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Masculinities and Femininities: Romance and Authenticity on American Dating Apps

Multi-Disciplinary Gender Studies
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Abstract

The phenomenon of dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, and Grindr display the way image-based technologies allow for a new visual literacy. This study investigates how the experience of using dating applications (apps) related to Giddens's notion of romance and explored the way visual literacy was constructed through discourses of authenticity. How do young Americans construct their social worlds through everyday actions and interactions on dating apps? How is romance re-conceptualized through dating apps, and what are the consequences of dating apps on gender identity and courtship?

A qualitative, mixed methods approach was used to gather data. An online survey was distributed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Results were triangulated to gain insight on notions of romance, gender identity, and visual literacy based on discussions of image codes and dating app use. The sample was Americans and people living America between ages 20-29 who used dating apps.

The research demonstrates that the journalistic media's discourses perpetuate stigmas of dating apps as virtual spaces for hooking up, when in fact they are used in complex ways that sustain notions of romance and solidify feelings of identity. Additionally, it establishes that authenticity is a primary factor in selecting profile images and communicating on dating apps.

I. Introduction

Virtual technologies have had a major impact on American relationships in the past decade and a half. In 2005-2012, Cacioppo found that more than one-third of married couples in the U.S. met on a dating site (Cacioppo, 2011: 18814-19). In 2012, Rosenfeld and Thomas found that to be 22% of heterosexual married couples in 2010 met online. (Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012), while Pew found it to be 29%.(Smith, 2016).

"Near the end of 2014, Tinder claimed that the average user logged on eleven times per day and spent approximately seven minutes on each session, meaning that they are there for more than 1.25 hours each day" (Ansari and Klinenberg, 2015: 116). Mary Meeker, Morgan Stanley internet analyst and current partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield Byers, reported at California's Code conference that "Tinder users 'swipe' 800 million times per day, up 21 times year-over-year" (Mary Meeker report, 2014). Tinder is huge, and getting bigger.

The mean Tinder user is 27 years old (Ansari and Klinenberg, 2015: 116); this figure is especially significant since the mean U. S. nationwide first marriage age is 27 for women, while for men it is 29 (Ansari and Klinenberg, 2015: 16-17, sourced from U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1890 to 1940, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1947 to 2014). Nowadays, young people of a marriageable age (18-30+, also the range of Tinder's user population) are using Tinder and dating apps.

Of course not every relationship on Tinder leads to marriage, nor is that intention universal among Tinder users. However, many users seem to be aiming in that direction, encouraged by Tinder itself. Tinder has even promoted "Tinder

weddings" on its Twitter homepage (Tinder, 2016: *"The Magical Santorini Wedding…."*; and Tinder, 2016: *"They #Swiped Right…"*), and *The New York Times* has written an article with interviews of married couples that met on Tinder (Foster, 2016), in this way further promoting the impression that Tinder can lead to marriage. Tinder-based weddings are becoming normalized, altering people's expectations of what a match could potentially lead to as well as their notions of contemporary romance.

Tinder and other dating apps are commonly how people today are meeting romantically. This technological change to social practice affects who ends up married and who has children with whom. In turn, this affects the trajectory of future generations through their life course, and society more generally.

What are dating apps and why are they significant?

Most of the modern field of research that focuses on technology and dating is about online dating and its impact, as shown in the literature review. Not much research has focused on dating applications as a separate phenomenon.

Dating applications are also termed "hookup apps," although term dating app is used in the work because it encapsulates the range of apps made for people to meet one another. Additionally, as research shows, many participants do not use these apps for the sole reason of casual sexual encounters (hooking up) (Table 4 in Results). Therefore, dating app is a more accurate term than hookup app for this study and will therefore be used throughout.

Both online dating websites and dating applications are similar in that they show image-bearing profiles of users with the aim of allowing strangers to match with

one another, generally for a romantic or sexual purpose. Many online dating websites, such as OKCupid, now have corresponding smartphone apps. But for the purposes of the current study, "dating apps" refers only to apps made for smartphone use with no corresponding dating website.

Dating apps differ greatly from online dating websites, and are in some revolutionary. Dating apps are unique in that they are 1.) image-based, 2.) location-based, and 3.) designed to be mobile because they are smartphone applications. Generally, dating apps also integrate with one's Facebook profile, drawing profile interests ("likes") and photos to upload onto the dating app profile. Tinder was the first popular dating app to do this, and competitors have followed suit. The impacts of the connection between the dating app and Facebook are discussed later in this thesis. Additionally, major dating applications have a "consent to chat" mechanism that allows users to only chat with one another once they have indicated interest through matching. This matching usually takes place through a swipe, so in this analysis when "swiping" is referred to, it implies that individuals have swiped in order to indicate their interest in matching.

Tinder, one of the most popular dating apps, and Bumble, developed by a former Tinder employee, also employ the language of play in their apps. For example, once a match is made, the screen encourages users either send a message or "keep playing", i.e., keep swiping through other potential matches. Tinder and Bumble are also more image-based than other dating apps, with the convention being to have only a brief statement on the profile (referred to as the "tagline") if even any user-created writing at all.

In contrast, less-popular apps such as Hinge and CoffeeMeetsBagel emphasize "quality" of matches over the socially perceived "less serious" language of play.

CoffeeMeetsBagel does so through limiting the number of profiles able to be viewed per day, forcing users to closely examine each profile. Hinge also emphasizes quality of matches by only generating matches with friends of friends on Facebook. The profiles on these two apps also are text-heavy, with users filling out information such as religion, hobbies, and other categories similar to those seen on online dating profiles. Despite the fact that Hinge and CoffeeMeetsBagel incorporate the main features of dating apps delineated above, they also share traits of online dating websites through their emphasis on quality, (implied) serious matching and profiles laden with text. Interestingly, this similarity to online dating may contribute to their relative lack of popularity.

Grindr is the most popular dating app globally, with one million active users in 192 countries. ("Dating apps prove factor in HIV rise among adolescents," 2015). It is aimed at and used by gay men, as opposed to Tinder, which is aimed at and used by heterosexuals, although gay users certainly avail themselves of it as well. Grindr is unique though in that it uses an older instantiation of visual structures that has proven unpopular on applications aimed at straight users, as its straight-aimed app Blendr was not successful relative to Tinder. Grindr, for example, shows numerous images of multiple people simultaneously, and users can chat with each other without any "matching" needed. Due to the scope of the current project, however, and Grindr's special focus on gay men, it will not be expanded upon further. Rather, dating applications such as the other ones listed in Appendix G, and especially Tinder, are focused on in the present study.

More generally, dating apps are worth studying as a distinctive category because they are primarily image-based in a way that online dating is not. Dating apps then become an important lens through which a new visual literacy in communication

can be explored. Tinder, for example, relies mainly on profile images as the means by which people match/become connected via the app. Thus Tinder (and related apps) can be used as a focal point to explore questions of gender, society and interpersonal relationships as affected by visual representations of others. They reveal also how young people re-structure through new technologies dynamic notions of love, sex, and romance.

II. Research Question and Thesis

How do young Americans construct their social worlds through everyday actions and interactions on dating apps? (This question formation is influenced by research conceptualizations discussed in Pfeffer, 2014). Such a question can be broken down into sub-questions, each of which will be addressed in turn:

1. How do the ways people create and look at dating app profiles contribute to new understandings of image-based communication?

2. Are certain kinds of masculinities and femininities being communicated through images on dating app profiles?

3. Are notions of romance played out through dating apps, or is it a superficial or practical space?

Thesis

Tinder and related apps are revolutionary in that, *inter alia*, they have heavily contributed, perhaps even structured, a new visual literacy and altered how young

adults communicate. At the same time, it has also contributed to conservative notions of romance in the way users conceive of its usage.

It can be argued that the experience of using dating apps and getting feedback on profile pictures via matches conduces to a new visual literacy in terms of communication and reinforces certain hierarchical notions of masculinities and femininities (drawing on Connell's theory of relative masculinities in Connell, 1995).

The components of this argument can be further broken down: Dating apps' image-based communication fosters a new visual literacy. This visual literacy plays out through networked image-heavy social technologies such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tinder. As a result, the visual format takes precedence in constructing one's identity in terms of gender and social class. The visual component is also affecting notions of romance not only through determining who matches with whom on dating apps, but also by contributing to the belief that images of oneself can convey one's "true" identity, and can be articulated by users in discourses of the "natural" and "authentic." *A fortiori*, the visual component is something that can be purposefully packaged and conveyed via dating apps. This idea of having, and then of another being attracted to, one's true nature is in fact an older, conservative romantic notion. This strand exists despite the frequent portrayals (specifically in journalistic media) of dating apps as novel, superficial, hook-up based, and socially revolutionary, yielding in turn to a re-defining of dating and romance.

The research sub-questions under analysis have been addressed herein by several methods. These include through the distribution of an online survey and by semi-structured interviews with Americans via Skype. The responses were analyzed and the implication of this analysis was framed in terms of identity, visual communication, and notions of romance.

Being that Tinder is a trendy topic nowadays, writing and analysis is also rapidly expanding. Most of this work occurs within journalistic media, but other more systematic work related to Tinder is coming out of a range of different disciplines, including sociology, feminist and critical theory, and communication. Given that behavior surrounding dating apps crosses so many intellectual boundaries, a multi-disciplinary approach promises to be a satisfactory way to aggregate varied conclusions on the implications of dating apps. Hence is this study, sociological studies on courtship and online dating, as well as theories of romance and gender, have been assayed in order to gain a firm grounding for the research.

History of Technology-based Courtship

Although the history of courtship goes at least as far back as the institution of marriage itself, here it will be examined from the perspective of the past half century. This period was selected because it captures the maximum dating career of most dating app users. Additionally and significantly, it incorporates romantic trends extant in the generation before that of today's young people, and thus those trends may be discerned, to whatever extent they exist, in contemporary courtship practices and views. Finally, it encompasses major technological advancements which seem to be accelerating. The internet, the mobile communication revolution, along with assistive reproductive technologies, have been the backdrop to changes in ideas about love, relationships, and family formation. Yet the time span also embraces pre-networked (i.e., stand-alone) computer systems. The use of this technology for computerized matchmaking sprung up as early as the 1960s (Bilton, 2014). Like contemporary online dating sites such as Match.com, eHarmony, and OKCupid, these offerings utilized computer algorithms to generate compatibility. Punchy headlines of the era, such as the *Toledo Blade*'s "Computer Cupids Woo 13-Year-Olds; N.Y. Schools

Balk; Jury Investigates" (*Toledo Blade,* 1966), convey how computer matchmaking scandalized public guardians from the beginning. Perhaps the moral lading of such headlines reveals concerns about removing courtship from the hands of parents and matchmakers and placing it, unsupervised, into those of young people. Moreover, there was a moral stigma attached to the use of such technology, with the popular view being that those who relied on this approach to dating were "losers" who could not find appropriate partners through traditionally, and sanctioned, methods. With the advent of the internet, and internet based-dating, this stigma has been carried forward, at least in the early days of the internet (Smith and Duggan, 2013; Smith, 2016).

Of course mass media interfaces for finding a marriage partner pre-dated the computer. Zoe Strimpel has insightfully traced the history of matchmaking via commercial outlets (2016, "From Matrimonial Press to Computer Cupid: Dating Before the Digital" talk). Her inquiry, ranging from matrimonial advertisements of the late 19th century to the matchmaking bureaus of the 1940s, showed that such methods tapped into anxieties about the waning of marriage as a "person-to-person" interchange.

Strimpel argues that between the 1940s and 1980s there was a decline of all forms of the matchmaking industry, including the computer matchmaking approaches. She maintains that this is due to an increased view of marriage as romantic, as opposed to the calculating philosophy of the matchmaking industry. Another scholar, Anthony Giddens, writes that most marriages of the period (in the U.K. and the U.S.A.) during the 1940s and earlier "were contracted, not on the basis of mutual sexual attraction, but economic circumstance"(Giddens, 1992: 38). Support for this view comes from interviews of elderly New Yorkers conducted by Ansari and Klinenberg (2015); they found people frequently mentioning that they settled for "good enough" when electing to marry. For women, such minimal threshold-meeting behavior was especially necessary to gain freedom from the parental household.

However, computerized (and even video) dating services continued on despite general public disapproval, and came to enjoy a wave of popularity beginning in the 1980s. Utilizing scientific jargon, computer dating services promised to help people beat the numbers game and find a soul-mate. The invocation of the language of rationality was successful, with popular dating sites such as eHarmony using "scientific" studies to match people up; OKCupid's computer algorithm even claimed to turn compatibility likelihood into a percentage.

But how effective are these algorithms in determining compatibility and attraction? Eli Finkel's research team opened a comprehensive attack on claims that these statistical tools have yielded positive results, and as such challenged the basis of the trust that people have in computer matching for dating. His team "pored through more than 80 years of scientific research about dating and attraction, and was unable to prove that computers can indeed match people together" (Bilton, 2014; Finkel et al., 2012). To the extent these findings are sustained, it seems there is no basis to believe that computer algorithms promote better romantic outcomes than conventional offline dating (Finkel et al., 2012).

Additionally, Christian Rudder, co-founder of OKCupid and author of *Dataclysm*, despite being extremely invested in OKCupid's algorithm, admits that when it comes to online dating, "your picture *is* worth that fabled thousand words, but your actual words are worth…almost nothing" (Rudder, 2014b). Rudder derived his conclusions from nationally representative data sets of thousands of OKCupid users. In this situation, Rudder and his research team ran a direct experiment on actual OKCupid user data to compare the same profiles in two different scenarios: one with their texts displayed and one with their texts hidden. They measured the interest of other users in those profiles, and concluded that "the text is less than 10% of what people think of you." Images matter most when it comes to receiving romantic interest in online dating.

Rudder's conclusion that images matter most is supported by Jan de Vries's work on the impact of photographs and self-descriptions in dating interest among 223 white Los Angeles college students (De Vries, 2010: 538). He found that "for men the self-descriptions were half as important as the photographs, whereas for women the impact of the descriptions was equal to the photographs (De Vries, 2010: 538). The finding that photographs were equally, if not more important, for young people was relevant to the online dating industry in 2010. Since that time, the success of image-oriented dating apps such as Tinder, which forgo the capability of displaying large amounts of text, seems to offer yet more validation for the critical role visual communication plays in arousing potential partnering interest.

For online dating sites, the scholarly evidence indicates that dating compatibility algorithms do not work, but that images do matter greatly. Hence it is no surprise that dating with technology has moved from online dating based on questionnaire answers to mobile, image-based dating apps. Dating apps companies rely on self-actualized users to make matches themselves through images rather than compatibility formulae. Historically, courtship may have been in the hands of parents and matchmakers, but today it is in the palms of users' hands.

Now that the a brief summary of recent technologies of courtship, and the central role that images have come to play in dating services, has been reviewed, it will be helpful to examine salient aspects of gender in online dating, again drawing on a wider context. Here particular attention will be given to the theories of Anthony Giddens since his work bridges technology and gender within a sociological context. After completing this examination, the derivation of the research methodology will be addressed.

Contemporary Findings: Gendered Behavior in Online Dating

Many academic studies discuss gendered interactions in online dating, although there is little information about dating apps specifically. Yet despite the

relative dearth of information, it does seem clear that there is a vast differential in terms of dating app usage by gender, with men being much more enthusiastic users. According to Quiroz, who examined gendered aspects of dating app usage, "GPS dating currently reflects gender disparities with men users of mobile dating apps outnumbering women by a ratio of 4:1.3" (Quiroz YEAR? 184). Other sources (Rudder 2014a) offer support for this large difference in terms of genders present in online dating websites and apps. Additionally, when it comes to dynamics on the websites themselves, "women send four times fewer messages than men" (Kreager, 2014: 387, also supported in Rudder 2014a).

