” before it and other scribbles. Then, it will be preceded by the 4 other portraits.

I want to utilize the findings I will gather through the research and interviews I will conduct. This is to further support my paper and reinforce my use of the theory of

phenomenology and prove that dating applications have an impact on modern dating through its integrated culture.



**Figure 1** Framework of the Visual Representation of Online Dating’s Impact on Modern Society’s Perspective on Romantic Relationships

The creative framework that I used visualizes the process of how I came up with the output of providing a visual representation about the impact of online dating on modern society’s perspective on romantic relationships. In this section, I created an overall visual summary of the details on how my project is made. The creative framework and the following words that are part of it are discussed based on the context of this study.

For the method and process of my study as well as my output, I started with the goal of understanding other young individuals’ perspective and personal experiences with

dating and courtship in general in today's climate to gather firsthand qualitative data. I began by acknowledging that there could be a problem linked to it which is the rise of social anxiety and fear of intimacy in young individuals.

Due to social media being a norm in this modern age, meeting new people to seek romantic interests online has become normalized too unlike before, in the internet's first few years, the act of interacting with people online alone has been looked down upon or perceived as weird. With the increase of users in dating applications, virtual dating has formed a culture of its own in which finding a romantic partner has become more complex. Terms like "cuffing season", "talking stage", and "ghosting" are examples of common situations exclusive to virtual dating that could bring unnecessary stress and relationship trauma to individuals.

As a proponent, I will provide an intervention, which is taking an action by creating this study, to provide young Filipino individuals a valuable perspective and understanding to see if re-education is necessary in the use of dating sites. By providing an intervention, I planned and created a visual representation of the impact of online dating through an interactive zine by applying the firsthand data gathered from interviews and incorporating them into the portraits with the help of Theory of phenomenology as its main foundation. I will apply the theory of phenomenology throughout the photography and interview process for the zine.

For my **research design**, I will first conduct a quantitative preliminary interview to (10) respondents, before the creation of the output of my study. My first preliminary interview gathered information about personal experiences and emotions of young individuals who used dating applications to see if there are common situations that may entail its usage.

I will utilize hand-written recording for firsthand one-on-one conversations with the respondents. The information from the interview would serve as inspiration for the photographs. After the creation of the zine, I will conduct a post-survey questionnaire through quantitative and qualitative methods and analyze the answers of the respondents and assess their insights about the output of my study. The data that was gathered showed that the zine as a visual presentation helped communicate the problem to my audience. Furthermore, the gathered data was analyzed and served as a foundation and stated that the impact of online dating has made modern dating complicated that resulted in my short to have a clear statement and was able to effectively provide a clear reflection to my target audience.

The research materials that will be used as a basis for the post-survey of my study are from online articles and studies that are related to data visualization.

My **target audience**, young Filipino individuals, are also the respondents who answered all the surveys that were conducted by this research. The age range of those who answered the preliminary and post-survey is 19-38 years old.

The results from the data that are about to be gathered by using quantitative questions from the survey questionnaires will be critically assessed and explained through Quantitative content analysis.

### **Pre-production stage**

For the pre-production stage, I focus mainly on planning the process of the interactive zine, creating a Gantt chart and sequence treatment to make sure that the needed deadlines are met and output will be finished on time. This is where I started to budget the expenses that are needed for the pre-production, production, and post-production stage. After the budget planning, the preliminary interviews circulate to write material for the screenplay. Casting calls are held by posting on social media platforms like Reddit and dating apps and deliberately choosing single individuals who had past experiences having “situationships” through these apps. Simultaneously, equipment for shooting is gathered. Lastly, extra miscellaneous for production needs and props are bought.

### **Production stage**

My production stage is mainly about the interview and photoshoot process. I will be meeting each respondent one by one in their preferred day schedules. I will meet them in a location that is their preferred “comfort spot” or any place they find interesting to hangout in, whether it’s an establishment like a coffee shop or a public park. From there, I just talk to them and ask the questions casually to not make it feel like an interview but more of a casual conversation. Despite the pre-written questions, there will be a few that will come up in regards to the respondents’ personal story. After the conversation, I ask them to pose for the camera and take their photo. Also, let them write any quote or personal rambling for texts in the journal.

During this period, I will also create the other assets needed for the output’s post-production by illustrating the clown faces in Adobe Photoshop. I will be using a chalk brush to elicit that doodle aesthetic.

## **Post-production stage**

By this time, I have developed the film roll from the disposable camera I've used. Once that's picked up, I will be scanning each photo of the respondents and their ramblings that was written on a paper.

