

**Mediated Sexualities and the “Dating Apocalypse”:
Gender, Race and Sexual Identity on Hookup Apps**

BY

JODY AHLM

B.A., Northeastern Illinois University, 2011

M.A., University of Illinois Chicago, 2014

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois Chicago, 2018

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Lorena Garcia, Chair and Advisor

Claire Decoteau

Paul-Brian McInerney

Héctor Carrillo, Northwestern University

Jane Ward, University of California Riverside

To the internet, for all you do

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee members, Lorena Garcia, Claire Decoteau, Paul-Brian McInerney, Héctor Carrillo, Jane Ward, and CJ Pascoe, for their invaluable feedback at various stages of this process. I am especially grateful to Lorena Garcia, for her supportive mentoring, and always insightful feedback on my work.

I am grateful to the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, and the University of Illinois Chicago's Provost Award, for providing the financial support necessary for this project.

I had the good fortune to go through this process in an uncommonly supportive environment of collegiality and intellectual community among graduate students in the Sociology department at the University of Illinois Chicago. Special thanks to the sister wives, Danielle Giffort, Paige Sweet, and Kelly Underman, without whom many of these ideas would not have fully developed, nor would I have actually finished writing this or anything else. Thanks also to Amy Brainer, Tünde Cserpes, Carla Ilten, and Michael Muñoz for their friendship, and for pushing my thinking in new directions at the right moments.

This dissertation would not have been the same without Lital Pascar, who challenged me intellectually and held me together at critical times in this process. To Sandra Aguirre, for encouraging me to go back to school and finish my B.A. Obvious thanks to Julie Fritz and Lex Sheely, two of the best friends I could imagine, and a necessary non-academic support system. Finally, to my families, given and chosen, for their support; and to Chicago, for giving me a home.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Theoretical Framework.....	6
B. Chapter Overview.....	13
II. RESEARCH METHODS.....	16
A. Digital Qualitative Methods.....	16
B. Data Collection.....	18
1) Tinder and Grindr User Interviews.....	18
2) Gender and Sexual Identity in Qualitative Interviews.....	23
3) Digital Archive.....	28
4) Privacy and Copyright.....	29
C. Data Analysis.....	31
D. Limitations.....	31
III. THE “STRAIGHT GRINDR”: SEXUAL SCRIPTS AND THE SOCIAL SHAPING OF TECHNOLOGY.....	33
A. Heterosexual Scripts.....	35
B. Male Homosexual Scripts.....	39
C. The Apps.....	42
D. App Users’ Sexual Scripts.....	46
1) Heterosexual Tinder scripts.....	46
2) Grindr scripts.....	53
3) Non-heterosexual Tinder users.....	54
E. The More Things Change.....	58
IV. THE PROMISE OF TINDER.....	60
A. Theoretical Framework.....	65
B. The Promise of Tinder.....	71
C. Disappointment.....	76
D. Searching for Intimacy.....	82
E. Conclusion.....	88
V. RACE AND SEXUAL PREFERENCES ON GRINDR AND TINDER.....	93
A. Racially Exclusionary Grindr Profiles.....	98
B. Justifying/Condemning Racial Preferences.....	105
C. Sexual Preferences on Tinder.....	112
VI. BINARY CODE: QUEER AND TRANS APP USERS.....	119
A. Zeroes and Ones.....	119
B. Encoding/Decoding on Tinder.....	127
C. Why Isn’t There an App for Lesbians?.....	134
VII. CONCLUSION.....	139
CITED LITERATURE.....	147
APPENDIX A: Participant Demographics.....	159
APPENDIX B: Sample Interview Schedule.....	161
VITA.....	163

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
1. Features of Tinder and Grindr.....		41
2. Viewing User Profiles.....		45
3. Dominant Heterosexual and Gay Male Scripts.....		58

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	Actor network theory
API	Application programming interface
CQE	Chicago Queer Exchange
GNC	Gender non-conforming
GPS	Global positioning system
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICT	Internet communication technology
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LBQWT	Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, and transgender
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer
MOC	Masculine of center
MSM	Men who have sex with men
SCOT	Social construction of technology
SST	Social shaping of technology
STD	Sexually transmitted disease
STS	Science and technology studies

SUMMARY

This dissertation is a qualitative study of two smartphone dating applications, Tinder and Grindr, known colloquially as “hookup apps.” In this dissertation, I take up questions of whether and how hookup apps are changing dating, sex and intimacy in the United States. Claims that these apps have radically changed dating and sex are overstated and assume a unidirectional relationship between technology and social relations. Users are embedded social actors, and participate in technological innovation. I use the case of hookup apps to address broader themes of technological and cultural change, by showing the value and necessity of contextualizing claims about the effects of new technologies on social life. I bring together insights from sexualities studies and science and technology studies in order to understand the ways in which technological mediation of sexual interaction and identity matters to social life. Data for this study come from forty-one interviews with app users, as well as screenshots of user profiles and online content related to the apps.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a September 2015 *Vanity Fair* article “Tinder and the Dawn of the ‘Dating Apocalypse’,” Nancy Jo Sales’ exposé of the young Manhattan professional dating scene tells the story of singles having sex with a different partner several times a week, a mix of one-night stands, short-term relationships devoid of intimacy and “friends with benefits” arrangements, all achieved through mobile dating apps¹ such as Tinder, OkCupid, Happn and Hinge. The young women she interviews sip martinis and complain about the men on Tinder being crude, aggressively sexual in their messages, and commitment-phobic—all while swiping away. These women like the easy access to sex, sort of, but ultimately find these apps unsatisfying. The men, for their part, tell stories of easy sex and clingy women they have deleted from their phones. They are portrayed to the reader as quintessential fraternity “bros” who rate women, compare sex stories, and use Tinder to “hit it and quit it,” except that these men are in their mid- to late-twenties and wear hip suits or have impeccably kept “lumbersexual”² beards, not college guys with backwards ball caps.