In addition to Rudder's work, Pew Research Center has conducted two major studies of Americans published in 2013 and 2016. The Pew studies helped guide and inform the present study framework. More specifically, the professionally conducted studies by Pew offered a baseline against which the present study's results could be compared. The Pew research also contained useful information about gender differentials in online dating and dating apps, and these would also allow comparative conclusions to be drawn when a different sample and recruitment strategy was deployed.

Pew Research Center performed a 2013 study on online dating and dating apps, labeling the users of such as "online daters." However, Pew conflates the two, which makes it hard to tease out the nuances of the specific phenomenon of dating apps. Pew Research Center conducted a national survey sampling 2,001 adults from June to July 2015 and published in 2016. The Pew 2016 study notes that there is an increase of growth between 2013 and 2016 in groups that have historically not used "online dating" (although they mean online dating and dating apps), specifically 18-24 year olds and people over 50. They note that "fully 22% of 18- to 24-year-olds

now report using mobile dating apps, a more than fourfold increase from the 5% who reported using dating apps in 2013" (Smith, 2016). This is interesting in that they are noting that studying dating apps as distinct from online dating may be insightful. Pew's findings of gender difference in online dating behaviors are reinforced in other work on online dating, such as in *Dataclysm* (Rudder, 2014a).

Although online dating sites are relatively common among a range of age cohorts, mobile dating apps are primarily popular with Americans in their mid-20s through mid-30s. One out of every ten 25-34 year olds (11%) has used a dating app—that is double the rate for those ages 18-24 (5% of whom have used dating apps) and for those ages 35-44 (4%). Older adults use online dating sites in at least modest numbers, but dating app usage is effectively non-existent for people in their mid-forties and beyond. (Smith and Duggan, 2013).

The following trends are useful to present in that they show the rapid growth and current contours of mobile dating apps:

1. "fully 22% of 18- to 24-year-olds now report using mobile dating apps, a more than fourfold increase from the 5% who reported using dating apps in 2013." (Pew 2016).
    a. Online dating is most common among Americans in their mid-20's through mid-40's. (Smith and Duggan, 2013)
2. The 2016 report also found that "college graduates and the relatively affluent" are very likely to know people who use online dating, and specifically people who enter relationships from online dating (Smith, 2016).
3. Urban and suburban residents are more likely than rural residents to use online dating, and those who have attended college are around twice as likely to do so as are those who have not attended college. (Smith and Duggan, 2013) (this is replicated in my results)
4. 16% of online daters agree with the statement "people who use online dating sites are desperate," which is a decrease from earlier surveys conducted by Pew (Smith, 2016).

Gendered Trends:

1. Men are more likely to initiate contact than women (Kreager, 2014)
2. More men than women present on the sites/apps
3. Women are more likely to experience harassment
    a. Women are much more likely to have experienced uncomfortable or bothersome contact via online dating sites or apps. Some 42% of female online daters have experienced this type of contact at one point or another, compared with 17% of men. (Smith and Duggan, 2013)
4. Women get more help on their profiles, (making online dating a communal, social experience)
5. Men are more likely than women to initiate contact on online dating sites. Men viewed more than three times as many profiles as women did, and that men on average sent three times as many first-contact emails over the course of the study. (Hitsch, Hortacsu, and Ariely, 2010).
6. 22% of online daters have *asked someone to help them create or review their profile*. Women are around twice as likely as men to ask for assistance creating or perfecting their profile—30% of female online daters have done this, compared with 16% of men. (Smith and Duggan, 2013)

Although clear data are lacking, it seems reasonable to expect that comparable trends that characterize online dating sites are applicable to mobile dating apps.

Giddens's Theories of Romance and Intimacy

Anthony Giddens's illustrious work *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) theorizes romance in the late 20th Century and predicts contours of early 21st Century romance. He sees that ideas of intimacy have been re-framed due to increased gender equality, gay rights, and non-marital sex. These changes are especially seen through larger societal changes in attitudes and behavior around sexuality.

Giddens identifies gender role behaviors that have historically affected courtship and sexuality. He identifies the rigid double standard about men's and

women's sexual experiences, noting that "men…have traditionally been regarded….as requiring sexual variety for their physical health. It has generally been thought acceptable for men to engage in multiple sexual encounters before marriage" (Giddens, 1992: 7), as opposed to women. Although this double standard has been reduced in that it is now socially acceptable for women to have sexual relations before marriage, statistical research has found that women consistently under-report their number of sexual partners (Spiegelhalter, 2015). This strongly suggests that unlike men, who under historical embodiments of the masculine role, may be expected to inflate the number of partners, women still appear to be hewing to traditional feminine roles of modest and restraint, would seek to down-play the number of partners. For his part, then, Giddens may be identifying historical patterns of courtship, but since many vestiges of them still exist today in new forms, the differential behavioral regimes for men and women continue to be sanctioned, perhaps more strongly than Giddens had anticipated.

Expanding on the social difference based on who is perceived to actually be having more sexual partners, historically there has been a gender difference in the dynamics of sexuality. Giddens zooms in on Lillian Rubin's 1989 work on sexual histories of heterosexual people in the U.S., concluding that "just as the social reputation of the girls rested upon their ability to resist, or contain, sexual advances, that of the boys depended upon the sexual conquests they could achieve" (Giddens, 1992: 9). In other words, traditionally men aggressively pursue sex in order to maintain their social identity as a masculine man, while women resist sexual advancements to properly manage their social identities as feminine women. Yet somehow, this gendered balancing act was not so balanced after all, as the men did actually have more pre-marital sex then these women. So with whom were they having it? As one 45 year-old respondent to Rubin's study characterizes the situation, the men were having sex with "those girls, the sluts" (Giddens, 1992: 9). The women these men have sex with before marriage are seen as socially separate from women who abstain, and the value-laden epithet "slut" is used to frame them as morally

inferior. This situation reveals two kinds of hierarchical femininities: a morally proper femininity of abstention from sex with a gender role behavior of management and resistance, and a morally-lesser femininity with a gender role behavior of sexual freedom and giving in. Taking into consideration a social constructivist approach to gender, it is evident that the gender identities of man and woman are not essentially present in people, but are complex identities that are created. One way in which these identities are constructed is through multiple possible roles in the case of heterosexual courtship.

To summarize, Giddens's theories of gender role behaviors in matters of romance emphasize 1.) the double standard of non-marital sexual experience 2.) the gender roles are such that men push for sex while women resist/contain sexual advances, and 3.) the women who give in versus the ones who resist inhabit different kinds of femininities that are hierarchical, with the later much higher than the former.

In comparing femininities, R.W. Connell's theories on masculinity expressed in her book *Masculinities* have been drawn upon (Connell, 1995). Masculinity has been defined as "behaviours [*sic*], languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine" (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 15-16). In other words, masculinity is a set of social and personal practices not tied to a biological assignment of male. This same ideology can be applied to femininity. However, in her work Connell separates out different kinds of hierarchal masculinities existing in a relationship to each other and in relation to femininity. She makes the case for a hegemonic masculinity that operates as a cultural mainstream form of masculinity; one that dominates over femininity. Masculinity is often discussed as a stable, singular thing in mainstream discourses; this is an insidious strategy that enables hegemonic masculinity to maintain its power. As a result of Connell's theory, masculinities and femininities are discussed in plural and consider them a set of practices.

Sexuality, and its related component, dating, is a site for the battle of power in terms of gendered relations and in terms of kinds of masculinities and femininities. Giddens ties notions of power with ideas of romance and sexuality by bringing in Foucault's *A History of Sexuality* (1977). The hierarchical relationship between different kinds of femininities exemplified above and the double standard of pre-marital sex reveals inequalities between gendered identities. It may seem that the power of one gender, man, has power over other genders. However, these inequalities between genders and within kinds of gender expression (masculinities and femininities) do not mean that the power of men is a static thing driving the direction of sexuality in society. As Giddens summarizes, "power is a mobilizing phenomenon…those subject to disciplinary power are not at all necessarily docile in their reactions to it." (Giddens, 1992: 18-19). Rather, power is productive (Foucault, 1977), creating a tension and back and forth between these identities. This productive power means that relations can be transformed. Women resisted the double standard, and yesterday's "slut" having pre-marital sex is today's average woman. That does not mean that today's women do not face social pressure when it comes to sexuality. But it does mean that notions of gendered behavior, identity, and role change over time and have consequences in terms of who has power over whom. Therefore, it is useful to think about productive power and gender when examining modern ways sexuality plays out on dating applications.

As Giddens argues, productive power has led to transformation between those in power and those without. He argues that the iteration of this transformation in his time has been through a novel, contemporary notion of intimacy.

The nature of intimacy has transformed due to changes in the way people conceptualize self-identity. According to Giddens, intimacy in romantic love "presumes a psychic communication, a meeting of souls which is reparative in character"(Giddens, 1992: 45). Intimacy is fostered primarily through closeness with the mind, the mental self-identity. This is contrary to a lustful closeness with the body, what he terms "lust" and "earthy sexuality." Intimacy in a relationship relies on

"mutual disclosure" (Giddens, 1992: 6) so that the authentic selves drive the aforementioned psychic communication. This psychic communication means that "the other, by being who he or she is, answers a lack which the individual does not even necessarily recognize—until the love relation is initiated. And this lack is directly to do with self-identity: in some sense, the flawed individual is made whole" (Giddens, 1992: 45). In other words, Giddens believes that intimacy, and therefore the ideal romantic love, stems from a need for another fully realized identity to complete one's self-identity. Giddens' theory of romance assumes that the self is incomplete without romantic intimacy.

Giddens's theory of romance supposes that 1.) the self is incomplete, and needs another self to be complete and 2.) the melding of authentic selves to generate pure intimacy requires absolute self-disclosure. Whether or not this notion of pure romance as intimacy is upheld in contemporary searches for romantic love on dating apps will be discussed in the analysis.

Giddens's *The Transformation of Intimacy* emphasizes how notions of romance alter over time, and these notions are related to changes in sexual freedom, gender roles, and hierarchical femininities. His theories are essential when thinking about how notions of romance and sexuality are conceptualized today as a result of dating app technologies.

Challenges of Studying New Technologies

Constructing a literature review has been challenging due to the fact that dating apps are an extremely new technological frontier. Little scholarly research has been done on dating apps themselves, despite the large amount of journalistic media covering them. (This excludes Grindr. In the past few years Grindr has been addressed more in media and sociological studies, but this is because of the fact that it relates to cruising and is important to a sexual minority.) Much of the research done has conflated online dating and dating apps, exemplified through the 2013 Pew

Research Center study done on online dating. The 2016 Pew Research Center study does contribute to findings about dating apps, but this is more in terms of who uses them in American society rather than the meaning they have for those inhabiting the virtual space. Much of the discourse on dating apps relies on findings about patterns on online dating, relating to attraction. Therefore, theories of the self, identity and related areas must be applied to these technologies to even begin at unpacking the meaning dating apps have for users and society as a whole. Yet this gap in scholarly attention is also an opportunity; it means that there are fresh perspectives to be taken on whatever new data can be collected. It is to this opportunity that the present study aspires to address, and from several perspectives.

Not only is there space in the field for a multidisciplinary gender studies and sociological approach to dating apps, but the fact remains that there has been but little research done on dating apps. Therefore, this research project has value in that it can be among the contributions to understanding the way contemporary courtship plays out through the particularities of dating app images and, in doing so, how notions of identity are affected.

IV. Methodology

Methodology

Since the social phenomenon of dating apps was the object of study, sociological epistemologies and methods were employed in this project. However, feminist methodologies were also utilized for the study design in order to gain insight on dating apps' implications for gender identity. Therefore, a multi-disciplinary approach was exploited.

Complementing the multi-disciplinary approach was the deployment of mixed-methods to tap several layers of meaning; these methods were semi-structured

interviews and an online survey. In the following section, the rationale for the selection of these approaches and methods are presented and justified.

Methodological Justification: Sociological Epistemologies

Firstly, a purely quantitative approach of usage behavior to the research subject was rejected. There are of course quantitative statistics on patterns in online dating and Tinder usage shared on various sites, such as OKCupid's blog or Tinder's twitter feed, but little is available from these sources about how people actually use and react to dating app technologies. Moreover, little quantitative research is extant in terms of the degree users find them personally meaningful; this is the case both concerning their quest to meet others or terms of curating their own identity on their profile. Additionally, a weakness is that these statistics are generated using private data that the dating app companies collect. As Rudder (2014) explains, many of these companies bring researchers in to look at the data and see how trends/patterns can be used for the companies' advantage. They are unlikely to release datasets, or even certain types of summaries, as it would be a corporate disadvantage. Such data or interpretive pieces could harm their business operations, or even endanger the continued employment of their data analysts. Because of this, the researcher could only examine how people conceptualize their use of the technology.

Additionally, quantitative approaches in sociology have been developed from their use in the natural sciences. Methodologies for the natural sciences may not be helpful in the study of social experiences, as natural sciences deal with matter. Because of matter's lack of consciousness, results of quantitative experiments can be explained as a reaction to external stimuli. "It is compelled to react in this way

because its behaviour (*sic*) is essentially meaningless" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 871). On the other hand, human beings have consciousness and construct their social reality by seeing, interpreting, and experiencing "the world in terms of meanings" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 871). Meanings are not independent or static; rather, they are constructed and reconstructed through social action (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 871). For example, as Haralambos and Holborn point out, a human does not immediately stop if he or she sees the stimulus red light while driving. They examine it to see if it is a traffic light, meaning stop, or perhaps it is a decorative Christmas light. They can interpret the meaning of the environment and what it means in terms of social cues. This means, *inter alia*, that humans who are responding to a stimulus (in this case a survey question) may alter their responses due to social desirability`, self-presentation, anticipated rewards, lack of self-knowledge, poor memory, and a host of other factors.

Finally, the use of solely quantitative methods in social science research was rejected because they assume data can lend an absolute, generalizable truth, which goes against the researcher's postmodern principles. Postmodernists "tend to reject the belief that researchers can ever discover some objective truth about the social world…they believe that all that can be done is to examine the social world" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 865-866) and deconstruct it due to all the competing views of the social world. Notions of an absolute truth, as discourses of scientific truth have often had negative consequences for women (see next section). However, postmodern ideology often overlooks the impact phenomena have on real lives. Tinder is used by real people, and impacting them in terms of how they conceive of themselves and resultingly move through the social world.

The investigation is not considering the self to be a stable category, but rather, one that is constructed and changing over time. The advent of new technologies such as Tinder alter and help re-make notions of the self. In this case, gender identity is re-made through images- images selected as supposed representations of the self that get put on one's profile, other categories of images of you/of yourself that get rejected as not being truthful to your inner self, and images of other's selves, curated on their profile, being rejected.

Despite the serious limitations outlined above, there are some benefits to collecting survey and other self-response data, and in this light such data are utilized in the present study. In addition, it was decided to conduct research through a qualitative methodology because it allows for users/research participants to make meaning through discourse and self-reflection and allows for patterns in behavior and data to be expressed on user's own terms. Open-ended questions allow for rich, interesting data on how people perceive dating apps' social effects and personal impact.

The researcher assumes that there is something truthful, certainly in a subjective sense, about their observations due to the use of established research methodologies. For the purpose of this project, the investigator took into account (from a postmodernism perspective) how notions of the self are structured though language. However, it is also important to consider how people's thoughts and behaviors are especially meaningful in understanding the influence of a social phenomenon such as dating apps on communication and identity. Therefore, an interpretive sociological approach was used in this project to study dating apps. According to Haralambos and Holborn, interpretive sociologists believe that "social action can only be understood by interpreting the meanings and motives on which it is

based" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 871). Due to their richness and depth, qualitative data best allow researchers to "interpret the meanings that lie behind social action" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 871).