In this stage, this is where all assets will be gathered for the output. I will be using Adobe InDesign for the journal layout and Adobe Photoshop for further editing in the photos and other details. Then, printing will take process.

## **Review of Related Literature**

In relation to the zine, this part discusses related literature that further discusses how dating applications made courtship and dating more complex, the unnecessary situations that may come with it, and its impact being at the core of our modern social climate. This enables me to strengthen the purpose of my output. Furthermore, it also tackles how art can be a tool to evoke a valuable perspective to individuals. Lastly, for my study's objectives and methodology, this also tackles the importance of a short and how it can be designed to inspire and bring social awareness to audiences.

## **Association Between Social Anxiety, Depression, and Use of Mobile Dating Applications**

A study published by a group of Ryerson psychology students has discovered a link between social anxiety and depression and the extensive use of dating apps. Their analysis was based on 243 participants from the U.S. who have previously used dating apps. Participants completed an online questionnaire in 2019 that measured their symptoms of social anxiety and depression, as well as their motivation for using dating applications. According to Beverly Fredborg (2021) this is one of the first research studies addressing the connection between mental health and dating applications. A Tinder Motivations scale, inspired by a previous research from the University of Amsterdam, has measured participant incentive and reported that there are six reasons why individuals use dating apps: love, casual sex, ease of communication, the thrill of excitement, self-worth validation, and trendiness. In accordance with the study, self worth validation is defined as "validating the sexual attractiveness of one's own appearance and feeling better about oneself in general".

Symptoms of social anxiety and depression were revealed to predict the motivation behind the use of dating apps in participants. It explains that people who reported higher levels of depression tended to report more extensive use of dating apps for self-worth validation (Fredborg, 2021). Furthermore, the study reveals that socially anxious females were more likely to use dating apps to find romance, compared to socially anxious males. This research also reported that dating apps provide shy and socially anxious people a safe space to socialize (Goerlich, 2021) despite the fear of rejection or negative judgment.

Important to note that this study didn't show a causation of negative effects on mental health from dating apps, rather it reveals a correlation between the extent of its use and the presence of symptoms of mental illness among individuals which are caused by other external factors like family conflicts or social media in general. In addition, the study encourages us to look at our own behavior and offers us a chance at reflection of what the function is of using dating apps in our life right now (Fredborg, 2021).

Bumble, a popular dating app in which the females get to start the conversation, is the only dating app to provide guidelines backed by mental health professionals. The company aimed to provide support on how to maintain confidence in oneself and social connections while dating according to their website.

### **And the “Clown of the Year” Award goes to...**

The rise of "clownery" in meme culture, particularly following the release of films like *It: Chapter 2* and *Joker* in 2019, reflects a growing cultural fascination with the absurd and chaotic aspects of human behavior. These films, featuring iconic clown-like characters such as Pennywise and the Joker, tapped into a sense of societal unease at the end of the 2010s. Rather than glorifying the violence associated with these characters, the meme culture surrounding them embraced the eccentric, tragic, and sometimes nonsensical traits of clownery. People began to identify with the absurdity of their own experiences, using clownery as a form of self-expression and humor that highlighted the chaos and confusion of everyday life.

This trend gained even more momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic, when online communities became vital spaces for connection. In the Philippines, for example, the "Subtle Clown Traits" (SCT) Facebook group flourished, as people found solidarity in their shared, sometimes embarrassing, behaviors and experiences. SCT members used humor to bond over awkward online dating moments, relatable emotional reactions, and other "clown-like" tendencies. This community exemplified how memes, by embracing the ridiculous and self-deprecating, allowed people to laugh at their own flaws and build

connections during a time of social isolation. Clownery in meme culture highlights the unifying power of humor in the digital age, offering a way for individuals to connect, cope with adversity, and embrace their own complexities (Regis, 2021).

## **Clowns On The Verge of A Nervous Breakdown**

This article explores the concept of clowns and how society's perspective changed — mainly how clowns were originally or once were symbols of fun and positivity turned into an icon for horror in pop culture and eventually, tomfoolery when it comes to romance and dating (Stott, 2012). This cultural shift reflects broader societal changes and illuminates the complex nature of human emotions and identities.

Clowns have deep roots in entertainment. Dating back to medieval times, court jesters served as the only individuals allowed to mock nobility, using humor to provide commentary on societal norms. They were seen as essential to celebrations, embodying joy, laughter, and a carefree spirit. This image persisted for centuries, establishing clowns as figures of positivity in various cultural contexts.