It was not the first eulogy for heterosexual courtship, nor, I imagine, will it be the last. Like similar articles about the app Tinder (Feuer, 2015; McNamara, 2016), this one combined the hand-wringing and apparent confusion over young adults’ sex lives—most notably in the plethora of popular and academic writing about hookup cultures on college campuses—with the perennial trope of growing disconnection and dysfunction created by new forms of communication technologies. Almost a year and a half before Sales’ *Times* article caused mild

¹ Apps are software applications designed to run on mobile devices (smartphones and tablets)

² Lumbersexual describes a highly cultivated masculinity that emerged in the 2010’s whose hallmarks are a large trimmed beard and outdoor inspired clothing such as plaid shirts, boots and denim. The aesthetic overlaps with gay male “bear” subculture, but is associated with a hip urban heterosexual man, typically mid-20s to mid-30s, white, and professional or creative class.

drama—arguably Tinder’s own fault, for responding to the article with a defensive Twitter post that was subsequently trolled³ on social media—Carson Griffith (2013) wrote in the *Times* that, “Technology has hit a new level of shallow [with Tinder], and New York’s 20-somethings are embracing it full speed.” BuzzFeed, grandmaster of the listicle⁴ genre, published “27 Times Tinder Proved 2014 Was The Year Love Died,” in December, 2014 (Bailey, 2014).

While online dating has been around for over twenty years (Match.com started in 1995), location sensitive dating apps—those using the global positioning system (GPS) capabilities of smartphones to connect users based on physical proximity—have a more recent history. These apps are referred to as hookup apps because of their reputation for facilitating casual sex between users. The GPS feature of the apps, and the limited profile length, seem to prioritize immediate availability for meeting in person over long-term compatibility for a committed relationship. Grindr was one of the first such apps. Launched in March 2009, it was marketed as a “social networking” app (wink, wink) for gay men. The huge success of Grindr, and demand for mobile apps more generally, prompted attempts to create a similar app for heterosexual dating. Grindr itself made an attempt at a straight dating app with its launch of Blendr, in 2011. Blendr and other apps failed. It was Tinder, with its card-swiping interface and “double opt-in” design⁵, that

³ Trolling is the practice of making offensive or provocative comments online in a deliberate attempt to antagonize someone, and initiate or escalate an angry exchange. This will come up again in relation to offensive messages on Tinder.

⁴ A “listicle” is an article whose primary schema is a numbered or alphabetized list. Often used as “clickbait”, as in “9 amazing otter facts you need to know,” (“9 amazing otter,” 2009), the form now shows up in more serious journalism, such as the *New York Times* article “The 459 People, Places and Things Donald Trump Has Insulted on Twitter: A Complete List,” (Lee and Quealy, 2016).

⁵ The design of both apps is described in detail in Chapter 3, The “Straight Grindr”: Sexual Scripts and the Social Shaping of Technology.”

became the first successful “straight Grindr,” with a quick rise to success and stardom after its launch in early 2013.

In this dissertation, I take up questions of whether and how hookup apps are changing dating, sex and intimacy in the United States. Claims that these apps have radically changed dating and sex are overstated and assume a unidirectional relationship between technology and social relations. Users are embedded social actors, and participate in technological innovation. Users of smartphone dating applications, often called “hookup apps,” now number in the tens of millions. They represent a significant touchstone in the ongoing debate about the effects of communication technology on social life. Through analyzing how and why users engage with this technology, and how this use is perceived and discussed, I offer an alternative way of understanding the impact of new technologies more broadly.

The idea for this dissertation project was conceived in 2014, in part with the question, Why Tinder, why now? I had just finished a study on Grindr, and suddenly everyone was talking about how and why Tinder finally made “the straight Grindr” happen. This time period was also the eve of the historic and hard-won Supreme Court decision (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ___ 2015) that legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states. As a queer sociologist, I found the juxtaposition of (gay) #LoveWins, and a straight hookup app receiving a 2013 “Best New Startup of the Year Award” (Tsotsis and Eldon, 2014), both fascinating and mildly annoying. We’re finally being accepted because we proved we want to couple up and settle down, but nobody seems bothered by a straight version of a gay sex app?

As it turned out, people got bothered. Tinder’s popularity drew attention, both as a Silicon Valley success story and an opportunity to fret about “kids these days” and their phones. The blame, though, was placed on the technology, not the (heterosexual) users. Tinder’s quick

popularity made it a lightning rod for anxiety over what our phones are doing to us, and to society. Some four years and 20 billion Tinder matches later (gotinder.com/press), the question “Why Tinder, why now?” feels both distant and remains to be answered. Tinder not only made the straight Grindr happen, it birthed an industry and normalized⁶ using the internet to meet strangers for romance and sex.

As the vanguard of hookup apps and ongoing industry leaders, Tinder and Grindr have both had their share of critiques. The internet is full of articles and blogs opining on the negative effects of Grindr, including jeopardizing gay men’s health, through the loneliness caused by “empty” social interaction (Miksche, 2016), making gay men unhappy (Zane, 2018), less intimate, and more racist (Rodriguez, 2014), and more objectifying of each other (Strudwick, 2014). In addition to ruining dating, Tinder has been accused of a host of other sins, including making people more shallow (Baxter and Cashmore, 2013), immobilizing users with too many choices (Krupnick, 2015), and being bad for women (Stahler, 2014). Both have been accused of increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections (STDs) (Ziv, 2015). Hookup apps, and more broadly mobile Internet communication technology (ICT), of which Tinder and Grindr are examples, is only the most recent target of technology anxiety. The printing press, automobile,

⁶ Views on online dating were already on the rise, certainly helping explain Tinder’s success. In 2013, Pew Research reported that 59% of Americans who use the internet agreed with the statement “Online dating is a good way to meet people,” up 15% from 2005 (Smith and Duggan, 2013). Many of my heterosexual participants described Tinder’s reputation as having improved since it first came out, and none said they would lie about meeting a partner on Tinder. By 2009, meeting a partner online was already remarkably common among cohabitating same-sex couples, growing to almost 70% by 2009, and had surpassed most other ways heterosexual partners met, except for “Met through friends” (Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012). In 2013, 29% of American adults said they knew someone who has found a long-term relationship or spouse through online dating, up from 15% in 2005 (Smith and Duggan, 2013).

telegraph, landline telephone, and early texting on mobile phones, all catalyzed fears of social disorder and decline (Fischer, 1992; Lindgren, 2013; Morozov, 2011).