Yet there is a concern that researchers push their own ideas on to their research subject through the system of interpretation. It is for this reason that feminist methodologies were considered in this research. By engaging complementary methodologies, it is hoped that some of the various weaknesses and blindspots of each methodology will be compensated by the strengths of the other.

Methodological Justification: Feminist Methodologies and Epistemologies

Feminist Epistemology is a theory of knowledge informed by feminist values and principles. Hammersley (1992) summarized main features of feminist methodology, emphasizing that "feminist research is successful when it raises consciousness and transforms gendered relations" (Bilton, et al., 2002: 462). This study supports this goal of transforming gendered relations by analyzing the way contemporary courtship exposes potentially unequal expectations related to gender identity. The awareness of a problem is an essential first step to addressing it.

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contemporary courtship exposes potentially unequal expectations related to gender identity. The awareness of a problem is an essential first step to addressing it.

A grounded theory approach has also often been used in feminist work. Grounded theory approaches use data generated from interviews to create codes that construct themes. Themes may be expanded upon to construct or support theoretical notions (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Pfeffer 2014: 17-18) through conceptual analysis. The coding of statements is an interpretive act, and relies upon an interpretive approach established within sociology. Coding focuses on how one's perception of reality is constructed through language and discourse, but the data is generated from meanings the subjects construct for themselves.

Selected feminist methodologies of intersectionality were employed in addition to reflexivity and thematic conceptual analysis through interviews in order to give agency to research subjects and let them articulate their experiences in their own terms.

Selected Methodology and Method

As noted above, this project is situated within feminist gender studies and sociology—two disciplines to get a nuanced picture. Likewise, two methods were used in order to triangulate the data.

Cohen and Manion (2000) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint." In the project, this standpoint is through two methods. However, the analysis triangulated in the sense that Hammersley defines it, where "quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to cross-check the

findings produced by the other methods. So, for example, the findings produced in a small number of in-depth interviews might be checked by administering questionnaires to a larger sample of people" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: 925). The survey is multi-method in that qualitative and quantitative data will be juxtaposed to compare and confirm meanings. More specifically, the patterns of rich subjectivities revealed in the interviews will be compared with those of a large numbers of people sharing shorter statements on their thoughts. A qualitative approach is utilized broadly, but with some quantitative elements to contextualize comparative findings.

Feminist methodologies of reflexivity and thematic conceptual analysis were employed within an interpretive, social constructionist approach to understand how experiences of dating apps shape personal notions of identity. Attention was paid to how identity is located in the social world, especially through gender, language, discourses, and meanings derived from interactions. These forms of qualitative analysis were performed through analyzing qualitative responses in the surveys and interviews using conceptual thematic coding based on a grounded theory approach (Gibbs, 2007; Pfeffer 2014)

The method of analyzing the qualitative data follows Pfeffer's example of a queer sociological approach, similar research goals of developing "a deeper understanding for how participants construct their social worlds through everyday actions and interactions" (Pfeffer, 2014: 14) were shared. Pfeffer seeks this approach to study trans lives and families, but it is also useful in thinking about how the social world is constructed through dating apps interactions and use.

The choice of methodology is not only relevant to the methods chosen to conduct the research, but also the questions asked in the survey. The study took steps

to avoid making assumptions about gender categories; rather, as pointed out above, respondents were allowed to self-identify their gender and look at the way it is constructed through social practices on dating apps. This project approached gender intersectionally by asking demographic information to investigate how economics, class, and race all contribute to expressions of gender.

Reflexivity is employed in this work by focusing on what picture of reality can produced for some, perhaps even the majority. However, the focus on subjective experiences of dating apps meant that there were contradictions in the way people experienced them, so the conclusions can only be applicable within context. Yet a result of uniformity would be yet more surprising, and dubious, given the rich history and analyses of the various epistemologies highlighting the individuality and subjectivity of the lived experience.

Table 1. Research Paradigm

Epistemology	- feminist - sociological
Methodology	- social constructionist - interpretive - constructivist grounded theory - triangulation
Data Collection Methods	- qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted via Skype - survey with qualitative and quantitative questions distributed online
Data Analysis Approach	- focus on conceptual analysis - grounded theory: in vivo coding, thematic coding, theoretical coding

Theoretical Framework in Analysis	- Giddens' theories of romance - theories of gender, especially Connell

Methods

The study used a mixed-methods approach. A survey was distributed online and interviews were conducted over Skype. The overall sample's age range ended up being composed exclusively of 18-29 year olds, despite the survey being available to anyone over 18. However, the ages of respondents reflect roughly the typical user of the apps. As Smith points out, "22% of 18- to 24-year-olds now report using mobile dating apps, a more than fourfold increase from…2013. These young adults are now more likely than any other age group to use mobile dating apps" (Smith, 2016). The requirements to be in the study were 1) The participant had to be over 18 and 2) The participant had to be living in America for at least 6 months in the past 4 years (see consent forms in Appendix A and B). It was made clear in the consent forms and questions that participants were being asked specifically about their experiences of dating apps in America.

Due to the snowball sampling, the sample was also limited to New York City and its surrounding tri-state area. Most respondents had a physical connection to New York City by currently residing there, having attended school there, or being from the area. Therefore, the implications of responses were considered in the social sphere of New York City and its environment. Being from the tri-state area and having lived in New York City for a few years, the researcher's position allowed her to comprehend

codes, cues, and recognize social implications as they pertained to the City specifically in the interviews.

Online Survey

The survey software used was Google Forms. Before circulating the final survey, a pilot survey was distributed online via Facebook. This pre-test was to determine if there was confusion amongst the questions and to make sure the software was running properly. 15 people responded to the pilot, which was distributed from March 12 to 14, 2016. At the end of the pilot, respondents were asked in an open-ended question to learn if they had anything else they would like to say about the survey, themselves, gender, or courtship in regard to dating apps. This open-ended question was offered to see if there were major or over-looked issues, but no significant issues or concerns were expressed. But one result of the pilot was the addition of a drop-down option in which respondents had to specify being from the USA; this was done because the initial questions overlooked the possibility of people living in the USA but not being from the country. Additionally, a question was added asking respondents what gender their dating app was set to match with (even though they were already asked a demographic question about sexuality). This was done since a comment on the pilot expressed that a user identifies as bisexual but only looked for one gender on dating apps.

The final version of the survey was distributed through snowball sampling with numerous entry points. These entry points included multiple Facebook profiles, U.S. university student organization email newsletters, and Tumblr blogs. Other distribution entry points were attempted, such as through departments in universities

and alumnae networks and through Tinder, but these proved to be unsuccessful. The survey was distributed from March 22, 2016 to May 18, 2016. 86 people responded to the survey, 74 of which fit the initial conditions of being over 18 and being either American or having lived in America for at least six months in the past four years (see survey consent form (Appendix A) and responses (Appendix G). Those people who did not fit the aforementioned conditions could not take more of the survey beyond these two screening questions. Once again, the survey specified that the participants were being asked specifically about their experiences in the United States. The survey took about 10 minutes to complete.

Question types were a mix of qualitative and quantitative in order to get varied kinds of data. There were open-ended responses, Likert scale answers, checkboxes, and simple yes/no multiple choice (for all of the survey responses, see Appendix G). However, the open-ended responses were what were primarily featured in the analysis. The open-ended responses were also compared with interview responses in order to triangulate themes. It seemed that the open-ended questions particularly engaged the interest of respondents, as they often filled them in with lengthy, detailed answers.

Below are the basic demographics of survey participants. For a more detailed breakdown of demographic information, see Appendix G.

Table 2: Basic demographics of survey participants

Basic demographics of survey participants (86 respondents total)		
Age (66 responses) 100% respondents aged 18-29	**Number of Participants**	**Percentage of Sample**

18	2	3%
19	3	4.5%
20	4	6.1%
21	27	40.9%
22	13	19.7%
23	8	12.1%
24	2	3%
25	2	3%
26	1	1.5%
27	0	0%
28	3	4.5%
29	1	1.5%
Gender (74 responses)		
Women	55	74.3%
Men	16	21.6%
Genderqueer/non-binary	3	4.1%
Sexuality (73 responses)		
Heterosexual	45	61.6%
Homosexual	6	8.2%
Bisexual	13	17.8%
Pansexual	2	2.7%
Asexual	1	1.4%
Other	6	8.2%
Race (64 responses)		
White/Caucasian	43	67.1%
White/Jewish	2	3.1%
Latina	2	3.1%
Hispanic	1	1.5%
South Asian	3	1.5%
Asian	2	3.1%
Black	2	3.1%
Black/African American	1	1.5%
Eurasian	1	1.5%
Middle Eastern	2	3.1%
Multiracial	1	1.5%
Multiracial (Indian and Danish)	1	1.5%
Multiracial (Half Caucasian, Half	1	1.5%
Middle Eastern (Turkish)	1	1.5%
Other	1	1.5%
Religion (73 responses)		
Christian	15	20.5%
Muslim	3	4.1%
Jewish	15	20.5%
Hindu	0	0%
Buddhist	0	0%
Atheist	14	19.2%
Agnostic	20	27.4%
Other	6	8.2%

Divulging demographic information was optional. Participants selected from pre-determined categories of gender, age, and sexuality, and religion, along with options of "other." However, it was decided that the race demographic category be fill-in format, as race is a complex identity. The US census has almost never

measured race in the same way each time around, and many people change their race category each decade that the census taken (Cohn, 2014). Therefore, it seemed more prudent to just let participants self-identify.

In the sample of survey participants, the racial makeup was mostly white (67.1%). 55 (74.3%) of the respondents identified as women, 16 (21.6%) as men, and 3 (4.1%) as genderqueer, so the sample was skewed toward women. There was a mix of sexualities, with the majority (61.6%) identifying as heterosexual. This study neglected to add queer as a sexuality category, so perhaps this accounts for large amount of people identifying as "other." Respondents' ages ranged from 18-29, as noted earlier. They were mostly students, with 75.7% currently enrolled in a university. Due to the range of ages and universities listed, it seems that the students were both graduate and undergraduates.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Six interviews were also conducted with volunteers via Skype. Volunteers were recruited from the final online survey. Volunteers also signed a consent form before the interview took place (see Appendix B). Interviewees were told that the interviews would last approximately 20 minutes. In actuality, the interviews ranged from 15-30 minutes. Interviews were conducted from May 5 to 13, 2016.

The interviewees were asked questions addressing topics such as how they choose images on their profile, how they choose who to match with, and what their experiences of dating app communication with other users were like. The list of questions interviewees were asked is found in Appendix C. As the interviews were in a semi-structured style, these questions were not necessarily asked in the order they

are listed. In most cases, all of these points/questions were addressed either by the interviewer through asking the question or due to being brought up by the interviewee. Follow-up questions were asked about terms interviewees used and ideas they had.

Once interviews had been conducted, conversations were manually transcribed from the audio recording made of the interview. Statements from the interviews were then thematically coded by hand (see sample thematic coding, Appendix F) using grounded theory techniques of conceptual analysis. First, the statements were in vivo coded, resulting in 196 codes. The in vivo codes were then narrowed down into approximately 50 thematic codes. Finally, these thematic codes were sorted into their overarching theoretical concepts such as authenticity, visual literacy, romance, and gender identity. For an example of the coding, see Appendix F. Open-ended responses survey responses were also sorted according to similar thematic codes as those found in the interviews.

For a basic demographic breakdown of participants, see the table below.

Table 3: Basic demographics of interview participants

Basic demographics of interview participants (6 respondents total)	
Age	20 22 [2] 25 29 Age not specified
Gender	Man [3] Woman [2] Nonbinary
Sexuality	Straight [2] Straight/bi Bisexual Homosexual Queer
Race	Caucasian/White [3] Asian Middle eastern Not specified

Religion	Non-religious [3] Agnostic [2] Not specified
Political Affiliation	Left-wing liberal, social democracy Liberal/socialist Liberal/radical politics Independent [2] Center-left
Occupation	Software developer Not specified Student [2] Graduate student Medical student

A demographically diverse interview sample was sought to make sure as much as possible that different facets of identity could be assessed. As mentioned earlier, it also allowed for an intersectional perspective in the analysis. Demographic information was collected before the interviews (see Table 3). Due to particular interest in gender identity and courtship, interviewees that represented a diverse range of genders and sexualities were selected. They also varied in racial and religious identity. However, the interviewee sample was skewed politically, with the majority identifying as left wing. This may be because of the New York City-based scope of the sample, as New York is known for being a city with liberal values.

Their aliases for this project are Samantha, Sanjay, Lana, Tina, Milan, and Kadeen. The interviewees consisted of one gay man (Kadeen), one bisexual man (Sanjay), one heterosexual man (Milan), one heterosexual woman (Samantha), one straight/bisexual woman (Lana, as she expressed her sexual identity), and one queer nonbinary volunteer (Tina). Besides Tina, all the interviewees identified as cisgender. Their ages ranged from 20-29. All interviewees used and primarily discussed Tinder (although they also talked about other dating apps they had rejected) except for Milan, who used Bumble.

An advantage of the survey was its anonymity. People seemed free to make value judgments on kinds of people, behavior, and profiles. Additionally, the researcher's identity as an academic did not appear to have much of an impact. However, with the survey, participants could not be asked follow-up questions about unclear logic or unexplained terms. On the other hand, the interview method allowed for the asking and receiving of rich evidence of specific image codes present on dating app profiles. The study could then get more into the thinking behind action, and users could reflect on meanings and expand on their ideas. Additionally, people could bring up topics that interested them and address them on their own terms, without the restriction of limited question types such as some questions on the survey.

V. Results

In this section, summaries are presented of the relevant results of the survey, followed by an excerpt of the thematic coding of the interviews. Some irrelevant information has been omitted from the answers to the following questions in order to best highlight the themes that garnered large amounts of responses and relate to the topic of this paper. For more detailed data, including all the survey responses and graphs, see Appendix G.

Table 4. Why are you on dating apps?
1. Just to Meet
2. Meeting mainly to date
3. Open to relationship and/or casual sex
4. Meeting solely for casual sex
5. Casual sex in threesomes and open relationships
6. Ambiguous meeting
7. Vanity
8. Entertainment
9. Curiosity
10. Convenience
11. Boredom and Loneliness
12. Confusion

Table 4: Answers to question "Why are you on dating apps?"