The 20th century marked a significant turning point in the portrayal of clowns. The rise of horror films, particularly with the introduction of characters like Pennywise from Stephen King's "It," reshaped the clown archetype. This transformation reflects deeper societal anxieties and fears projected onto clowns. The juxtaposition of their bright, exaggerated features against the backdrop of horror narratives created a chilling dichotomy, illustrating how the same figure could evoke both joy and fear. This shift indicates a broader cultural phenomenon, where the clown became a vessel for exploring the complexities of human emotions.

In contemporary society, clowns have also found a place in romantic contexts. They are often depicted as playful figures who embody fun and lightheartedness in relationships

On the other hand, there's the "fool for love" motif that often involves a degree of self-sacrifice or vulnerability, much like the emotional risks clowns take when performing. In dating, individuals may find themselves acting outside their comfort zones — whether it's through grand gestures, embarrassing moments, or just being open about their feelings. This vulnerability can be endearing and relatable, echoing the clown's role as a figure who is willing to expose their true self for the sake of connection. This portrayal adds another layer to the clown's identity, allowing them to represent a carefree attitude towards love and dating.



However, this aspect can also trivialize more profound emotions and concerns, reducing complex human experiences to mere entertainment.

The evolution of the clown serves as a mirror to societal changes, reflecting how collective perceptions of joy, fear, and intimacy can shift over time. As clowns transitioned from joyful entertainers to symbols of horror, and now to playful figures in romance, they reveal the multifaceted nature of the human experience. This duality invites deeper questions about the masks we wear in different social contexts and the ways we navigate our emotions.

### **How Online Social Media Persona Affects Personal Identity and Self**

The argument being made is that our online social media persona is one and the same with our personal identity. This paper touches on theories of continuity of body, substance and continuity of consciousness and how they are related to social networking sites. This paper offers discourse on the empirical means taken, discussing the various means of social media and social networking sites, particularly YouTube, in the greater context of personal identity. Most everybody has some form of online presence. Our online social media persona affects our personal identity and self by becoming one and the same with one another.

The ability to show them off on the internet is no different than a book about one's life. Through our online composition, we can see what it means to persist from moment to moment and exist at different times (Weber, 2017).

One of the most interesting parts in this study is that “masking” or “putting filters” works not just physically but internally — the parts in our personalities that we tend to hide.

### **How To Date When It Feels Like Everyone Forgot How To Date**

The pandemic greatly affected how we connect with people and perceive modern dating. In this study, this tackles how dating became more difficult now our lives are in a transitional period and returning “back to normal”. It mainly discusses the social habits, and emotional anxieties we adapted from interacting with humans online for a long while and how it will translate to the post-lockdown situation. The reliance on technology during those times made individuals poor communicators — being less direct and unclear when we communicate with potential mates which can lead to emotional burdens.

The study overall, educates the readers on how to be a better person for ourselves for our own emotional well-being (Solomon, 2022) and advocates the importance of proper communication and basic social ethics in the modern dating landscape (Ury, 2022).

### **Love in the Time of Algorithms: Tracing the Evolution of Online Dating**

This study discusses how dating apps changed the dynamics of matchmaking. It also discusses how more men and women are signing up for such applications to find a, either a short-time or long-time, partner. Like with other previous discussions, this study also tackles the advantages, quirks, and even problems like frauds or scammers. It shows the irony of how getting a lot of options to choose from can actually be an unforeseen nuisance for an individual who signs up for such applications. It discusses, also, how it's helpful for people who are more introverted to strike up conversations with potential mates (Gulab, 2023).

### **Review of Related Works**

This part of the study focuses on discussing the techniques that I will use to make my interactive journal and how I will take the portraits, the style used or explored, and the relation of aesthetics that served as the basis on how I conceptualized and relate the creation of a visual representation in a form of art through connecting it to the photos and digital doodles that allowed me to create my overall design of the outputs of my study.

## Figure 1

*Nice To Meet You My Friend / Thing You Wanted To Say But Never Did*



*Note.* Courtesy: Gelay Concepcion

Gelay Concepcion is a Filipino photographer known for his vibrant and evocative imagery that often explores themes of identity, culture, and the human experience. His work frequently blends documentary and fine art styles, capturing both the beauty and complexity of everyday life in the Philippines.

Concepcion's impact lies in his ability to highlight underrepresented narratives and perspectives, particularly in the context of Filipino culture. By showcasing the richness of local life, he not only elevates the stories of his subjects but also fosters a greater understanding and appreciation of Filipino heritage among broader audiences. His work has garnered attention in both local and international photography circles, contributing to the growing recognition of contemporary Filipino artists.