Such dire predictions often have a utopic counterpart. For example, the role of Twitter and Facebook in the Arab Spring, a wave of pro-democratic protests in North Africa and the Middle East starting in 2011, sparked a huge amount of popular and academic interest in the promise of social media for large-scale organizing for social change—up to and including regime change (Halliday, 2013; Lotan et al., 2011). Accepting the more complicated reality of the power of social media has taken time, but this case makes the point that we seem prone to hyperbole when imagining how a technology may impact society. These techno-dystopic and -utopic perspectives share a common assumption. Both rely on a belief that technology *makes* something happen, that there is an unavoidable consequence to the adoption of a particular technology, whether at the level of the individual psyche or the global balance of power. This framing of the relationship between technology and social change as uni-directional and inevitable can be described by the term technological determinism.⁷

More nuanced discourse about technological and social change does exist, but the initial response is often competing dystopic and utopic predictions, and determinism remains the primary framing in popular accounts of technology adoption. Books such as *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*⁸ (Carr, 2010), *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* (Turkle, 2012), and *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (Alter, 2017) make the bestsellers list. As a species, we humans seem intent on scaring ourselves by inventing new ways of doing things, and

⁷ For an early sociological version of technological determinism, see Marx' argument about the compounding function of technical innovation in the exploitation of the proletariat.

⁸ This book was also a finalist for the 2011 Pulitzer Prize in General Nonfiction.

then fretting over what we have invented, forgetting to look at the bigger picture in favor of causal arguments about technology catalyzing social change. The enduring appeal of the narrative of Dr. Frankenstein⁹ and his monster speaks to this collective neuroses. My dissertation intervenes in the determinist discourse about hookup apps. I engage two major bodies of scholarly work, sexualities studies, and science and technology studies (STS). These bodies of work, and my contributions to them, are elaborated in the next section.

A. Theoretical Framework

The literature I draw on to situate and analyze my data comes not only from sociology, but also the broader interdisciplinary fields of science and technology studies (STS) and sexualities studies, which include contributions by historians, communication scholars, and others. I will begin by outlining sexualities studies, highlighting the contributions of sociologists and focusing on several subfields in which I situate my contributions: intersectional sociology of sexualities, critical heterosexuality studies, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) studies.

Sexualities studies owe much to John Gagnon and William Simon's groundbreaking application of a sociological perspective to sexuality. They argued against prevailing theories of sexuality rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis or in biology-oriented sexology research, such as Alfred Kinsey's (1948; 1953) extensive study on Americans' sexual practices, and Master and Johnson's (1966) studies on sexual arousal and sexual behavior. In their 1973 book *Sexual Conduct* and in a series of articles, Gagnon and Simon developed a theory of sexuality as deeply

⁹ This narrative originates in Mary Shelley's 1818 novel, *Frankenstein*, viewed today as a commentary on the perils of modern science and the emergent industrialization of Britain. In addition to movie adaptations of the original, the trope of creator and uncontrollable creation has been used in countless literary, stage, film, and television productions.

rooted in the social and, importantly, profoundly mundane, no different than any other aspect of our social selves.

They posit three interrelated levels at which social scripts guide sexual interaction, the intrapsychic, the interpersonal, and the cultural. The interplay between these levels—actors' internal understandings of a situation and of their own sexuality, interactional scripts available to actors, and cultural meanings attached to actions and identities—provide the structure of sexual interaction. Sexual scripts guide everything from who initiates contact, where people put their mouths, and how they know when they are done having sex. Gender figures prominently in Gagnon and Simon's theory. In fact, they argue that gender socialization comes first, and sexual scripts are built upon, and dependent on, gendered social norms and actors' gendered identities.

Sexual scripts are not totalizing. In any given society there are multiple scripts, some more dominant than others, and some subculturally specific. Actors can and do improvise, and it is not a given that all social actors enter a situation with the same script. They may attach different meanings to the same act but agree on the interactional steps, or they may encounter social awkwardness, or even conflict, during the interaction due to disparate understandings of the proper sequence of events.

Expanding our understanding of sexuality as a social product, and overlapping with broader critiques of dominant forms of feminist activism and theory, sexualities scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the ways in which sexuality intersects with other systems of difference and inequality, especially race (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). As scholars have shown, sexuality is never not about race and gender. For example, gendered racial stereotypes structure Latina youth's interactions with educators in sex education classes, how they navigate conversations with family members about their sexual activity and sexual identity, and how they

negotiate safer sex practices with their partners (Garcia, 2012). The centrality of racial systems of categorization and inequality for structuring black lesbians lives affects how they construct sexual minority identities, and how they create and maintain families (Moore, 2011). And, gender and sexuality are a means by which some immigrant families and communities construct identities and claim superiority over white culture, in the context of racialization and marginalization (Espiritu, 2001). What this body of work shares is an attention to both the complexity of identity and the co-dependency of systems of inequality.

Much of the recent intersectional work on sexualities takes into consideration sexual identities, often addressing the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and communities, either by focusing on these communities, or incorporating these individuals into broader analyses. While the study of homosexuality has always been part of sexualities studies, early examples in sociology generally used a deviance framework (see for example McIntosh, 1968; Reiss, 1961), and early sociological research on black and immigrant communities often used the presence of sexual heterogeneity as evidence of cultural difference and social disorder (Ferguson, 2004). Gay and lesbian studies emerged as a subfield in the late 1980s, in part as a correction to this early focus on deviance and dysfunction, such as through historical tracings of the emergence of gay and lesbian communities in the U.S. (for example Duberman et al., 1990).