Just To Meet
To find people outside of social circles.
To meet people, for conversation
To connect to more people, preferably radically progressives. I am non-monogamous, but sex is not the reason I use dating apps.
To try to meet people
Looking for people to meet
To have fun and meet people, not necessarily to date
To meet interesting people
To meet guys
To meet guys (not typo- was said twice)
Meet new people!
Fun/meet people
Meeting mainly to date
To meet people. To try to find love :(
To meet dates
Looking for someone to date
I am sexually attracted to males and like to go out with them??
To find guys to date
To find a significant other
To meet a significant other.
To find a boyfriend
To find boyfriend
To find somebody to be in a casual relationship with
To meet new people and potentially find a relationship
To meet new people and go on casual dates.
At first i was motivated by a slightly morbid curiosity to understand the climate that allowed for the cringe-worthy screencaps that featured in so much of online journalism, but now I actually would like to date someone, despite my apprehensions about what a relationship based on intermittent chats can really become.
Open to a Relationship and/or Casual Sex
Looking for casual sex and maybe a relationship, meeting new people is always fun though.
To have casual sex and possibly a relationship
I'm looking for a reason to make any sort of IRL interaction. That could mean casual sex, or someone who I see myself with long term. When I log onto these apps, it's actually because I'm looking to get off my phone, to have a connection with somebody. Kinda ironic that I need to use my phone to get there, though.
just as a way of meeting people. i'm not specifically with a relationship or a hookup in mind, but i'd like to meet people and see what i get out of it-- if it's one of those options, i'm down.
Meeting Solely for Casual Sex
To find un-committed relaxed physical relationships without having to keep up the pretense of being interested in something more that is often expected in traditional dating.
Sex
I hope to find someone for mutual pleasure.
Casual Sex in Threesomes and Open Relationships
My partner and I have been in a committed relationship for almost 2 years. We are still very young and, although we love each other, are curious about sex with other people. Dating apps have allowed us to explore sexually independently of one a another without the complications of one partner having sex with someone the other partner knows or is friendly with.
Looking for hookups or thirds in an open relationship
Ambiguous Meeting
To meet new people, find one-night stand
After leaving college, I find it hard to meet people my own age. I would like both more friends and romantic

possibilities. People always advise using dating apps to get settled in a new place.
Find someone I like
Because I'm not dating anyone and as a lesbian it's hard to meet other people
I think that it's a good way to meet people outside of your normal social circles. Like if you're a young person living in a new city by yourself, dating apps aren't terrible for making friends either. While there are some pretty icky people on them, I've met some nice/interesting ones and have made friends actually. Also, I really like hookup culture and casual sex with new partners, but don't want to complicate my personal (actual) relationships with friends by sleeping with our mutual friends/exes/etc. In that way, having an endless stream of potential sexual partners is convenient.
Vanity
Fun, ego boost
To see if people thought I was attractive
I want to meet someone but have little confidence approaching someone random.
It was something to do. To maybe meet someone. To fill my vain need to be desired.
It's hard to meet people after college. Also it's a great confidence boost when you 'match'
Entertainment
For entertainment and socializing
funny/entertaining
For fun
Its fun
For fun
Fun
Mostly for my own amusement as opposed to actually looking
I was on dating apps mostly for fun. It's a great way to meet people, especially in a city. I think it's great that you can kind of get what you're looking for - whether it's dates, hookups or a relationship.
1. It is a social activity to swipe right or left with roommates. 2. It is an easy way to meet people in a new city. 3.Boredom
Curiosity
Just to try them out.
My friends did it
Curiosity
Convenience
Easier and more convenient way to meet men
Too busy
Boredom and Loneliness
I was bored
Boredom and loneliness
boredom; potentially find a date
Confusion
I guess the idea is that I would meet more people through them, but since I don't really do that with them, I'm not sure why.

Table 5. How do you choose your main profile photo?
1. Facebook
2. Feedback from friends (overlap with those who choose Facebook photo with most likes)
3. Recent/Accurate (authentic)
4. Looking Good
5. Looking interest/fun/attractive- personality

Implications of Table 5. How do you choose your main profile photo?
1. Feedback from friends (overlap with those who choose Facebook photo with most likes)
2. Recent/Accurate (authentic)
3. relationship with facebook- self-representation on social media
4. input from others- photos with most facebook likes, consulting with friends

5. "looking good"/attractive
6. recent photos (fear of deception)

Table 5: Answers to question "How do you choose your main profile photo?"

Facebook
My facebook profile picture.
Current profile picture from facebook
I use my profile picture from facebook.
I picked my FB profile photo
The one with most likes
Facebook
from my fb
There are few good pictures of me to choose from, so just my main FB profile pic.
FB profile
A Facebook profile photo usually works well
Usually my FB picture.
My profile picture
Use same as facebook
i use a photo from facebook that a lot of people have liked
It's same as my Facebook profilie photo
Most liked Facebook pic
facebook profile photo
I just used my Facebook profile picture
I don't- I let whatever comes up come up [note: this would come up automatically from Facebook]
Feedback from friends
Most recent usually. I also ask my partner what looks good to her.
from friend's suggestions
ask friends opinion
Well lit front facing picture of my face, and consulting friends
Recent and accurate
Recent and accurate to my current looks
Accurate and flattering shot of my face, no other people in photo
What photo is most current and makes me look best
I chose one that showed my face clearly (and in which I looked nice)
it was a recent good selfie
I choose the photo that is the nicest and also is generally more recent.
Prefer to be alone, as current as possible.
Looking good
A better looking picture.
I choose the ones where I think I look the most attractive to myself
If I look attractive in it
Sexual appeal
A good image of my face, ideally smiling.
I felt I looked the best
I look good
Which one I feel I look the best in
My main photo is sexy but not explicit. In many ways it doesn't look like me-- it's almost an alter ego. I look bitchy, challenging, confident, not someone to be messed with. Most importantly I'm fully clothed.
Whatever I think looks best
Which ever I look prettiest in

A photo I look really good in
Picture I look the best in
Which ever picture is cutest. Not necessarily the sluttiest
Whichever one I look the best
attractiveness
Must be a picture where you can see my face and torso and I look good in it
Good pic of me
Best picture of me dressed up
I chose a photo of myself that I think I look good in that also won't immediately put me in a category or a box or a stereotype. I think I'm an interested and multilayered person (as most people are), and I'd like to think my profile picture will encourage guys to want to continue looking at my profile.
One that is not with other girls. One that I think makes me look good.
My main photo is always good/flattering face shot of only me (like it doesn't have to be a linkedin profile picture or anything like very professional looking)
Looking interesting, fun and attractive
I want to look interesting and attractive
Most interesting photos
Which one looks fun
Facebook photo of me that makes me look interesting but also attractive.
attractive, makes it clear who's profile it is, its not a selfie, it shows i do things and have friends
if it shows off my best features and a little of my personality
Close up of face
I picked a photo where I felt confident about my appearance.
I chose a profile picture from facebook that showed my whole body and usually doing something with friends or something active to associate an idea about who I am with the photo when people see it.
Friendly look, with other people.
Whatever makes me look like i'm not trying too hard.
based on what i like

Table 6. How do users choose other profile images?
There is significance in the fact that some respondents wrote extended responses to this question
1. not looking fat
2. looking good
3. for others vs for self (my favorite vs. one I think girls will like)
4. variety
5. happiness
6. recent/accurate
7. show personality/interests
8. still lots of Facebook overlap

Table 6: Answers to question "How do you choose other profile images?"

Accuracy and Awareness of who is looking:
Sexual appeal
Ones I think girls will like
Made me look interesting
Whatever makes me look like an interesting person
Ones that were recent
Pictures of myself doing things, but where you can still see my face/body clearly. Also, other angles of portraits in different style outfits.
Similar to above but sometimes with other people so they know I have friends lol(earlier response: Prefer to be alone, as current as possible.)
Images showing my body accurately/personality and interests (overlap with looking good and showing personality/interests)

One is goofy; one is of my dog. The last is a friendlier/more genuine picture of me drinking a beer. It's almost candid-- I knew the photo was being taken, but was caught off guard and didn't have enough time to pose.
Choosing for self-interest
I choose my favorite pictures of me
I pick photos of myself that I like, out of my recent FB photos
Pictures that show who I am.
I don't have a lot of pictures of myself on Facebook, so I chose the ones that I felt happy about from those few.
Showing off Personality and/or Interests
I like having a picture with my cat and ones with me traveling.
Pictures that show I travel. Pictures that show I like sports. More good looking pictures.
Try to capture myself in social settings and doing my favorite activities.
Images that demonstrate my interests
usually shows about my life style
Pics that show some aspect of my personality and interests
Complimenting the first photo and presenting different aspects of my personality
Same as above- try to show hobbies and how goofy I am (earlier response: There are few good pictures of me to choose from, so just my main FB profile pic)
Show off hobbies, different hair styles
I chose ones that had my friends in them, ones of me having fun, ones of me being adventurous, and ones of me dressed up
Facebook/Facebook likes
I choose what will get me the most likes TBH.
From my most liked Facebook photos
other Facebook photos
The pictures that have the most likes are usually chosen.
The rest with most likes
Facebook
I just use past Facebook profile pictures.
Good pictures from facebook.
Looking good, thin or happy
most attractive
just trying to look good
Whatever I think I look best in
If I think I look good
there were the only photos I feel I looked good in
the same way (earlier response: if it shows off my best features and a little of my personality)
Good pics
I also look good
Attractiveness
Same as above (earlier response: Which one I feel I look the best in)
Not much thought. At least one full body to prove I'm not fat.
A picture where I look my best.
Ones that I look good in and help me cultivate a certain aesthetic
All thin, attractive, and fun/happy photos
Other better looking picture/those which highlight my interests.
It's a mix of trying to look attractive, cool, down to earth and popular. All at the same time.
Variety
A variety of photos in different lighting/with different people/in different places
they have a good and creative color scheme that reflects my personality
same as above, but in a greater variety to show different sides of myself (earlier response: attractive, makes it clear who's profile it is, its not a selfie, it shows i do things and have friends)

I try to use a range of photos that show my interests or features so that people who won't read my description still get an idea of what I am about.
Variety of looks, so others can see what I look like in different situations.
aiming for variety
They have to show me in a variety of environments/activities, and also I have to look good in them
Happy
Pictures in which I look confident and happy, or in which I can remember feeling that way
Usually Instagram pictures where I look the happiest or the most put together.
No reason/random/etc
Randomly
Randomly
just a feeling
don't have any other images
Depends on my mood.
Same as above (earlier response: I don't- I let whatever comes up come up)
not too personal
Extended responses
I try to think about what pisses me off in other people's profiles. You should have at least 4 photos just so people can get a sense of what you actually look like: -One should have the majority of your body in it. I'm not overweight, but I'm not super skinny and I don't really want to meet up with people who don't like my body type because that's a waste of time, so I err on the side of giving more information in the profile.   -No bikini/underwear photos because they immediately attract creepers. -I try to be doing interesting things in pictures (travelling or camping or something). Or include funny things that might invite conversation. I have a picture from a few years ago where I was dressed as a nurse on halloween and holding a stethoscope up to a pie. It sounds silly, but it's a cute picture of me and it gives people an opening to talk about something, so I don't plan on taking it down any time soon. -Group photos are fine, but it should be apparent who you are and they should show you off--not your frat/sorority/entire family -I hate selfies in general and *especially* mirror selfies.
First and foremost, I pick photos that I look good in (as a not-so-photogenic person, that already limits my options pretty tightly). Then I pick a range of pictures that I think represent my personality and my interests. For example, I like to go out, sing/am passionate about music, am close with my family, and I've been told I have a sort of funny and quirky personality. So one or two photos feature me out with friends or wearing something I would normally wear out at a bar or party on weekends, one or two photos of me with my brother or family members, a photo of my performing/singing, and two photos that I think are silly and/or represent my personality well.

What constitutes a bad profile?

Many responses indicate multiple features that constitute a bad profile. It was challenging to put them under one particular theme they addressed when they addressed multiple ones. There was a lot of overlap in between themes in terms of responses. Therefore, all the responses have been put together together, generally organized thematically. The overlaps are mixed in with one of the topics they addressed. The fact that there are numerous overlaps between themes suggest shared opinions on what an unpopular, unsuccessful profile is. Responses were thematically coded based on their common themes. Many of the themes overlap under larger theoretical concepts. For example, language of creepiness also suggests sexual aggressiveness and concerns about suspicious ambiguity. All of this falls under the umbrella of discourse around safety and authenticity—making sure the person you are talking to is real.

Larger Theoretical Concepts Table 7 responses address:
    Safety
    Authenticity (inauthentic, ambiguous, incomplete Profiles)
    Vanity/Superficiality
    Personality (racist, elitist, having friends)

Table 7: Answer to question "What constitutes a bad profile?"

Overt Masculinities
Shirtless photos
Shirtless
Photos usually. If they're stupid (like drinking or doing drugs) or just lame (shirtless guys) then it's a big no for me.
-mirror selfies, shirtless selfies, guns, girlfriend, child
I like to think of profiles more as representations of people. If a dude is shirtless in a picture, or has a couple of selfies, or has a photo of himself at the gym or doing something seemingly douchey, I don't really think he'd be the type of person I would get along with. So it's not that that's a bad profile, it's that his profile shows me the type of person he will probably be. That said, it's hard to tell what type of person someone is based on a few photos and sometimes words written. But when I'm going through, I usually think: would a guy that I wanna hang out with, hook up with, date, or whatever post something like this? If the answer is no, I usually swipe left
Not enough clothing, guns, never smiling..
Creepiness (similar/suggestive of overly sexual, but not the same)
creepiness
Creepy seeming (sleazy description) or shirtless pics.
Overly Sexual or Aggressive
overly sexual
Someone who is overly pushy and forward.
Obviously just wants to hook up or has terrible photos and spelling
no personal info, no jokes, little personality, very sexual comments
Too much posing. When it comes off as sexual.
Sexually abrasive words. Dick pictures. Pictures of just body parts.
Overly informative, unflattering pictures, confrontational bio, sexually explicit photos, or not enough information.
Derogatory
Someone who uses corny jokes, or says something sexist, or has a lot of grammatical errors in the bio.
Derogatory or offensive remarks in your bio
Racist/sexist/looksist/ageist content or no information at all
Pictures that are not nicely taken, when men say derogatory things about women or what they would like to do to women, swearing on their profile
"don't message me if..."
Bad pictures (can't see face), no bio or description, bio or description is racist
Blank profiles. Profiles that shame others. Profiles that list all of the things the person likes to consume. Profiles that tell the reader who they should be, but say nothing about themselves. Racist or ageist profiles. To a lesser extent, profiles that carefully avoid saying anything controversial.
A bad profile is just one that shows qualities I don't like (using emojis, sexist jokes, elitist pictures of dudes on boats) or one that tries to obscure information (you can't tell who the person in the group shot)
I think the main issue is that like people don't seem to get that this is public and say stupid shit. I tend to be pretty conservative in my social media use in general, but I think like with anything on the internet/dating app profiles, "If I were running for president, could I explain this away?" and if I can't, then I don't post it or say it. Dating is like a job market in some ways, and this is your primary screening before an interview. Do you want to look stupid in an interview? No. So don't look stupid in your dating app profile.
Ambiguous (Implication: Inauthentic)
Little to no information, weird photos (once saw someone's selfie from the toilet)
Nothing on it
Poor quality, suspicious, or otherwise unclear photos. No description. Rudeness.
Not info information, dishonesty
Little to no information at all/just a photo
No picture, no Biography

No picture, or no information
1 picture or less, no description
blank or no pictures
Not filled out
No pics
Few pictures, pictures that make it so you can't tell who is the profile holder, no description, annoyingly in-your-face or typical descriptions.
no pictures, doesn't talk
no photo
When there is no face; when you can't tell which person in a group picture has the profile; a shirtless guy; when guys have their Instagram and snapchat handle; too many emojis in the description
Not enough pictures of the person's face.
not many pictures. or pictures not of the face
Someone who seems very superficial or not acting as themselves.
lack of variety
One that is bland
Bad Photos or No Information
A bad bio
Bad photos - blurry, too many people, dark, weird angles; no info on themselves
Only pictures, no actual information about the person
No info in the bio, bad photos
Bad photos of the person where you can't see their face clearly
Not enough photos, weird photos, or a bad bio
Poor grammar and lack of information
ugly, no friends, no interests
Inaccuracy
tacky, rude, boring, pictures don't provide variety/aren't accurate.
False information.
men cuddling puppies in a disingenuous way
Group Photos
Zero full body shot. All group pics where you can't tell who is who. I swipe left on both of these.
group photos when I can't tell who you are
Group photo is the first photo, or even worse, the first few photos are group photos
Car pictures as the default profile picture. Bad spelling. Having all buddy pictures and not being able to tell who the guy is.
Blurry photos, photos that include too many other people. I like when people share something interesting/funny about themselves that can be a conversation starter.
Contrived or Egotistical
too polished, too much text, or photos of white people with african children and/or animals
the person is clearly vain and trying too hard
photos of your humanitarian work
When 5/5 of the pictures are selfies taken in the same room / lighting / area. This suggests narcissism and the sort of confidence that probably doesn't translate to real life anyway. I hate that.
Sounding over-confident in their own self, in terms of how much other people like them. Ignorance.
where you look full of yourself - in the case of men, a mirror selfie.
too self absorbed or self deprecating, not enough info
Too cocky
too wordy, too obnoxious, too egotistical
Someone who acts like an asshole or thinks they're better than this...
People Who Look Taken
when the description box is blank and they have pictures of them drinking or really close to someone of an opposite gender.
One with a persons arm around someone like they're already hooking up (i.e. a guy with his arm around a girl)
No Opinion
I'm not sure if I have clear criteria for a bad profile. I evaluate a profile impressionistically. There is not a conscious consistent criterion that I use. Either I feel like I want to match or I don't.