His project, “Nice To Meet You My Friend” — a series of portraits of the people he met online — will be the main inspiration for my output, aesthetically and the emotional process behind it. Concepcion’s personal project elicits that intimate feeling when two people connect and the aesthetic of the portraits symbolize that unfiltered connection.

## Figure 2

### *Chalk Zaldivar Paintings*



*Note.* Courtesy: Chalk Zaldivar

Chalk Zaldivar's work explores irony, contradiction, the rhetoric, and the questioning of long-established institutions and social conventions as he frees visual art from the shackles of aesthetic taste. Many of his artworks are an ongoing engagement with iconic paintings in history, leveling their sacred contemplative aura and modernist originality with the scrawling and doodles found in a schoolbook. These parodies are things that most if not every Filipino can relate to, recognize, and sympathize with.

Just to expand on Zaldivar's concepts, the iconic smiley face — which has become his trademark at this point — may be interpreted as a persona or the public image we sometimes, if not most, put when we're in certain social situations. I'll be applying that idea in my output by illustrating childlike doodles of the make-up of popular clowns throughout the 1940s and 1960s.

**Figure 3**

*Kellogg's Corn Flakes: 1955 Masks of Famous Clowns*



*Note.* Courtesy: Kellogg's Corn Flakes

In 1955, Kellogg's introduced a series of advertisements featuring clowns as part of their marketing strategy for Corn Flakes.

The use of clowns in advertising aimed to create a sense of joy and excitement around the product, making it more appealing to young consumers. The playful imagery and lighthearted tone resonated with families, contributing to the overall success of the brand during that era. This marketing approach was part of a broader trend in the mid-20th century, where advertisers increasingly targeted children with colorful, character-driven campaigns.

The legacy of these clowns is evident in how Kellogg's and other cereal brands continue to use mascots and character-driven marketing to engage with their audiences, fostering brand loyalty from a young age.