Sexualities scholars have also investigated heterosexuality. Over the past twenty years, heterosexuality has come under increased scrutiny in what has been called “straight studies” or “critical heterosexual studies” (Dean, 2014; Fischer, 2013; Ingraham, 2004; Katz, 2007; Ward, 2015). Much sociology today has, arguably, distanced itself from what Chrys Ingraham (1994) identified as the “heterosexual imaginary” by not taking heterosexuality for granted when studying gender. Critical heterosexualities studies focuses not on incorporating heterosexuality

into analysis, but on analyzing heterosexuality itself, as an “organizing institution” (Ingraham, 1994:204), a privileged status, and an unmarked identity category.

My dissertation draws on these developments in our understanding of sexuality as it relates to the social world. I contribute to both critical heterosexuality studies and LGBTQ studies, using an intersectional framework to make sense of the way sexual identities are informed by race, class and gender, and the ways in which individuals and communities exist within multiple structures of power simultaneously. I fill a gap in this literature by bringing in a focus on technology, while addressing issues of broad concern to sociologists—the relationship between structure and action, gender and racial inequality, intimacy, and identity—in order to contextualize the use of hookup apps and challenge determinist claims made about these apps.

Sociologists in particular have been slow to address the importance of technology in contemporary sexualities. Work that addresses sexual identities or practices that occur online typically sets aside analysis of the role of technology, focusing on the identities and practices of the actors and taking the technological mediation for granted.¹⁰ While sociologists of sexualities and others within sociology have increasingly studied online sexualities, this is largely by default because so much of social life today occurs in a combination of online and offline interactions. My dissertation makes a needed intervention in this literature by bringing in tools from science and technology studies (STS), and relevant applications of those tools by scholars outside of sociology, into this body of work. I readily situate this dissertation within the sexualities literature, both offline and online research, and draw on sexualities work throughout. Sexual practices and identities are central to my analyses. I also take seriously the role of the medium through which these practices and identities are enacted. Instead of taking the medium for

¹⁰ For a notable exception, see Mary Gray (2009) on rural LGBT youth and internet use.

granted, I directly address how and why the technology matters—and tackle the question of when and why it does not matter. I turn now to an overview of science and technology studies, which offers conceptual tools for answering these questions.

Science and technology studies (STS) takes up the relationship between the social and the technological. Within this field, there has been a tension between perspectives based on the relative importance placed on either the social actors or the technology itself, and the causal force of either. Social construction of technology (SCOT) perspective focuses on the conditions in which a technology is created and used, including the social locations of designers, and the systems of meaning that construct what a technology is expected to do. A particular technology does not beat out others on the market because it is the best—there are organizational level factors, economic relations, and public policy pressures that go into the design, production, and relative success or failure of an given technology, whether a new type of mobile phone or a new medicine.

The SCOT perspective has been criticized for going too far, in its eagerness to combat technological determinism and uncover structural processes behind the development and production of technologies. Actor-network-theory (ANT) brings the technologies themselves into the analysis, as actants with their own agency. For ANT theorists, the relationship between the social and the technological is a network of actants that can include individuals, organizations, governments, compounds, and devices (Latour, 2005).

Ian Hutchby (2001) argues that that the concept of affordances offers a middle ground between what he sees as the failure of constructivist approaches to address the ontology of technologies, and the tendency of realist approaches, such as ANT, to not give enough weight to the social forces. The concept comes from cognitive psychology (Gibson, 1979). In its initial

formulation, affordances referred to possibilities for action. In Gibson's example, a lizard will see a rock and perceive the possibility of shelter. Affordances, in this definition, are readily apparent, as exemplified in the human perception of stairs as climbable (Warren, 1982), or a horizontal bar on a door as pushable (Norman, 2013 [1988]).

Affordances are not the same as features. For example, a knife allows the user to divide something into smaller parts. The *features* of any knife are a sharp blade, and some type of handle. Dividing an object into smaller parts is an affordance. For better or worse, people are creative with tools. We frequently use tools for tasks they were not intended for (even ignoring potential safety risks), such as using a knife to pry something open or using the knife tip to tighten or loosen a screw. Any technology, in this example a knife, has affordances intentionally designed into it as well as affordances that only become obvious once in the hands of a creative user. Because users are themselves innovators, the design process is reiterative. Designers imagine a user and create a product based on this imagined user, users adapt the product to their own purposes, designers collect data on users, designers respond by changing aspects of the design, users adapt the updated product to their own purposes, and the process repeats.

Thinking about affordances only in terms of design is not adequate for analyzing the complex relationship between social processes and technology. Peter Nagy and Gina Neff (2015) propose the concept of "imagined affordances,"

Users treat technological devices as significant physical entities (materiality), they interact with them through constructed perceptions (mediated experiences), and they express strong conscious or unconscious emotions toward them (affect) that are only partly evoked by the physical features of technological artifacts. Imagined affordance may be one way to synthesize these. (7)

As I have argued elsewhere (Ahlm, 2017), the affordances of Grindr include a renewed public sex culture, but the general privatization of sexuality and the respectability politics of the

marriage equality movement make this affordance unimaginable for most users. Aided by the affordances of the locative technology of the mobile app, users could more discreetly find each other in public spaces that have seen increased policing of sexual activity. That Grindr is not used for this is one example of how affordances are mediated by social factors that affect user perceptions and emotions¹¹ around a technology.

Grindr is also not a radically new form of sociality. It is, in part, a remediation of non-digital practices of public cruising. A major difference, though, is the privatizing effect of this remediation, whereby users generally have sexual encounters in private spaces, instead of public or semi-public spaces (Ahlm, 2017; Licoppe et al., 2015). The geo-locative feature of the app does create new experiences of physical space (Crooks, 2013; Mowlabocus, 2010), and may create difficulties for users as they manage self-presentation and privacy in the overlay of physical and digital space (Blackwell et al., 2015).