Table 8: Answers to question "What annoys you about things other people do on their profiles?"

Selfies or Self-admiration
One selfie of yourself on a couch hanging out or at a party is fine, but like ALL your pictures should not be selfies. That tells me that you have no friends or are kind of a raging narcissist.
selfies
Mirror selfies: they are not flattering for anyone. If you lift up your shirt to show off your abs, I want to punch you.
selfies, shirtless photos, only photos of themselves out drinking (i would hope they have more of a personality than just that!)
duckfaces, selfies, excessive make-up, lack of content
When there is too many pictures of the person's face.
Pouting, not replying after matching.
Group Photos
Only shirtless pics, long bios, over usage of emojis, bad pictures, only group photos where everyone looks alike
No bio, too many group pictures, bragging in the bio
Group photo is the first photo, or even worse, the first few photos are group photos
Overt Masculinities
Arrogant profiles, too many shirtless selfies, lack of originality
shirtless photos
shirtless bathroom selfies, degrading quotes or sayings
Profiles that are an abundance of shirtless pictures are a tad annoying, while offensive remarks or quotes followed by a semi-apology or disclaimer (especially regarding feminism) outright piss me off.
selfies, shirtless photos, only photos of themselves out drinking (i would hope they have more of a personality than just that!)
shirtless photos
Post pictures of themselves with dead animals (aka hunting, fishing)
frat photos
Drinking and partying
drinking and partying pictures.
Car pictures as the default profile picture. Bad spelling. Having all buddy pictures and not being able to tell who the guy is. All partying pictures.
Men who have shirtless profiles, men who are drinking heavily, men who do not appear to have any friends, men who are not dressed well.
Humanitarianism and Travelling
posing with african children or tigers; saying things like "I want an /intelligent/ girl who can hold a conversation" or other bs
"Humanitarians"
Machu Picchu pics. Jumping in the air pic. List of demands in their bio. Saying "I love to travel"... Everyone does! Glamour or model like pics.
Lack of Self-Expression
Listing your boring ass interests (Likes: Coffee, Burritos, Breathing, Music)
Hobbies include things that aren't hobbies (i.e. watching TV, Netflix, being outside, listening to music) Shows the person is boring (or at least uncreative).
Cliche
Specifics: Height, Weight, or MBTI
Put their height, zodiac sign, other useless details
Very vain things like height, or humble bragging about being in the olympics.
listing their height or having pictures with girls I don't need to know your height, ok? I don't need to know your weight. So please don't list these things.
stop putting your MBTI results in your profile
Overly Sexual
say vulgarities
make sexual references
too many sexual messages
Pick up lines
Inauthentic
Try to pretend that they are something they're not.
lie!
Egotistical
Some people act as though they're "better" than the app, even though they're still on it
Bragging.Feshness; honesty.
Show off
Try way too hard
Have cars and guns

Photos that show off ripped or toned bodies, which creates a sense of that there isn't anything else to that person.
Just showcasing body parts.
when they look douchy and naked
Showing too much skin, people who seem they know best

<div align="center"><i>Unclear Motives</i></div>

Say that they're only looking for friends (Why are they on a dating app?)
"Not here for hookups" in the description on an app designed for hookups. Seems fake.

<div align="center"><i>Unconventional or Inflammatory Social Conduct</i></div>

They list all of their various problems and fetishes -- you wouldn't start a conversation with that right away, why write it on a profile? It makes more sense for that to come up in further conversation.
Not filling it in, images of drunkeness, poses with guns, no clear face or body photos
People use weird pictures.
When people are rude on their profiles
Not using a real image or not enough information. -or couples...couples are the worst.

<div align="center"><i>Evidence of Prejudice</i></div>

Racism!
Nothing really because if people say things that I don't like ("under 6 foot need not apply" etc) I know not to match with them.

<div align="center"><i>Perceived Lack of Effort</i></div>

They have no written information about them.
Writing "just ask!" In their about me section
When they just put "ask me in person ;)"
Not putting enough infor or effort in

<div align="center"><i>Attempts at Humor</i></div>

Try to be funny and fail
fake reviews, super long bios, talking about feelings, saying they hate certain people or characteristics

<div align="center"><i>False Sentimentality</i></div>

poems that are completely meaningless

<div align="center"><i>Perceived Lack of Awareness or Intelligence</i></div>

spell tings like dis
Stupid photos mostly

<div align="center"><i>No Opinion</i></div>

nothing really annoys me
Nothing really, people should use dating apps as they see fit

<div align="center"><i>Extended Responses</i></div>

Shaming is a big problem, so is ageism. Overt racism is not common in the USA. I don't like people advertising sexual services (including SB/SD arrangements). If the person needs financial help, I don't mind them saying that, but that's like 0.1% at most. I don't like bots, that try to direct you to other (usually bogus) websites. I don't like lazy people who say they will only respond to super-likes. Possibly my biggest problem is women trying to hide or misrepresent their body shape. Extraordinarily common (possibly over 50%).
I'll just list my cardinal sins of dating apps--things that are an immediate left swipe: -Misspellings/egregious grammatical errors -Including that you are 420 friendly isn't terrible, but don't make it your entire profile. -oversharing/talking about your recent breakup in your description -Using a lame trope/line that is repeated frequently is awful (I hate the reviews thing unless it's actually original/witty) -When you have no pictures of yourself -When you have only pictures with other people and I can't tell who you are. I assume that you are the ugliest one. -When people have pictures from like middle school on there because they don't actually look at their own profile.

What profiles do users want to match with?

People care about looks on dating apps. However, in Table 9 people mention attractiveness, but in conjunction with personal qualities that are important to them such as genuineness, intelligence, a sense of humor,

Table 9: Answers to question "What constitutes a profile that you would want to match with?"

Clear Profile Pictures/Descriptions/expressions of extroversion- Need for Authenticity
there are multiple pictures and they lists interesting hobbies
I can tell who you are in your pictures

Someone who is funny and looks good. Has information on their profile about themselves.
has friends, cute, does interesting stuff, likes the same music on fb, lives near me, likes animals, has enough pictures of his face and body that i can get a good idea of what he probably looks like
Max # of pictures, varied pictures, decent description, etc.
Someone who looked "normal" in their pictures, seemed intelligent and kind in their bio
Someone with decent quality photos and enough about them that the first conversation is easier
Witty, informative, but not overly intimate, with in-focus, well-lit pictures that include both the person's face and the rest of their body.
Clear and attractive multiple photos of face and body, thoughtful profile
Someone who expresses themselves, and seems to actually want ot connect with other people
Well educated, seems normal, tall
someone who smiles, doesn't take themselves too seriously, a funny and interesting bio
Looks nice
just a good feeling
Nice person, interesting profile, talented, cute pictures
creative interests
Decent looking with a decent quote on his profile.
Hmm that's hard to come up with, because I'd like to think there's a huge amount of diversity in the people and thus in the profiles of the people I'd be interested in. Anything that represents that person, really. In the past, I've matched with people/swiped right on profiles who have photos of themselves with friends, family, pets, in various settings like work or abroad or at home. It doesn't quite matter to me!
a few cute photos, not a lot of text, some clear and somewhat unique interests in common (i.e. bands not everyone in the world has liked on facebook)
Someone who has a lot of common interests and is serious about them.
Variety of photos, a description/intro, satisfactory level of sex appeal
Someone who is attractive and seems like a fun person, especially good jokes on the profile
Someone who seems down to earth and wants to grab a beer. Normal pics. A bio that doesn't take itself too serious.
A wealth of info, nice and not rude
Someone who is good looking and also seems like they're interesting. Common interests are good, but not necessarily required.
Someone who appears down to earth through their description, a pretty smile.
Looks like they know how to have a good fun!
People who say something controversial, especially if it is progressively so. These people are making it clear they are not players, they are not trying to date everyone. They are willing to risk not being liked to find the people that will like them. I also greatly appreciate "proof of body type" pictures that show the woman takes care of herself. If the person identifies as queer (any variant), vegan, or non-monogamous than I almost always try to match them (unless they are obese). I also appreciate cat pictures :)
Nothing specific. Usually something interesting that stands out.
Kind eyes. Eloquent choice of words, but kept brief. Shared interests.
travel, sports, funny
Humor, cuteness
Something that makes me ask questions about the person, their likes and dislikes, what they do for fun, what they're thinking. Not necessarily how good they look in their photos.
Person seems interesting, intelligent, a good person, attractive
Something interesting about them and a nice picture
creative, attractive, things in common
witty description
Someone who shows that they are well educated and/or has a nice profession, someone who looks like they are a sociable person, someone who is dressed well, someone who appears to be outgoing and adventurous
Nice smile
Confidence Something quirky/interesting that sets you apart
Humor, nonchalance, shows that person has some drive, friends, a normal life.
Good photos, funny bio
Someone whose description seems to fit things I'm interested in, someone who fights for social justice issues, someone that I am attracted to, someone who doesn't seem like a predator or overly sexual
- Attractive photos – Bio shows that they are not as shallow as a puddle –Photos showing them doing interesting things
I like people who are concise in their description of themselves and seem to understand that this is a curated performance of a specific part of their identity. Descriptions should not be more than 2-3 sentences. Lists of interests are ok, but they should be like actually unique interests that would give me a real thing to talk about with you/ask about. Wit is good. If you don't look attractive but have a good descriptor it can go pretty far. I really like it when people list the languages they speak because I do that too, and it makes you look twice at people you might normally swipe left on.

Things in Common
Have mutual friends
Good pictures, interesting bio highlighting similar interests, mutual friends
Class
I'm aware that this is a total proxy for class, but I'm pretty intellectual and I like to see that people went to college or list a job that isn't like "BOSS OF UR PUSSY HAHAHA". Travel is also a marker--people of a lower socio-economic status can't afford lavish trips. But like decent travel photos are always a plus because I like to travel, so I know that we'll have something to talk about if we meet in person.
witty, good looking, some clear level of intelligence
cute, intellectual, funny
Educated, goes outside, looks like fun
Seem good looking and smart and funny
Desirable match listed by what they are not
He seems attractive, there is nothing too crazy in his description, no douchey pictures, he isn't wearing vineyard vines and none of the above things that annoy me
Decent Person/Values
person is smiling, doing something they clearly enjoy, seems like they would be a decent person
a decent person
Identity/Personality
Someone who actually told a story about who they are through the text and photos
Authenticity and Personality / Genuine and Honest
One that makes the person seem like there's a real man behind the profile. Something simple that just says "This is me" ...not trying too hard.
Person seems genuine, down to earth, smart, funny is a plus
honesty
someone genuine
One that's thought out and honest - also matching interests.
Honesty about what you're looking for (i.e. Be upfront if you have kids or are married)
Compatibility
Someone compatible with me
Variety of Photos
Someone who has both smiling and non smiling pictures. Someone who has pictures of themselves with friends, or maybe children (but not their children. Maybe a nephew / niece,) someone who goes / went to a good college. Someone who looks like they're already happy, and who wants to spend time with someone else that's happy.
Happiness / Fun
Someone that looks like fun
Just Physical Appearance
Nurse. Or sexy
Looks usualy
No Opinion
I don't have a clear idea of a "good" profile. It's a very impulsive decision

VI. Analysis

When investigating this project, it became clear that respondents addressed numerous themes when reflecting on Tinder and its impact on their lives. It seemed that the theoretical notion tying them all together was the idea of authenticity. Why is there such a concern over authentic presentation in dating apps? This study argues that the narratives of authenticity result from 1.) concerns of safety and fear of

deception and 2.) Giddens' theory of romance as a meeting of inner selves, which requires disclosure.

People within the sample age (20-29) are digital natives. They have grown up with social media and the Internet. Therefore they are especially cued to indicators of fake profiles and subtle signs of danger online. This, in addition to an increase in image-based social networks such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, has contributed to a contemporary visual literacy that is structured through authenticity. This analysis investigates and explores romance, stigma (as perpetuated by journalistic media) and self-identity expressed by profile images, and their relationship to authenticity within the space of dating apps.

Networked Technologies and Safety

It is important to reflect on the role networked technologies such as social media websites play when it comes to the establishment of authenticity. Tinder was one of the first dating apps connected to Facebook, perhaps driving its initial popularity. It establishes security through its link to Facebook. This is in contrast with earlier established apps such as Grindr, which is known for its hook-up reputation. As Kadeen puts it:

> *Scruff and Grindr, are more of the sex-geared platform than Tinder is…that is shown by the ability of users to send each other photos, for example. But also,…on Tinder, the fact that it will take your name and Facebook photos, and it'll link it to Facebook, um, a lot of people wouldn't want, wouldn't necessarily want… their sexual practices known. (Kadeen)*

Kadeen's statement implies that Grindr is more anonymous than Tinder, to the point where users can openly share their sexual practices without a risk of being identified.

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In contrast, Tinder's anchor to Facebook means that the identities presented on Tinder are probably real, as it is currently difficult to make a fake Facebook profile that is validated within Facebook's system.

Part of Grindr's effectiveness for promoting hook-ups is the fact that users can privately share photos with one another. However, Tinder does not allow for private sharing of photos, furthering its reputation as a secure place to interact with real people. The only photos Tinder users can put up on their profile come from Facebook, doubling Tinder's appropriate content settings with Facebook's. Tinder is a virtual space that is trusted as full of "real people," which makes users feel free to engage with others on the app, despite the fact they are essentially strangers. Tinder's connection with Facebook contributes to security, as users can trust in identities presented and know they will not be bombarded with potentially inappropriate images. There is a tie between one's use of different social networks and social media such as Facebook and their use of Tinder.

The Facebook profile is also representative of one's social identity. There you have your real life friends, your hobbies, photos of you in your daily life taken by others.

> *And also another thing I like about Tinder is because it's hooked up to your Facebook A) It's harder to fake a profile and B) You get some of the likes on there, and I liked a lot of music back when I was in middle school, so every so often something shows up that they like the same thing and if it's an important thing... then it's a really good sign too. (Tina)*

The data reflects a disconnect with Ansari and Klinenberg's statement "the fact that your interactions on your phone can have such a profound effect on people's impression of you as a person makes it clear that you basically have two selves now—your real-world self and your phone self" (Ansari and Klinenberg, 2015: 47).

In fact, users express a genuine belief that their profiles reflect their inner sense of self.

Authenticity

Earlier research on online dating also shows concern about authenticity when it came to who people were interacting with online. This can be displayed through a juxtaposition of authenticity and risk. In interviews with 29 participants, Couch, Liamputtong and Pitts (2012) investigated "perceived risks and dangers of online dating" (2012: 697).