## Figure 4

### *Love For Sale: The Words and Picture of Barbara Kruger*



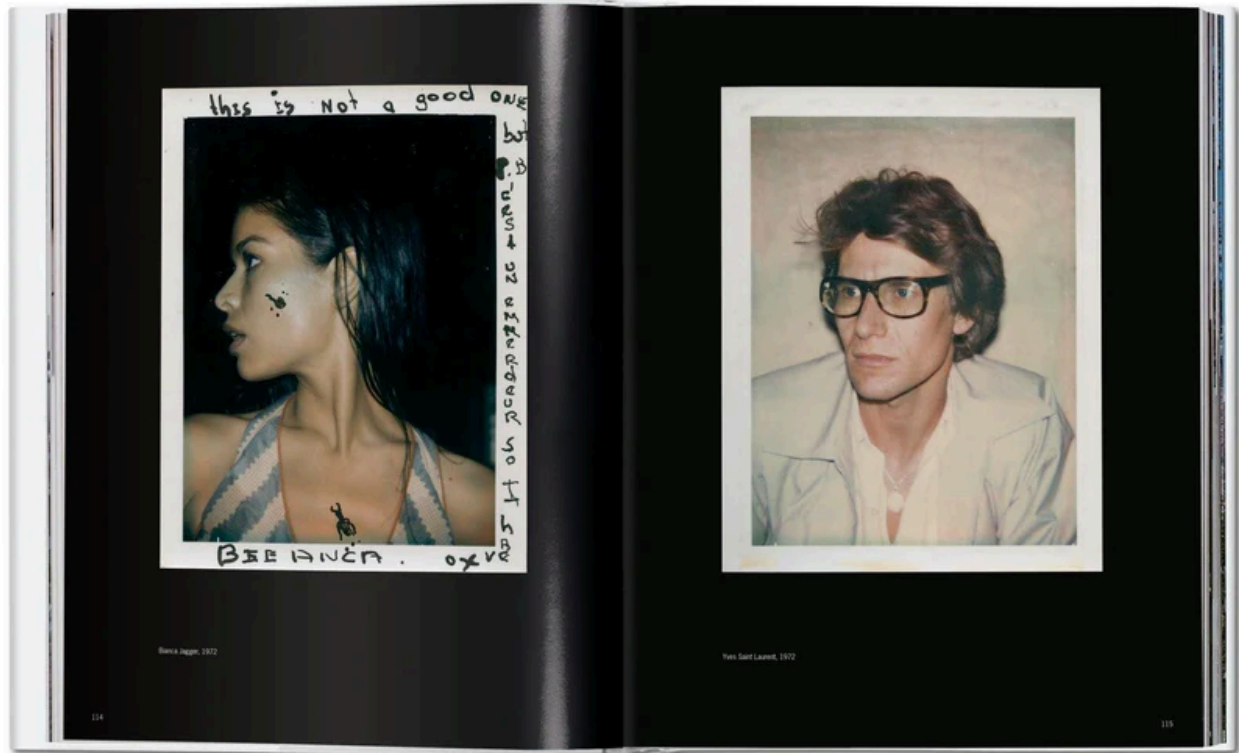
Note. Courtesy: Barbara Kruger

Kruger's works often employ a distinctive graphic style, utilizing high-contrast photography and assertive typography. This approach challenges viewers to confront the messages conveyed by advertising and media, particularly regarding gender roles and relationships.

The impact of "Love for Sale" extends beyond the art world; it fosters critical discourse about the commercialization of emotions and the ways in which society constructs notions of love. By exposing the underlying messages in consumer culture, Kruger encourages viewers to question their own beliefs and values, making her work both relevant and influential in discussions around feminism and capitalism. Her ability to merge art and social commentary has solidified her status as a pivotal figure in contemporary art.

## Figure 5

Andy Warhol's Polaroids 1958 - 1987



*Note.* Courtesy: Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol's use of Polaroid cameras in the 1970s was a significant evolution in his artistic practice, primarily aimed at capturing the essence of his subjects quickly and spontaneously. Warhol often used these photographs as a means to document his social circle, which included celebrities, artists, and other notable figures of the time. The immediacy of Polaroid photography allowed him to create a more candid and intimate portrayal, contrasting with the more polished and controlled images typically produced in studio settings.

Warhol's Polaroid shots are like his personal diary. They shifted the focus from traditional, formal portraiture to a more casual and accessible form of representation. Warhol's portraits, characterized by their bold colors and repetitive imagery, challenged conventional ideas about identity and celebrity, emphasizing the interplay between fame and personal identity. His collection of photographs was Instagram before Instagram.

His Polaroids not only documented a moment in time but also became integral to his later silk-screen works, further cementing his legacy in both the art world and popular culture. This approach has influenced contemporary portraiture, encouraging artists to explore themes of authenticity, identity, and the complexities of modern life through a similar lens.

## **Results and Discussions**

During the exhibit, the audience showed genuine interest and quickly connected with the themes in the portraits. The focus on online culture struck a chord with many, as it's such a big part of our daily lives. Seeing their own digital experiences reflected in the artwork made the concepts instantly relatable, drawing them into the stories behind each piece and making the exhibit feel personal and relevant.

As I explained the inspiration and ideas behind the portraits, their connection to the artwork grew even deeper. Many shared how the themes inspired them, opening up about their own experiences with online culture. They didn't just stop there—they also voiced their opinions, offering unique perspectives on how the digital world affects their lives, both positively and negatively. These conversations made the exhibit feel like more than just an art display; it became a space for reflection and dialogue about how the digital age shapes who we are and how we connect with each other.

The audience also expressed that they prefer meeting people in real life as opposed to online.

## **Recommendations**

The project could also benefit greatly from incorporating an interactive element where the audience gets to use a disposable camera. This hands-on activity would provide a nostalgic and tactile experience, allowing participants to step away from the immediacy of digital photography and embrace the slower, more thoughtful process of analog photography. Using a disposable camera encourages individuals to be intentional with each shot, capturing moments with care and consideration.



Additionally, this experience could serve as a creative exploration of how we perceive and document moments in a digital age dominated by instant sharing and editing. By stripping away the filters and endless retakes of modern technology, the disposable camera could inspire a fresh perspective, highlighting the beauty in imperfection and spontaneity. This element would not only engage the audience in a deeper, more personal way but also tie into themes of online culture by contrasting the fleeting nature of digital interactions with the permanence and unpredictability of film photography.

## **Conclusion**

The exhibit ultimately became more than just a showcase of portraits; it evolved into a meaningful conversation about the role of online culture in our lives. By reflecting their own experiences in the artwork and sharing their thoughts, the audience created a collective dialogue that bridged personal stories with larger societal themes. This connection between art and viewer highlighted the power of creativity to spark understanding, inspire reflection, and foster discussion about the complexities of the digital age. Through their engagement, the exhibit demonstrated how art can serve as a mirror, helping us explore who we are in an increasingly connected yet complex world.

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