Grindr has received much more attention in the scholarly literature than Tinder. Kath Albury (2018) argues that much of the press about Tinder overstates the newness of the shift to casual sex that it has come to represent, showing that heterosexual casual sex has a much longer history. Other scholars have analyzed profile pictures (Duguay, 2016; Mason, 2016), how Tinder frames authenticity (Duguay, 2017), and the “swipe-logic” that Tinder popularized (David and Cambre, 2016). This dissertation is the largest interview study of Tinder users that I know of¹², the only study to compare Grindr and Tinder, and the only one that takes a sociological approach.

Analyzing the relationship between technology and sexualities has most often been taken

¹¹ For example, the affective connection between shame and public sex.

¹² I have come across two (unpublished) conference paper listings that are about Tinder, but they focus on college students, and I do not know the details of the studies they are presenting.

up by scholars outside of sociology, and regarding sexualities, is most developed around the techno-sexual practices of men who have sex with men (MSM) (for an overview see Grov et al., 2014). We need work that looks at internet-facilitated sexualities, by incorporating and comparing sexual identity as well as gender and race. In short, we need a sociology of digital sexualities, one that accounts for the proliferation of internet communication technologies (ICTs) and mobile devices. Sociology has a rich theoretical basis for understanding digital sexualities. Sociology has a lot to offer the study of the range of technological and cultural subjects variously called digital technology, digital society, ICTs, mobile media, and new media (Lupton, 2015).

B. Chapter Overview

This dissertation is based on a qualitative research project, and in the next chapter I describe the types of data I collected, how I collected them, and how I analyzed the data. In each of the substantive chapters that follow I begin from the perspective of a specific sub-group of app users, then bring in comparative data related to other groups of users to further develop my argument.

Chapter 3, *The Dating Apocalypse: Sexual Scripts and the Social Shaping of Technology*, describes in detail the apps Tinder and Grindr, and what they allow users to do. Using the concept of sexual scripts, I show the extent to which Tinder and Grindr have and have not changed sexual and romantic interaction. I assess deterministic claims made about the apps, and situate their design and use in the larger cultural context. The design affordances of both apps reflect the divergent histories of their targeted user demographic, and pre-existing heterosexual and homosexual scripts affect how users engage with the affordances of the apps. The unequal gender dynamics of normative heterosexuality remain unchanged in my participants' experiences on and through Tinder.

Chapter 4, *Intimacy and Heterosexual Singledom*, takes up the claim that hookup apps inhibit users' ability for intimacy. I situate app users' experiences in the context of contemporary forms of intimacy and changing trends in relationship formation. I argue that dominant constructions of heterosexuality today create a bind for middle-class heterosexual young adults in which the time period between college and marriage is expected to involve self-exploration through dating, but this exploration is supposed to be future oriented and a process of human capital accumulation through self-intimacy. This period is depicted as fun and self-oriented, but is often experienced as labor and disappointment. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on queer intimacies via a comparison between the relative dissatisfaction of Tinder users and Grindr users. Non-heterosexual participants were more satisfied with their app use because the sexual scripts available to them include more options for forming intimate relationships outside of a sexual relationship. Gendered heterosexual proscriptions, not the apps, limit the formation of intimate social ties.

In Chapter 5, *Race and Sexual Preference on Grindr and Tinder*, I examine the debate around Grindr profiles with racially exclusionary statements and analyze my participants' responses to this debate. Part of the debate about racial preferences on Grindr has been a claim that Grindr somehow exacerbates racism. Through a comparison with Tinder profiles I argue that differences in the filtering and messaging features of the apps is a partial explanation for differences in the types of exclusionary profile statements, but that racially exclusionary statements on Grindr are also reflective of the prevalence of cultural logics of innate sexual desire in gay male communities.

Chapter 6, *Binary Code: Queer and Trans App Users*, brings in concepts from cultural studies and queer theory, together with STS, to examine the way gender and sexual binaries are

structured into the design of Tinder and Grindr. I look at the practices of lesbian, bisexual and queer women, and transgender app users (LBQWT) and the ways in which they use Tinder. I examine recent measures by both apps to introduce trans-inclusive features, arguing that the changes to Tinder have not affected the normative gender/sexuality structure of the app.

In the conclusion chapter, I bring the substantive chapters together to show how my empirical case of hookup apps addresses the much broader question of the relationship between technology and social change. Taken together, these chapters show the importance of contextualizing claims about the effects of new technology within the broader cultural and political context. This dissertation contributes to sexualities studies by filling a gap in our understanding of technologically-mediated sexualities, bringing concepts from science and technology studies to take seriously the role of technology in shaping sexual practices and identities.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

I used qualitative research methods in this dissertation. In-depth, in-person interviews were conducted with forty-one app users. I took over 1100 screenshots, primarily of Tinder and Grindr profiles, and collected digital media content that include online news articles, blogs, YouTube videos, social media accounts, and multiple press kits put out by the Tinder and Grindr. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Illinois Chicago.

I will begin this chapter with a brief overview of the field of digital qualitative methods. This field is relatively new and in some ways unsettled, making it worthy of its own section. Then I will provide an overview of my data collection, data analysis, and a discussion of the limitations of this study. Throughout, I will draw attention to methodological issues that are specific to research on sexualities.

A. Digital Qualitative Methods

The commercial internet is thirty years old, the smartphone (mobile phones with many features of a computer, including internet capabilities) is almost twenty years old, and paper maps went out of fashion almost ten years ago. Though these technologies have been around for some time at this point, the pace of change is difficult for research methods to keep up with. In 2011, 35% of all Americans owned a smartphone (Pew, 2011). Today, seven years later, that number is 92% for Millennials (born 1981-1996), 85% for Gen X-ers (born 1965-1980), 67% for Boomers (born 1946-1964) and 30% for Americans born before 1946 (Pew 2018b). Seventy-seven percent of Americans today go online at least once a day (using any type of device), and 26% report that they are online “almost constantly” (Pew, 2018a). In other words, the internet, and the mobile internet, are integral to most Americans’ lives. The number of people who use

these technologies and the ways in which these technologies are used changes rapidly. For perspective, I started graduate school in 2011 (with a beloved flip phone). In the time it has taken me to get a PhD, mobile internet devices have gone from a gadget for people with disposable income to a constant presence in most people's daily lives.¹³

The idea of “digital qualitative research methods” dates back to the early 2000s. During this time, scholars were grappling with how to implement “traditional” ethnographic methods in research on online communities (Beneito-Montagut, 2011; Garcia et al., 2009; Hallett and Barber, 2014; Hine, 2000; 2015). The anonymity of the early internet raised ethical questions about deception and privacy that arguably were not resolved before they became dated. Most scholars writing about this issue agreed that in online chat rooms and community forums, a researcher should disclose their researcher status. However, how often this should be done and whether it is possible to achieve true transparency in these settings was highly contested. Ethnography in these spaces is “disguised observation” as opposed to deception (Murthy, 2008).