> *All participants believed that online dating was risky in some way. The risks that participants identified were risks of lies and deceit, sexual risks (including pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and sexual violence), emotional and physical risks, and the risks of encountering dangerous and untrustworthy people online and in person. (Couch 2012: 697)*

One of the main risk of online dating was that of lies and deceit. However, Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs's study on online dating revealed that most participants "reported that they attempted to represent themselves accurately in their profiles and interactions" (Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs 2006). People on dating websites, or at least, the ones researched, had the motivation of presenting themselves authentically.

Overall there is greater of an issue with historic online dating due to a lack of "networkedness" and security coming from a connection to Facebook. Yet the sentiment of displaying an authentic self is still present, with Milan expressing his concern with being as clear as possible about his status as a medical student, rather than a doctor. As he states, "I wanted to make sure that people knew exactly like in which position I was at the time." In order to do this, he made sure not to display any

photos of himself on his profile of him at school wearing medical clothing in case people mistook him for a doctor.

Authenticity plays a primary role in the way people examine images of others as well. The data shows that concern over identity is a preoccupation of dating app users through expressions of ambiguous imagery as a negative occurrence. Ambiguous imagery includes blurry images, group photos and incomplete profiles (Tables 7 and 8). This may be because most of the users in the sample have grown up with the internet and been warned throughout their lives about the dangers of meeting people online.

Concern over deceit and risk may explain why people are so attuned to the subtleties of image codes in profile images. Many participants, when disparaging against bad profiles, mentioned issues of unclear images and clearly meticulously staged photographs and notions of artificiality. Additionally, when mentioning issues relating to safety, many of the "red flags" that alerted users of an unsafe situation was the fact that the identity presented was ambiguous. As Tina describes, "if like, some people only have photos of them doing things, but it's always from the back or in the distance, then that's a sign that they've got a bad face and they're hiding it."

Terminology

When asked how they felt about the term "dating app" versus "hook-up app", interviews supported the argument of this paper, in that dating apps are used to multiple reasons. Responses to the term dating app versus hook-up app spread across the board. Tina found the term hook-up app stigmatizing, saying it was "old people getting confused."

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R: Okay. And what do you feel about the term hook-up app instead of like dating app. Do you know what I mean by dating app, and do you agree to that term?

T: I think that's just uhhh, old people getting confused.

R: Confused?

T: Like, I don't think there's a need. Like when people say the term hook-up app, they are being derogatory. (Tina)

Others felt that they did not know how to categorize dating apps because of the widespread ways they were used. Lana expressed that there was not a single word to encapsulate the complexity of dating apps because of the multiple reasons people use them for, stating "I guess you couldn't really have a name that accurately represents them unless you had a name with a couple sentences in it because there's a lot that goes into it!"

However, within journalistic media both terms have been used. As we can see to the answers to the question "Why are you on dating apps" (Table 4), people are on dating apps for a myriad of reasons. Sometimes they are on them for more than one reason, and some are open to multiple directions their presence on dating apps could go. Perhaps even the term dating app is not the most appropriate one, but it still carries less stigma than the term hook-up app. Some apps such as Siren market themselves as social networks, a neutral term. Some people use dating apps just to meet other people, but there is still the presumption that the initial match is generated through mutual attraction.

To what extent do you agree with the following?

1= strongly disagree   2= slightly disagree   3= neutral   4= slightly agree   5=

strongly   agree

I go on dating apps to meet someone to hook up with.

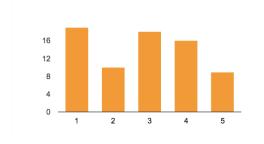|		
strongly disagree: 1	**19**	26.4%
2	**10**	13.9%
3	**18**	25%
4	**16**	22.2%
strongly agree: 5	**9**	12.5%

Figure 1.. Responses to question "To what extend to you agree with the following: I go on dating apps to meet someone to hook-up with."

The media frames dating apps as dangerous sites for the proliferation of STI and HIV, because of the casual nature of hook-ups that are occurring because of the apps. However, most of people's motivations for being on the dating app were to date, to meet, and be otherwise open to relationships or something similar. A very small number of people in the survey revealed themselves to be on dating apps solely for casual sex (5 out of 63 (8%), two of whom were in open relationships)(Table 4), and none of the interviewees were. Additionally, Figure 1 displays how varied opinions were on whether they were on apps to hook up, emphasizing the ambiguity expressed in the interviews. Like the graph, people are split over the issue. This is significant because the media has framed these sites as dangerous for the fact that people are using them to hook-up, but people don't appear to be using them to hook-up.

Journalistic Media and Stigma

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There are many human interest stories about Tinder and its impact on heterosexual dating from sources such as Buzzfeed, Huffington Post, and BBC. These sources stigmatize Tinder and other dating apps as perpetuators of hookup culture. Hookup culture may be perceived as socially taboo because it incorporates casual sex, which goes against the socially conservative notion of procreative sex being for the purpose of marriage.

Concern about the relationship between hookup culture, technology, and STIs also played out in studies of online dating. As Couch, Liamputtong, and Pitts (2012) note in their literature review, early research "done on behaviors of men who have sex with men found that 40% of "men who have sex with men had used the internet to seek sex, and that unprotected anal intercourse was more likely in those who sought out partners online than those who did not" (Liau et al. 2006; Couch, Liamputtong, and Pitts, 2012: 698). At the same time, research that focused on how women used the internet to find sexual partners "found that although women who sought sexual partners online engage in higher risk behaviours than women with no internet partners, the women seeking sex partners from the internet also engaged in more protective behaviours than those who did not use the internet to seek sexual partners" (McFarlane et al. 2004; Couch, Liamputtong, and Pitts, 2012: 698). High risk behaviors do not always mean high risk sexual behaviors. Couch, Liamputtong, and Pitts' observations reveal that studies about internet sex-seeking behavior contradict each other and depend greatly on the identities of the sample.

Despite the clear need for more scholarly research on this issue when it comes to online dating, online dating and dating apps have been continuously framed by the media as places where STIs and HIV are proliferated.

BBC recently published articles essentially disparaging dating apps as sites for sexually transmitted infection (STI) proliferation, with alarming titles such as "Dating apps prove factor in HIV rise among adolescents," "100 Women 2015: How does the brain cope with Tinder?" (Stephens), and "Dating apps increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections, say doctors" (Kelsey 2015). These scare-mongering titles work to construct dating apps, especially gay dating apps, as sites in which HIV is spread due to casual sex despite admission *within the articles* that there is no relationship between dating apps and health issues. Despite the title "Dating apps prove factor in HIV rise among adolescents," BBC news admits that "there is no evidence directly linking apps to HIV infection rates" (2016) in the article, following with the statement of Wing-Sie Cheng, Bangkok Unicef regional advisor for HIV and Aids, that dating apps' "increasing prevalence means there is a "need to sound alarm bells" without citing any evidence that there is a cause for alarm. "Dating apps prove factor in HIV rise" is disproven by its own contributors by the fact that there is no scientific link between dating apps and STIs/HIV rates.

Such articles exemplify how journalistic sources investigate the relationship between dating apps and HIV without commenting on the invisible assumption: that dating apps increased unprotected hookups/casual sex, which then leads higher rates of STIs and HIV. Journalist media tends to blame the technology rather than the behaviors it believes technology is proliferating. Additionally, the examples presented here perpetuate stigma on these behaviors through fear-mongering headlines, when in fact there is not evidence to support any negative relationship between dating apps, hooking up, and STIs. Mainstream media's statements stigmatizing hooking up and risky behaviors contradict how sexuality is actually played out on the apps. This

seems to reveal mainstream journalistic media's conservative values when it comes to casual sex.

Impact of Journalistic Media on Participants

The media has a strong impact on how people use the apps, evidenced by interviewees' mentioning of journalistic media influences when answering questions. Some interviewees point to articles that have contributed to their interpretation of other users' profiles.

> *Uh, like, uh, I read just like- I read a n- I don't' remember where it was, it was in some kind of article that was basically- yeah, just talking about how… you can, ehh, I guess augment, your physical looks by being around people who are also attractive. So like when I saw- when I saw, like a group of four girls and majority of them were attractive I was like: "okay, you know, which one am I looking at and also, like, did she just put up this photo with these other people just to make herself look better?" (Milan)*
>
> *I've read so many articles about like, like group theory and stuff like that. So like, uh, like if you have attractive people in you- with you in a photo, like it kind of like makes you more attractive. Like the cheerleader effect or something like that. So like that was kind of annoying. I- I didn't like that so much. I liked girls who were comfortable just being by themselves, like in the photo, like, and not with someone else. (Milan)*
>
> *I read this article, um, I didn't like decide to do this because I read the article but it kind of makes sense according to, like, what I was doing. It's like- you want a good picture of, like, face and stuff, and you want a picture of your body and also just, like, a picture showing that you're fun. Lana (conceptualizing her choice of profile pictures through a media article*

Additionally, extensive discourse on dating apps in the media have driven people to download the apps themselves.

Yeah that was like: everywhere it's like Tinder, Tinder, Tinder. It wasn't just friends as such but it was a bunch of—it was a lot of things that were going on about Tinder everywhere so I was like yeah, what is this thing? (Sanjay)

Perhaps the some of the answers listing "curiosity" to the question "why are you on dating apps" (Table 4) is a result of mystique generated by extensive media discourse on dating apps.

Harking back to the concept of networked technologies is the fact that 63% of Facebook and Twitter users get news from the social networks (Matsa, 2016) by following news organizations. Additionally, people aged "18-29 are equally as likely to get news from TV as from their cell phones" (API, 2014), and 76% of them (that own a cell phone) "say they used it to get news in the past week" (API, 2014). This method of news consumption illustrates the network between consumptions of media. This interconnectedness between technologies reveals that people's selves are tied to their social media profiles, which then give them insight on the outside world through journalism.

This tie between these technologies is deeply understood by smartphone users, and structures ideas of authenticity. A "real" person is connected to the outside world and to technology: they are perpetually "plugged in." Someone who exists only in a stigmatized, virtual space such as a dating app without having evidence of social media use or knowledge of codes created by digital natives but circulated through the journalistic media is cause for alarm, and users are attune to this.

People's experiences of using dating apps do not exist in a vacuum—the shadow of journalistic media on dating apps affects users in terms of motivating them to get on the app in the first place, as seen in Sanjay's case, to how they interpret others' profiles.

Dating App Stigma

Respondents' deep influence by journalistic media is especially concerning when the media simultaneously stigmatizes dating apps in articles such as the BBC news one mentioned above. Although interviewees seemed to firmly believe that the stigma of online dating and dating apps has been significantly reduced even within their short lifetimes, there seems to be conflict in their feelings about and use of it to hook-up.

As Lana explains:

> *I would say earlier in time, like a couple years ago, there would have been more stigma. Um, but, um now everybody uses it and also I think everybody knows just cause you have Tinder doesn't mean that like… you're (…) like using it to uh- Like everyone kinda knows the function it plays. Um. And I don't know, I don't think it has the stigma at this point. (Lana)*

However, Lana also expresses discomfort about the label of dating apps and the use of them, stating, "I feel like everyone knows what we mean when we say dating apps but it also just kinda sounds lame, you know? Like no one wants to be like (whiny, low-pitched voice) 'Oh I have a dating app.'" Lana's statement supports the Pew finding that "16% of online daters agree with the statement "people who use online dating sites are desperate." (Smith, 2016). However, this Pew finding also displays a reduction in agreement over the years, as it used to be a higher percentage in 2013. Although dating apps are widely used, the stigma of online dating may have somewhat transferred on to dating apps.

This stigma of dating apps may be related to their reputation for being spaces to find casual sex and hook-ups. Some of this stigma is evidenced by the difference between interviewee statements on hooking up and survey respondents' statements.

Survey respondents discussed casual sex and hooking up openly, perhaps due to the anonymity of the online survey (see Table 4: Answers to question "Why are you on dating apps?"). However, in the Skype interviews, subjects seemed coy and reluctant to discuss hooking up openly. This is evidenced in Lana's earlier statement, where she does not compete her thought. She changes direction, stating that "now everybody uses it [Tinder] and also I think everybody knows just cause you have Tinder doesn't mean that like… you're (…) like using it to uh [direction change]- Like everyone kinda knows the function it plays." She avoided discussion of casual sex and hooking up, presuming that other people know Tinder's multiple functions. Like Lana, Sanjay seemed open about dating apps but uncomfortable when discussing hook-ups. It was often alluded to at multiple points in the conversation:

> "And yeah. I have kind of used it to date- ish. Um, so yeah."

> "Well I mean it's it's it's it's it's marketed as a hookup app basically. Not really a dating app as such. But, uh, um, I mean…yeah it's it's it's its—I don't know it it it'll fall somewhere in between. I- I know a lot of people who are on Tinder only for like something more serious, so like more into dating site. And I know a bunch of people who are all there, who are there only to hook-up. "

> Researcher: "And you said some people use it to date, some people use it to hook-up. Do you use it for those reasons as well?" Sanjay: "Yeah, both."

Sanjay's discomfort was clear in his repetition of "it's" and his choice of deflection when discussing "other people" hooking up. He had to be directly asked what he used Tinder for as earlier he ambiguously states "I used it to date-ish." After some gentle probing with different kinds of questions, he eventually admitted that he did indeed use them to hook-up, along with dating. As Lana and Sanjay exemplify, many interviewees were reluctant to discuss hooking up directly and when pressed for the

reasons they themselves use dating apps would often defer to how other people use them, deflect the question, or be very coy when sharing their reasons for being on.

Evidently, the stigma of online dating has been reduced in recent years, exemplified through the Pew 2016 study, interviewees' reflections on dating app stigma in their lives, and the huge numbers of Tinder users increasing daily. However, there is still ground to be fought when it comes to overcoming the issue of stigmatizing dating apps and hook-up culture generally.

Romance

Dating apps have also been stigmatized as superficial due to their image basis. In this assumption, people are implying that people on Tinder select matches based solely on their looks. However, they are no more superficial than other social networks such as Facebook or Instagram, which also rely heavily on images (profile images, shared images, liked images, etc.) People select their profile photos from their Facebook photos that reflect hobbies and values—in other words, their personality. From the evidence presented in the research regarding the care with which people select their own profile images and choose other images to match with, superficiality is not a common thought expressed. Rather, users make meaning through their selected profile images and choice of who to match with. Often, this meaning carries surprisingly conservative notions of romance.

The only mention of real-life dates was just from the interviewees themselves. Survey participants were not asked about the details of dates because the research addressed why people used Tinder as a virtual space, rather than what their dates were like. In the open-ended sections of the survey people did not mention dates of their own volition. Notably, of their last ten matches the majority had either gone on zero or one date, so the majority of people users spoke to on Tinder were never met up

with in real life. Therefore, it is fascinating to study Tinder and users' complex motivations for using it because it seems like it is much more than a dating app. People are not going on it just to get a date.

However, interview respondents did bring up the specifics of Tinder dates they had gone on occasionally, and they were asked about in the interview questions (Appendix C) to glean insight into their motivations for using a dating app. For example, assumptions can be made about their motivations depending on whether they had gone a date or not and the context of their other statements. In the case of Samantha, who met her current boyfriend on Tinder, divulged his profile and tagline when discussing him, not what their date was like. However, this may be because she was being interviewed about dating apps themselves so she felt an urge to stay on topic of his profile. Potentially, it could also be an iteration of a modern romantic idea of the meet-cute.

The meet-cute is a story told to friends or one's social group about how a couple met, and it often involves cliché elements of a "perfect meet-up" or "romantic meet-up." A typical example would be your future partner picking up a dropped book for you in a hallway. There is a social reward of fulfilling a romantic ideal when one tells a meet-cute story to their friends, as opposed to just saying "we met at a bar." Samantha's iteration of her story was as follows:

> *I felt like I did not send any first messages but the one first message I happened to send was to a dude that had a picture of a dog. And I didn't really like what he looked like but I really liked the dog so I was like, "is it wrong to match with somebody just for their dog?" And the dude was like, "Whoa that's mean. Like I matched with you cause you're a stunner." And that's my boyfriend that I've been with for two years.*

The story Samantha told involved a romanticization of their initial conversation based on the contents of his profile picture. She builds the narrative of the meet-cute as

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opposed to downplaying it by saying "we met on Tinder". The fact that Samantha elected to share the meet-cute story rather than just saying "oh, we met on Tinder" reveals Tinder potential to fulfill a romantic ideal. Tinder is blamed for being superficial because it mainly relies on images, but much of what goes on has to do structuring contemporary notions of what is romantic. Tina tells a similar story of modern romance,

> *So my tagline is just like 'eyebrow game seeks eyebrow game'. And basic information… Eyebrow game seeks eyebrow game.' Just like a joke as a nice entry point for people to message me. My boyfriend right now, the first thing he sent me was like a .gif of someone moving their eyebrows.*

Again, the profiles themselves are used in the stories told about dating.

Additionally, the data shows conservative gender roles when it comes to courtship. The data shows men are more likely to initiate conversations with their matches. 7 out of the 9 respondents who 'strongly agree' to the statement "I usually start the conversation with my match" were men. 31 respondents claimed they 'strongly disagreed' with this statement, 30 of whom were women. Of the 27 respondents who claimed they "strongly agree" that they wait for their match to start conversations, 26 were women. Modally, users claim they do not care who initiates conversations. Therefore, although users egoistically claim they do not care who initiates conversations either way, they act out a traditional gender role spelled out by Giddens; the man as the initiator and the woman as recipient.

People are from a very liberal area and interview respondents admitted their political liberalism, yet when thinking about romance, conservatism pervades. It is not romantic; it is not good behavior of an ideal partner, to have photos of people drinking, partying, or at the club, behaviors critiqued in the survey and interviews.

"And then there's people who are just boring, like they just have all like the same photo, basically. Like, it's just like them at a party drinking, them at a party, drinking, them at a party, drinking. I'm like 'you're not a very interesting person then'." Tina

This displays a very conservative notion of romance. The people who answered the survey likely go to clubs themselves. It is just that those are not the images they choose to represent their values, personality, or interests. It is conservatively romantic imagery on dating apps, evidenced through date stories and preferred profile images.

Polyamory and the Threat of Infinite Possibilities

The explicit resistance exhibited in Tables 7 and 8 (What constitutes a bad profile? and What annoys you about things other people do on their profile?) to those who say in their tagline that they are on the dating app just to make friends reveals that within the social conventions of Tinder behavior that it is faux pas to be on there if one is in a relationship or looking to make friends rather than a romantic connection.

What constitutes a bad profile? (Table 7)

One with a persons arm around someone like they're already hooking up (i.e. a guy with his arm around a girl)

when the description box is blank and they have pictures of them drinking or really close to someone of an opposite gender.

What annoys you about things other people do on their profile? (Table 8)

Say that they're only looking for friends (Why are they on a dating app?)

"Not here for hookups" in the description on an app designed for hookups. Seems fake.

These statements mark those people who just want to meet up as against the norm, resulting in strict mediation of social norms when it comes to courtship, namely that one ought to be available romantically to another. Once again, this points to a social conservatism amongst Tinder users in that they are resistant to polyamorous people looking for another partner, meeting asexual people looking to expand their friend group, or people who are new in town who just want to take it slow.

As expressed in Table 4: Answers to question "Why are you on dating apps," some couples are on dating apps to have a threesome or be a part of an open relationship:

> *My partner and I have been in a committed relationship for almost 2 years. We are still very young and, although we love each other, are curious about sex with other people. Dating apps have allowed us to explore sexually independently of one a another without the complications of one partner having sex with someone the other partner knows or is friendly with.*
> *Looking for hookups or thirds in an open relationship*

While other people are looking to expand their social circle:

> *To find people outside of social circles.*
> *To meet people, for conversation*

Despite the existence of apps made especially for that purpose such as 3nder, people still choose to go to the popular space of Tinder to seek out a sexual addition to their relationship. Tinder can be used for contemporary ideas of liberal romance in a way that involves polyamory. However, Lana mentioned to the researcher that she had reinstalled Tinder within her monogamous relationship to make her boyfriend jealous after an argument, mentioning "I deleted it [Tinder] although, um (…) I did undelete it um, (…) because I was mad at my boyfriend" (smiles and laughs). She reinstalled Tinder as a sexual threat to her boyfriend. She did not use language such as "I chatted

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with guys on Tinder to make him jealous" or mention others in her story. She only stuck to the concept that her re-downloading of Tinder was for an emotional reaction on his part due to a threat, not a personal need on her side to flirt with others or actually use Tinder. The simple presence of it on her phone was enough. Lana's story exhibits that Tinder and its vast amount of new potential mates is seen as a sexual threat to relationships. It has to do with this idea that behind Tinder is an unlimited buffet of options.

Behind the screen are multiple threats to the relationship; multiple other options exist behind at any moment as long as the app is installed on one's boyfriend or girlfriend's phone. This concern was reflected in one of survey responses to the question "Is there anything else you would like to say about this survey, yourself, gender, or courtship in regard to dating apps?" (Appendix D) with the question "Does the use and proliferation of dating apps decrease relationship satisfaction?" Additionally, the Pew 2013 study finds that "one-third of internet users (32%) agree with the statement that "online dating keeps people from settling down because they always have options for people to date" (Smith and Duggan, 2013). This reflects the notion that having infinite options of partners is detrimental to relationships because people will always be tempted by the abundance of unexplored choice.

This notion of infinite possibilities of romantic partners is not unique to Tinder to dating apps. It is only novel in that dating apps provide a way to peruse these possibilities from the convenience of your smartphone. In fact, online dating was invented when a romantic notion of infinite possibility really took flight. One could find their mate across the country, or even across the world. This mentality is reinforced by the Pew 2013 survey, finding that "70% of online daters agree that it helps people find a better romantic match because they have access to a wide range of

potential partners (compared with 48% of those who are not online daters)" (Smith and Duggan, 2013). Such ideas support a notion of romance that was purely the soul, purely the personality, purely the identity of that user. It was "pure romance" as Giddens puts it, because the personal selves that are divulged are not the physical selves, they are the mental selves forging a "psychic communication" (1992, 45) The foundation of the relationships formed in long distance cases of online dating, those relationships are not necessarily sexual or lustful, as Giddens says (1992, 45). In that moment of time, that romantic ideal of limitlessness as options was fulfilled, yet now society has stepped away from an idea of romantic distance, making way for dating apps. This change in romantic thought further emphasizes the distinct divide between online dating and dating apps.

Tinder has a mystique because of its popularity, and it seem some young people are concerned about the negative impact its presence has on their current relationships. On the other hand, Ansari and Klinenberg (2015) argue that because we are so overwhelmed with choice and "infinite possibilities, we've cut down our options to people we're attracted to in our neighborhood" (Ansari and Klinenberg, 2015: 118). I am inclined to agree. In a word of infinite choice, when it comes to online dating and dating apps, even in one of the most populated areas of the United States, people still desire someone who is close in proximity. However, this notion of romance is not a result of utilitarianism or a need for economic freedom, but rather a reflection of new notions of authenticity. True romance according to Giddens stems from an authentic divulging of selves. According to the way people use Tinder, people buy into this notion of authenticity when it comes to looking for a romantic partner. However, they also want the convenience for someone who shares their

environment, background, values and a desire for physical closeness as well as mental closeness.

Image Codes and Visual Literacy

As evident from Giddens's work, notions of romance change over time. Technology also changes over time. How do people situate themselves within these changing aspects of their lives within their lifetimes? The solution seems to be through discourses of authenticity. By constructing the way they experience authenticity within romance (knowing the self and knowing the other) and within technology (reflecting the self through social media profiles), people produce a form of stability. By anchoring to authenticity, people make sense of themselves in relation to these two facets of change. On dating apps, expressions of authentic selves are generated through profile images.

Visual literacy is constructed through image codes created by the consumption and distribution of images in multiple technological platforms. What is noteworthy about these image codes is that they structure people's notions of how to perceive and convey authenticity solely through images on their dating app profiles. They share a visual language, with codes and cues that mark identity. Tina expresses this literacy when she says "For me it's all about analyzing a lot. The double-cues that each image shows other people." She goes on to mention how she "can tell what someone's hobbies are, and what their interests are, and what kind of person they like to hang out with, and what kind of basic personality they have based on images alone."

The following statements from Table 6 illustrate the way people's choices of profile picture reflect who they fundamentally feel they are. They choose their profile images for themselves, using language of "I."

Table 6: Answers to question, "How do you choose other profile pictures?"

I choose my favorite pictures of me
I pick photos of myself that I like, out of my recent FB photos
Pictures that show who I am.
I don't have a lot of pictures of myself on Facebook, so I chose the ones that I felt happy about from those few.

Additionally, interviewees also weighed in on how their choice of profile images reflected their hobbies and values.

I tried to use images that represented, like, some values that I have. (Milan)
like traveling and cooking and I'm also like slightly on the political side so that's why I have a picture of the demon- demonstrations. (Sanjay)

Participants perceived their own profiles as accurate micro chasms of their true social self. They aimed for photos that depicted their values, their hobbies, and, of course, looking their very best – they are trying to find a mate, after all.

The idea of presenting a physically attractive image of yourself presents a dilemma for some dating app users. As Lana makes the assumption that, the images of people she is looking at generally are 'slightly better than what they look like in real life'. In her analysis of potential matches she performs the mental task of downgrading them, because she believes they are showing their best, if not their most realistic image of their attractiveness. On the other hand, other users express a deep level of self-management to have a photo that accurately presents their physical appearance. This is interesting because the philosophy behind this choice to look as true to their real life self as possible reflects the romantic notion that they hope to be liked for their true, natural self. They are interested in finding someone that likes them

for who they are, physically, personality wise, and their identity overall. The tension of depicting themselves as more attractive as they are in real life, a trend somewhat jokingly expressed by Tina "that a lot of people's biggest fear is that their date is gonna be fat," stories of physical misrepresentation, especially played up when discussing online dating. The legacy of online dating in terms of inaccurate depictions of users as better than they are in real life perhaps has contributed to this intense self-regulation when it comes to selecting photos that most accurately capture one's physical appearance.

Minimalism as an Aesthetic Ideal

A key aesthetic to the notion of visual literacy is minimalism. It is seen as better to be concise, yet evocative in a short amount of text space, such as the Tinder tagline, or perhaps even Twitter's 140 characters or less.

> *I think it's like funny when some people have like, you know, … these little like*
> *catchphrases or whatever they make. You know what I mean. Like those, uh…*
> *like little one-liners. I don't know- I don't even know what they are really. But*
> *yeah. (Milan)*
> *(on taglines) "you have to have something short and pithy" (Samantha)*

This ability to be concise and minimal on one's profile is attributed to being casual or effortless. Such effortlessness, or being funny effortless, for example, communicates "This person is being authentically funny", "this person is authentically effortless", and so on. However, it takes a great deal of effort to consolidate complex ideas in a few words, often reducing what naturally could be quite long into a few words. This trend of visual literacy and communication perhaps explains why there has been such

a successful transition from online dating, which is extremely text heavy and laden with content, such and images and text, to a "minimalist" dating app, which only shows one photo at a time, and consists of an incredibly small amount of text, and yet has proved popular.

Tina's quote on obvious effort in profiles reveals a dislike for too much effort, which is a turn-off. Her statement is supported by people's descriptions of profile images (Table 5) and of bad profile images (Table 7) as too full of effort.

> *You can just tell who's cool and who's presenting to be cool...There's like an effortlessness to the images. They didn't have to like curate them, because they had like a wealth of images to choose from (Tina)*
> *I think you could tell if someone was struggling to find pictures for their profile, versus if they had a lotta pictures… Yeah, if you have a lot of similar photos, if you have a lotta selfies, if your photos are not high quality, if you don't have good pictures of your face or your body, if their photos don't show them doing any of their interests. Y'know, you can tell, also if they only have a couple of photos. (Tina)*

Table 5: Answers to question "How do you choose your main profile photo?"

> *Whatever makes me look like i'm not trying too hard.*

Being authentically casual and cool is an ideal expressed through the construction of effortlessness on one's profile.

The need to convey a large amount of information in a small space of only five or six photos and a tagline expresses a conservative notion of asceticism. Users are walking a tightrope between modesty and revelation. They choose to go to a space like Tinder, as opposed to a dating app or site where one can put up unlimited amounts of photos; they choose the minimalist aesthetic of Tinder. However if one does not make the most of this minimalist space, it goes against communicative norms and is seen as deceptive (Table 8 result of "not enough effort"), implying that

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even though the space is minimal, people expect it to be easy and simple to fill out. They get frustrated when other users do not make that seemingly small effort. Yet, earlier we mentioned how it takes a great deal to work to stay within a small amount of text or space, and to choose just the right image, the stakes are high. There is tension between the ideal minimalist aesthetic and the expectation to fill out profiles fully within this minimalist aesthetic, and to fill them out well.

To summarize: Dating apps' image basis and communication through image fosters a new visual literacy. This visual literacy plays out through networked image-heavy social technologies such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tinder. As a result, the visual is constructing one's identity. The visual is also affecting notions of romance not only through determining who matches with whom on dating apps, but also by contributing to the belief that images of oneself can convey one's "true" identity, articulated by users in discourses of the "natural" and "authentic." This idea of being attracted to one's true nature is in fact an older, conservative romantic notion despite the portrayals (specifically in journalistic media) of dating apps as new, superficial, hook-up based, and revolutionary in terms of re-defining dating and romance.

VII. Limitations

Sample Limitations

As addressed earlier, the sample was demographically skewed and obviously the non-systematic recruitment of participants meant that in no way could it be construed as a random sample or statistically representative of any group. The fact that it was small further limited any claims to generalizability. Additionally, it must

be noted that the sample was self-selecting. Therefore, participants had an interest in taking part in the study and were perhaps motivated by extreme opinions on dating apps one way or the other. This may explain occasional contradictory experiences of dating apps.

Many were also heterosexual, but this did not seem to have as much of an effect, as sexuality did not appear to have a major role in how people constructed their own profiles and what image codes were deemed as "bad." However, it does serve as a reminder to take into account what more dating apps could do for queer people, as queer participants expressed frustration with the limited gender binary apps forced users to adopt and felt a need to seek out less popular, queer-aimed apps (Her) in some cases.

The sample was limited to the northeast of the U.S., specifically New York City and the tri-state area. Because of the snowball sampling, most respondents had a relationship to New York, either by being from there, currently living there, or having attended a university there. The geographical limitation of the sample made it hard to account for urban/rural divides and varieties of opinions across the U.S.

There was a left-leaning political bias among respondents, especially visible in the way interviewees identified. However, that may be because of the New-York-City based scope of the sample, as New York is known for being a city with liberal values, as evidenced by its election results (Zimmerman, 2008).

Method Limitations

Despite the small sample size, a large amount of data was generated. This large amount of data could have benefitted from quantitative analysis through

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statistical software. However, within the qualitative framework and short timeframe of this project, it was impossible to spend time and resources on looking at the correlative or other relationships among variables. Additionally, qualitative interview thematic coding software could have allowed for the processing of more data, but the researcher did not have access to this research tool. The large amount of data due to the choice of a mixed-methods approach forced a prioritization of the qualitative focus of the project. Therefore, open-ended responses in the survey were primarily used to triangulate findings from the interviews.