Online anonymity is certainly not a dead topic or an impossibility, but the ability to be anonymous online has decreased to the point where the idea of “internet privacy” is considered laughable. The best that all but the most savvy internet users today can hope for is managing their online presence to minimize personal and potentially embarrassing content, and avoid exposing themselves to identity theft. Gatson (2011) argues that the relative lack of anonymity online also affects the power dynamics by creating a dialogical relationship between participants and online ethnographers. Participants can and do investigate researchers using online search

¹³ Inequalities across education, income and race persist. Tellingly though, one of the most important technology-access inequalities today is not whether someone has internet access or a smartphone, but whether their phone is the only way they are able to access the internet (Pew 2015).

engines¹⁴ and, with the digitization of academic publishing, participants can easily find and sometimes access published work. As Gatson found, they can “talk back” on the same forums that the researcher is immersed in as an ethnographer.

The constant presence mobile devices play in many people’s lives makes these devices not only a topic of study but also a potential research tool. For example, even if a researcher is not studying phones or phone use, chances are a participant has a phone on them when they show up for an interview. Perhaps the researcher is studying kinship networks. The participant may not be able to remember the last time they talked with a specific family member who lives far away, but their phone does. In an example like this, it is likely that the participant will spontaneously take out their phone to try to answer the question accurately for the researcher. However, in a different type of situation it may be useful for the researcher to intentionally incorporate this type of memory recall or information access into the interview. Even without incorporating a device into an interview (semi-structured qualitative interview or survey), asking questions about technology use may be helpful for getting at a non-technology related question. For example, a researcher interested in how many hours a week a participant works should probably ask how often the participant checks work email on their phone when not technically “at work.”

B. Data Collection

1. Tinder and Grindr User Interviews

I conducted forty-one interviews in 2016. These interviews included 14 gay male Grindr users,¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷ 18 heterosexual Tinder users (ten women, eight men), one bisexual man who

¹⁴ Several of my participants specifically told me they had looked me up online. Given that many participants mentioned looking up prospective dates online, they probably also looked me up before or after the interview.

used Tinder for heterosexual dating,¹⁸ and eight Tinder users who sexually identified as lesbian, bisexual or queer. Of these eight,¹⁹ four identified their gender as cisgender²⁰ woman, one identified as genderqueer, one as a man/transman, and two as transwomen. Of participants who used Grindr,²¹ one was white, six were black, six were Latino, and one was Asian. Among heterosexual Tinder users, there were five white men, six white women, two Latino men, one Latina, two Asian men, one Asian woman, and one man who identified as multiracial. Participants in the LBQWT Tinder user group included five white users, two black users, and two Latino users.

Participants were recruited through ads placed on Facebook as well as referrals from participants. Through selective ad targeting and selective snowball recruitment, I created a purposive sample of racially diverse app users. In order to be eligible for the study, participants needed to have a profile on Grindr or Tinder for at least two months prior to the interview, log in

¹⁵ Data from my pilot study included 20 interviews with gay male Grindr users. These participants are included in Appendix A because I draw on these interviews in Chapter 5 to analyze racial exclusion on Grindr.

¹⁶ Five of these men also used Tinder. I discuss this in the next chapter when I argue that gay men have more specialized options for dating and hookup apps.

¹⁷ One of these participants identified as “gay but queer” because of his politics, as a resistance to what he perceived as the normative and apolitical nature of most gay-identified men. I include him in this group because his use of Grindr, and sexual practices in general, were the same as the men in the study who only identified as gay.

¹⁸ Because of how he used Tinder, I include him in my analysis of heterosexual Tinder users. I discuss his bisexual identity as it relates to building intimacy through disclosure (Chapter 4) and the built-in heterosexuality of Tinder’s design (Chapter 6).

¹⁹ Because of the small number of participants in this subgroup, and the size of the LBQWT community, I have gone to greater lengths to protect the confidentiality of these respondents, including changing some specificities of their identities and experiences.

²⁰ Cisgender means a person whose current gender identity is the same as the gender identity they were given at birth.

²¹ Included in Chapter 5 are gay men who used Grindr and participated in the pilot study. There were fourteen white men, one black man, two Latino men, two Asian men, and one multiracial man.

to their account at least once a week, have had one or more in-person meetings with someone from the app, and live in Chicago. Participants range in age from 18 to 42, with the majority between 25 and 35 years old. Interview participants received twenty-five dollars to compensate them for their time and travel expenses.

Recruitment of gay men was relatively easy and proceeded quickly. I had found this to be true during my pilot study, when I was not even offering cash compensation for the interviewee's time. My intuition that this ease of recruitment of gay men, across race, age, and educational achievement, was connected to the institutionalization of Human Immunodeficiency virus (HIV) research in gay communities seems supported by comments made during a number of these interviews.

Participating in research about sexuality does not have the same connotations of community service for heterosexual potential subjects. White heterosexual Tinder users were slightly more difficult to recruit, as measured by the time it took to get the sample I wanted. Non-white heterosexual Tinder users were difficult to recruit and, even after running extra ads targeted specifically to non-white Facebook users. While it seems true that Tinder users are majority white, I also encountered a significant number of people of color on the app during the time I spent going through profiles. It seems more likely that the scrutiny, judgment, and exotification of the sexualities of people of color, combined with the history of ethical breaches in research on communities of color, made this group of Tinder users less interested in sharing their experiences with a researcher. Minimal investigating online would reveal that I am a white researcher, making my trustworthiness even more suspect.

The recruitment issue I did not anticipate was a difficulty in recruiting LBQWT participants. As an insider—again, minimal online investigation would turn up pictures of me

and, to a queer gaze, I am easily recognizable as a masculine-of-center²² queer person (MOC)—I assumed a baseline level of trust would at least make recruitment of this demographic group not difficult. As it turned out, I had to find ways beyond Facebook ads and snowball sampling to find participants. While I did tell friends and acquaintances about my study, I intentionally did not interview anyone closer than two, sometimes three, “degrees of separation.” This meant not interviewing people in my immediate social circle (many of whom are, like me, white, college-educated, LBQWT people in their late-20s to late-30s who use or have used dating and hookup apps), not interviewing close friends of close friends, and not interviewing close friends of people I had dated. Admittedly, this made a small sample frame even smaller. However, I felt it was important, particularly given the small size of my sample sub-groups, to search out LBQWT participants who were differently situated than the types of app users I was already familiar with.

An incident while attempting to recruit LBQWT participants through alternate means revealed some of the possible reasons for my difficulty recruiting this group. At this point I was done interviewing gay men and white heterosexual Tinder users. I was only running targeted Facebook ads to recruit Tinder users of color, which was quickly burning through my research funding without producing results. It was suggested to me by an acquaintance that I post a call for participants on the Facebook group Chicago Queer Exchange (CQE). This group has around 18,000 members and is typically used to find roommates, get recommendations for queer-friendly services such as mental health professionals or lawyers, sell furniture or clothes, advertise for “gig” jobs such as photography or household maintenance, and advertise

²² The term masculine-of-center, or MOC, has become popular in queer spaces in the past five to ten years as an umbrella term for LBQWT people who’s gender presentation is masculine. It is meant to include people who gender identify as butch, stud, aggressive, boi, genderqueer, androgynous, or trans-masculine and is sometimes used as a stand-alone gender identity. MOC will come up again in Chapter 7, Binary Code.

community events such as parties or support groups. Occasionally, calls for research participants are also posted to this group.

In response to my post, which consisted of the IRB recruitment script and a link to my IRB approved website, one person wrote a lengthy comment detailing what I assume was a personal experience participating in a research study. This person discouraged people from participating in my study, explaining a study in which researchers disregarded and misrepresented identities of queer participants. I responded with a comment in which I acknowledged the history of misrepresentation, marginalization and even harm that LGBTQ individuals have experienced in research studies. I explained that I was not affiliated with the programs that conducted that particular study and was, in fact, conducting research that would increase understanding of the identities and experiences of LGBTQ individuals. A graduate student acquaintance at another university in the area, active on this group's discussion threads, vouched for me as a researcher and queer person, and a number of group members implicitly vouched for me by "liking" my initial post and/or my response comment. Ultimately, four participants were recruited through my CQE post.

Some interviews were conducted at my office, others in a study room at a public library, but most were conducted in coffee shops. Participants were remarkably candid with me in public spaces, even in crowded coffee shops. They often recounted their sexual practices and experiences in explicit detail, including difficulty bringing a partner to orgasm, non-consensually video recording sex with a partner to show another partner, attempted sexual assault by a date they met on the app, and using apps for cheating on their partner. While there is a certain sense of anonymity in urban public spaces, and individuals who volunteer for a study about hookup apps are already likely to be more open about their sexual lives, the topic of sexuality also

occupies a unique discursive space. A formal interview by a researcher may serve as a “confessional,” a space where (sexual) subjects experience an “incitement to discourse” via the ritualized accounting of oneself, especially in relation to the taboo (Foucault, 1990 [1978]). This may partially explain such candor.

During interviews, I asked participants if I they would show me how they used the app, by swiping through Tinder or perusing Grindr while I asked them to talk me through their process. This allowed me to see, and ask questions about, aspects of their app use that seemed obvious to them, or would not have come up had I just asked them to describe how they use the app. At the end of interviews, I showed all participants a short humorous video about each app. The contents of the video included an inversion of gender norms of heterosexual hookup scripts, Tinder’s reputation as a hookup app, and racially exclusionary profiles on Grindr. Showing these videos to all participants allowed me to compare their responses.

2. Gender and Sexual Identity in Qualitative Interviews

Researcher positionality can affect rapport during interviews, even the information participants are willing to share (Wolf, 1996). An example from an early interview I conducted brings to light both the precarity of women researchers interviewing men as well as the way (perceived) sexual identity affects gender dynamics in the research interview. During my interview with a 26-year-old heterosexual man, his misogynist way of describing and speaking about women made me uncomfortable at multiple points. After an hour of interviewing I found myself wishing I could just ask him to leave my office, where we were conducting the interview, but not wanting to miss out on data from finishing the interview. At one point he referred contemptuously to women as “bitches.” He spoke derogatorily about women he found unattractive. When telling me about his messaging practices and typical meetups with women

from Tinder, he described disdainfully what he perceived as women's position of power in the dating market and how this resulted in men being "used." It is highly unlikely that he would have been this open about his feelings of powerlessness had he assumed I was heterosexual. He did not need to maintain an image as powerful and desirable in front of me because he did not find me desirable, nor did he seem to fear me judging him, though it was clear that heterosexual women's potential judgments of him were a driving psychological factor in his life. The fact that he had no problem referring to women, as a category, with a term understood to be derogatory suggests he did not consider me part of this category. The conflation of gender and sexuality, where normative gender presentation carries an assumed heterosexuality, often constructs lesbians and queer women as not merely non-desirable, but actually non-woman.

I have consistently found that my non-woman, non-man status works to my benefit when interviewing men of any sexual identity. Gender scholars have noted how masculinity is largely about performing for other men (Grazian, 2011; Pascoe and Bridges, 2016). My role as an interviewer does not present the threat of having one's masculinity assessed by another man. I am also read in the situation as an un-desiring (and undesirable) subject. It is always assumed I am not attracted to or at all interested in men, therefore men I interview do not have to wonder whether they come across as desirable. This is not to deny that people, in general, like to be viewed as successful, including successful at dating and sex, but I found men to be the least guarded with me during interviews.