Another limitation of the methods was that the researcher was conducting research remotely. In the case of the online survey, remoteness was an advantage. Many interview candidates were reluctant to go into detail about why they were on the app and what happened (especially sexually) once they met up with people. Perhaps the face-to-face aspect of Skype was what caused interviewees to be reluctant in discussing their personal experiences and feelings about hooking up specifically. However, survey respondents, perhaps due to the anonymity of the survey, were more forthcoming with discussions of hooking up.

One of the advantages of the remoteness of Skype interviews was that people from all over the U.S. can be reached in a similar timeframe at times that are convenient for them. This was advantageous in a country as diverse as the U.S. However, the researcher did not use Skype interviews in this way due to the regional scope of the sample.

Despite the perception of Skype interviews as less intimate or ideal an interview method than in-person interviews, Skype was advantageous in that people could speak at convenient times and locations for them, facilitating the scheduling

and conduct of the interviews. Remoteness as a researcher was a limitation, but also had its benefits.

Future Work

Future work could use alternative methods of data collection. Given the regional scope, small sample, and qualitative approach of this project, further projects could expand on these findings by enlarging the scope via a national survey. With a more quantitative approach and larger-scale survey, one could have seen if the themes found in this project replicate across regions in the United States.

If a qualitative approach were maintained in future work, then it may be worth using an alternative method of analyzing people's experiences of dating apps. A focus group may be successful in getting at shared visual codes that contribute to a universal visual literacy. Additionally, observing study participants as they used dating apps and asking about their process could be productive.

Future work could be done by focusing the topic to one app in particular. In this project, the researcher struggled when navigating between recognizing specificity of a particular dating app and making conclusions across dating apps. Focusing on only one app may resolve this issue.

This project was heterosexual-focused in that it looks at apps most popular with heterosexual people, and the sample was skewed in favor of heterosexual people. In future projects looking at dating applications, communication, identity, and notions of romance, Grindr may be worth studying specifically. As mentioned in the introduction, Grindr is unique. Its structure has been successful, but other apps that have similar structures have not been popular. Studying Grindr in relation to the

findings of this project could lend insight on whether visual literacy affects queer courtship in Grindr's particular virtual space.

Additionally, this project focuses on the United States; there may be huge differences in the way dating apps are perceived and used in other countries.

VIII. Conclusion

Dating apps are revolutionary due to their contribution to a contemporary visual literacy and alteration of how young adults communicate; however, they also contribute to conservative notions of romance framed through users' discourses about authenticity.

Authenticity is also significant when thinking about the way dating apps have been framed in a larger social context. Not everyone uses dating apps to hook up, of course, despite the media's hysteria over dating apps facilitating hookups and STI proliferation. The media discourse contributes to continued stigma about meeting romantic partners through technology, although it has improved since earlier years. Many users of dating apps still hold the notion that they will find their Tinderella and live happily ever after; statistics on how contemporary long-term partners meet are in their favor (Cacioppo, 2011: 18814-19; Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012; Smith, 2016). However, dating app users seem to still have anxieties about stigma, perhaps due to concerns about safety. This is seen through obsessive calculations of image codes to validate the authenticity of a person's profile and the identity presented.

Users also re-structure conservative notions of romance through image codes. People look for evidence of mutual interests, personality, and positive character. They consider their profiles reflections of their authentic selves, and opt for disclosure of personality and realistic examples of their physical appearance through their choice of profile pictures. People want someone to like them for who they "truly" are, a

romantic notion. The importance of authenticity is also evidenced through the favoring of minimalist aesthetics such as short taglines or photos of themselves alone, generating a perception of effortlessness that is in fact very much curated.

The impacts of dating app images on courtship mean that people have become so adept at reading image codes to determine aspects of identity that they have constituted a new visual literacy. This differs from historical notions of symbols/codes in images and of representational conventions in art studies, where there was a decisive understanding of image based on a written scholarly code (for example, the pomegranate as a sign of fertility). Rather, this form of communication has developed socially and organically among users without a driving "correct" dictionary of codes developed by an intellectual elite. Digital natives are constructing their own language through technology, and the journalistic media attempts to play at translator.

This work highlights how much more needs to be done in terms of academic study of dating apps specifically, as opposed to grouping them together with studies of online dating. Much current work on online dating looks at attraction from a sociological and psychological science approach (Quiroz, 2013; de Vries, 2010; Finkel, 2012). The little work that has been done distinctly on dating apps often focuses on Grindr. This may be because Grindr has been around since 2009 (Ramos, 2012). The fact that Tinder's widespread use has increased exponentially in the past two years, especially among young singles who are approaching the years in which the average population experiences first marriage, indicates that the visual focus of Tinder will have consequences in terms of communication in the future. It is important that there be greater scholarly focus on Tinder.

Academic works on heterosexual online dating tend to assume essentialist approaches to gender identity and only look on the effects of who matches with whom online. Few studies look at how people's use of dating apps actually has a great effect in constructing their own identity. This can be identity in terms of who they are relative to the larger social world (their self-identity in terms of their values, hobbies,

and social circle) and in terms of expressions of masculinities and femininities that contribute to their gender-role behavior and therefore gender identity. This project also addresses the importance of visual literacy in contemporary communication by identifying specific image codes that are used to express identity.

More scholarly work needs to be done to understand the contribution dating apps, especially Tinder, have made to experiences of the social world. Their contribution may not be positive (depending on one's opinion about the replacement of text with image in personal communication), but it is undeniably significant. Journalistic media cannot be the only source of how dating apps are understood. Its stigmatic discourses tying dating apps to hooking up/casual sex and a supposed resulting increase in HIV/STIs is an unfair view of the varied reasons why people use dating apps.

Tinder transforms the dating game into a literal game in the palm of your hand. Some people are on Tinder "for fun,"(Table 4) and it uses language of play in its messages to users. However, despite its appearance as a playful and fluffy app of little consequence, it provides a space for images to produce and reproduce ideas about gender, identity, and romance through discourses of authenticity. Once again, this leads to who meets each other, who dates each other, and who marries and reproduces with whom in this particular generation of young adults. All these activities yield a world that would be different without their powerful influence on who will be existing in society in the future. Although the longer term implications of these processes are beyond the scope of the current study, it is perhaps worthwhile to close with regard to the value of research on these applications not only for the study of gender, visual communication, and self-identity, but also in terms of the nature of world in the future. Mobile technology and various apps have given new significance to the power of communication. Linking these ideas, it may be seen that it is not only the question of who will be one's next date that is in the palm of users' hand; it is the future of society.

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X. Appendices

Appendix A.

Dating App Survey Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Please read this document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Research Purpose and Procedure
The purpose of this research is to assess how people in America use dating applications and how they interpret dating application profile images.

This research is conducted by Rachel Katz, who is studying for an MPhil in Multi-Disciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Cambridge. It will be used for her dissertation.

Survey
You will be asked to participate in an approximately 10-20 minute online survey about your experience of using dating applications. Topics will include how you choose who you want to indicate your interest to (swiping), how you choose what information and photos to put on your profile, how you use features of the applications, and what relationships (if any) you have had with other users of the application. No preparation is necessary.

Anonymity
Your identity in this study will be anonymous. It will not be possible to know who chose to participate in this study. The survey will NOT collect any personally-identifying data unless you agree to be contacted for an interview. If you agree to be contacted for an interview, your contact information will be stored separately from your survey responses. However, this survey will ask for demographic information. The information you share will be stored securely and will be used only for academic purposes. Study findings will be presented only in summary form.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop participating at any time. You may also refuse to answer any of the questions.

Contact
If you have questions about the study, please contact:
Rachel Katz   Rachel Katz: rak55@cam.ac.uk
Peterhouse   OR   Katie Dow (supervisor): kld52@cam.ac.uk
Trumpington Street
Cambridge
CB2 1RD
United Kingdom

You must be over 18 to complete the study.

The survey is for people who are American or who have lived in America for a prolonged period of at least six months in the last four years.

By continuing on to the survey, you are giving your consent to participate in the study.

Interview Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Please read this document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Research Purpose and Procedure
The purpose of this research is to assess how people in America use dating applications and how they interpret dating application profile images.

This research is conducted by Rachel Katz, who is studying for an MPhil in Multi-Disciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Cambridge. It will be used for her dissertation.

Interview
You are requested to participate in a 20-minute-long, one-on-one Skype/Facetime interview about your experience of using dating applications. Topics will include how you choose who you want to indicate your interest to (swiping), how you choose what information and photos to put on your profile, how you use features of the applications, and what relationships (if any) you have had with other users of the application. No preparation is necessary.

Anonymity
Your identity in this study will be anonymous. It will not be possible to know who chose to participate in this study. The interviewer will ask for demographic information. Your contact information will be stored separately from your interview responses. The information you share will be stored securely and will be used only for academic purposes. Study findings will be presented only in summary form.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop participating at any time. You may also refuse to answer any of the questions. You may withdraw any of your statements during the interview by asking the interviewer during the interview or by emailing the interviewer afterward.

Recording
This interview will be audio-recorded. If you do not wish to be recorded, please inform the researcher and notes will be taken instead. You can request that the recording be stopped at any time during the interview, either temporarily or permanently.

A transcript of the recording will be written up. No names of other identifying information will be included in the transcript. The recordings and the transcript will be separately password protected and will be kept in separate locations from your identifying information.

The recordings will be destroyed in October 2016, after the MPhil graduation. They will not be used for any other purpose beyond the research study.

Contact
If you have questions about the study, please contact:

Rachel Katz   Rachel Katz: rak55@cam.ac.uk
Peterhouse   OR   Katie   Dow   (supervisor):
kld52@cam.ac.uk
Trumpington Street
Cambridge
CB2 1RD
United Kingdom

You will be given a copy of this form whether or not you agree to participate.

If you agree to participate in this study, please <u>sign below</u> and <u>email a copy</u> of the signed document to Rachel Katz at rak55@cam.ac.uk.

Thank you!

AGREEMENT

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure, and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that this interview will be <u>audio-recorded</u>. I understand that I can request that the recording be stopped at any time.

Name (Printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Beginning interviewer statement: Hello. I'm Rachel Katz and I'll be interviewing you today. Just a reminder: the interview will be about 20 minutes long and will be audio recorded. I will also be taking notes. If you want to stop recording or would like to change or retract a statement, please let me know. You can stop the interview at any time.

Interview Questions

1. How do you choose who to match with/who to swipe with?

2. How do you want to come across to a potential match? Does your profile indicate this? How?

3. How do you choose what images to put on your profile?
    Follow up: Please describe your profile photo. What are you wearing? Are you alone in it? Is it just your face or is it your whole body?

4. How do you normally interact with other users? What's a normal chat experience/conversation like?

5. Why do you use dating apps?

6. What do you like about them? What do you not?

7. How long have you been on dating apps for? Which ones do you use? How often do you use them?

8. What do you think about taglines? What's yours? What do you like and not like about the ones you've seen?

9. Have you ever met up with anyone from a dating app or gone on a "Tinder Date"? What was that like?

10. How do you feel about the term "dating app" versus "hookup app" or other terms used?

11. Is there anything else you would like to say or ask me about before we conclude the interview?

Appendix D: Non-essential data: **Answers to question "If you have a favorite dating app, which one is it and why?"**

Tinder
Tinder. I tried Her but it blocked me for being "male" despite being non-binary. Not familiar with the others, but will check them out.
Tinder. It's fun and simple to use
love/ hate tinder. it has the biggest pool of people, but also the most shady
Tinder, bc its the easiest way to narrow down and specify who i want to see
Tinder
Tinder-seems a bit more serious
Tinder, it's the most popular in college
Tinder - the most people are on it and active
Tinder
Tinder because there are so many people on it.
Tinder
tinder b/c most successful
TINDER
Tinder- the simplest, the largest network of young people, and the real OG
Tinder - much classier fold than Grindr
Tinder. Easy to use. Very flexible in terms of how much or how little content you provide
Tinder, most people
Tinder, it seems like it is the most active for straight people (I am straight)
Tinder, for largest audience
Bumble
Bumble simply because the men on the app tend to be well educated and better looking
Bumble. It is very feminist!
Her
Her - more queer women focused than tinder!
Herr is queer friendly.
CoffeeMeetsBagel
Coffee Meets Bagel
Hinge
Hinge. You get to see the other person's education and there are more than 3 photos.
OKCupid (not a dating app)
OKCupid had the most in depth profiles and was my favorite
OkCupid because people actually make an effort on profiles and are more likely to meet in person
OkCupid because you can answer questions to increase your personality descriptions
Other responses
They are all terrible
Depends on the day
I like different apps for different things. Hinge is good for more 'date-y' people generally (it's less sketchy) and Tinder is good for fuckbuddies.
Not really so much a favorite but Tinder is the only one I've really seriously used.

Appendix E: Non-essential data: **Answers to question "Is there anything else you would like to say about this survey, yourself, gender, or courtship in regard to dating apps?"**

Frustrations (Emotions)
Men suck
is it possible to find a decent not shady and not emotionally cold dude in nyc?!?!?! And one who wants to date and get to know someone?
It feels awkward because you start out knowing a bit too much about the person than you would if you met them the normal way.
so awkward when your brother shows up
Assuming Hookups
Ultimately I think dating apps are inherently shallow, but I still think casual sex can be very beneficial for a certain amount of people.
Dating apps might facilitate the process of meeting new people; however, they only really help the hookup culture. You don't take someone too seriously because you know there are 10 other matches that you have as backup. You can't help but wonder if there is someone better on the app compared to the person you've been seeing. The app has caused me to be a commitment phobe who keeps a constant rotation of people going.
Contradictory experiences: Hard to Meet People, but a Confidence Boost
I've found some friends that enjoy going on dates due to dating apps but they were only for "hook-ups", getting drinks or dinner but none that I know have made it in a successful relationship
They can be fun when just looking for a confidence boost, but it's hard to really meet people on dating apps.
I only really downloaded Tinder because all of my friends had it, and they would go on it all the time when we were together. I personally used it to feel good about myself and see who I would match with, not to meet or talk to people. They used it seriously though.
Contradictory experiences: Success Stories
I think dating apps are awesome and really fun. I love talking about them with friends and coworkers. Great conversation starter. Also, I know many people who have met a girlfriend or boyfriend on a dating app. Rock on Tinder.
Queer Issues: Dating Apps' Positive Effects and Shortcomings
Tinder has helped me find other people who were gay on campus, which could potentially facilitate an offline relationship if I were to pursue one.
Most apps still force the gender binary on their users. I assume this is to not confuse all the cis people. Very annoying for the rest of us.
I've noticed a lot of my peers (other gay men,) are definitely interested in relationships, but are very afraid of getting played by the other person they're seeing, so they tend to end things even if they don't want to. In doing this, they're basically playing someone else before they get played. I think this is especially common at NYU / in NYC amongst gay college men 18-24. I have a lot of friends who have expressed real desire for a committed relationship, but have witnessed them dodge perfectly great opportunities for such a relationship. I guess it's difficult to really know why they do this, though.
Personal Interest in the topic
Does the use and proliferation of dating apps decrease relationship satisfaction?
It was interesting, thanks
Experiences Vary
I think people use them in much more varied and less formulaic ways than the app assumes and that popular culture assumes. Sometimes. Sometimes someone does just straightforwardly want to get laid.
Everyone experiences vary. Mine was very short: appx 1-2 months.
Boyfriend and I were not having luck on our profiles online, went out with each other instead