In another interview with a heterosexual man, gender and sexual identity interacted in a different way. When I asked the participant if he would mind showing me his Tinder profile, unlike other participants, he hesitated. I reminded him that he was free to skip any questions, including this request. He responded that he did not mind. When he showed me his profile I saw

that the source of his hesitation may have been a mildly homophobic joke in his profile text. One aspect of social desirability today is that many people do not want to be perceived as homophobic, particularly to someone they know or assume to be lesbian or gay. This participant seemed to know that his profile was potentially offensive.

What I read as embarrassment dissipated as I continued to be friendly and encouraging, carefully monitoring my tone to indicate that no offense had been taken. My sexual identity created an obstacle to rapport. In this instance however it is possible that my gender mitigated this effect. He may have been less comfortable sitting for an interview with a gay man than a lesbian, given that heterosexual men tend to be less threatened by lesbians and that his joke seemed at the expense of an effeminate actor. It is also possible that he was more open with me about how critical he was of women he met through Tinder because he did not perceive me as a member of that group, heterosexual women. He discussed at length his judgments of women for minor flaws, which he attributed to the casual nature of Tinder.

In both of the above examples of interviews with heterosexual men, it was much less transparent how my race affected the interview. The first man described his race as mixed. He said that people often asked him about his race, as a conversation starter on the app, because he is perceived as mixed race and does not clearly fit into expected phenotype categories. I do not know if he would have been more or less restrained in his comments about women had I been a queer black woman, for example, or how this would have differed from an interview conducted by a straight Asian woman or a gay white man. The second interviewee mentioned above was white. As with non-research settings, the social pressure most white individuals feel to avoid sounding racist is reduced when the interviewer is also white.

How race intersects with gender and sexuality in these situations is less clear and under-examined. It is possible that interviewees perceive LGBTQ people as more liberal overall and therefore more judgmental about racist statements or other comments that could be perceived as racially biased, thus diminishing the effects of racial sameness between interviewer and interviewee, but I did not notice any indication that this was the case in my interviews. Several heterosexual participants expressed surprise at the racially exclusionary statements in the YouTube video I showed about Grindr, saying that they assumed the gay and lesbian community was more egalitarian than society in general because they understood what it felt like to be marginalized. However, if this affected the interview it was not apparent.

Interviews with women raised a different set of issues around researcher positionality. While my sexual identity, and specifically my gender non-conforming presentation, meant that latent sexual tension or awkwardness around cross-gender discussions of sex were unlikely to affect the interview, the same was not true for interviews with women. In non-research settings I find that how heterosexual women interact with me depends on their level of familiarity with queer people and queer culture in general. Stereotypes of masculine presenting lesbians as predatory and sexually aggressive²³ have a long history. Today, in the context of increased visibility and acceptance and in a large city with a visible LGBTQ community, this tends to manifest in my own life as an awkward anxiety some heterosexual women have when talking to me, presumably due to uncertainty over whether I see them as desirable or read them as potentially desiring me, thus bringing into question their heterosexuality. Initial awkwardness

²³ This is heightened for black and Latina masculine-presenting lesbians, who are often portrayed as violent and sexually aggressive in cultural representations (Halberstam, 1995), medical discourse (Somerville, 2000), and the legal system (Mogul et al., 2011).

that resembled these types of non-research interactions I have experienced seemed present in two interviews with straight-identified women.

Interviewing LBQ women, particularly about dating and sexuality, presented not only the issues around insider-ness but in some interviews the issue of latent sexual tension and unclear situational scripts. This was issue came up in an interview with a 30-year-old non-heterosexual white woman. As discussed in the next chapter, there is a fairly scripted first date scenario, including through Tinder. This getting to know each other and build rapport is not unlike the beginning of a qualitative interview (Hermanowicz, 2002). Though tone and body language shifted after I declined to engage in the scripted flirtation, switching to what might be considered the script for being interviewed by an authority (a journalist for example, or a researcher), I instinctually overcompensated by remaining more formal during this interview than most others.

My experiences in interviews for this dissertation, and in a prior digital ethnography of Grindr, where I was frequently read as a young white gay man (the type of person with high erotic capital on Grindr) because of my masculine gender presentation and the presumed homosocial²⁴ context, suggest that intersections of sexual identity with other categories are not at all straightforward. Particularly when interviewing participants about their sexual practices and relationships, sexual identity and gender presentation emerge as important considerations in how researcher positionality affects data collection. This has implications beyond research methods, suggesting that conceptualizing gender as two categories—woman or man—misses important social dynamics when thinking about intersections of gender with other social formations, including race, class, sexual identity or ability.

²⁴ The assumption that only (cisgender) men use Grindr stems in part from the design, as I discuss in Chapter 6, Binary Code.

3. Digital Archive

In addition to interviews, I constructed my own digital archive. Between 2015 and 2017, I collected over 1,100 screenshots, primarily of Tinder and Grindr user profiles from various locations in Chicago, but also including some social media posts by the apps, in-app surveys and advertisements, Chicago profiles from similar apps,²⁵ and profiles from other locations²⁶ in the U.S. and Canada, and personal ads posted to @herstorypersonals.²⁷ The selection of profiles was neither random nor exhaustive, but does represent an array of gender, race, age, sexual identity, gender presentation, and location within the city. Profiles were chosen purposively to capture a broad group of users and to document examples of profiles that were particularly relevant to my research questions or to themes that were emerging during interviews. For example, profiles with exclusionary statements are overrepresented in my archive because of my interest in racially exclusionary statements. I added to this self-collected archive profiles posted to the website Douchebags of Grindr, which collects screen shots of Grindr profiles that users posting to the website find problematic, including those with racially exclusionary statements. I also went through Tinder profiles posted to a number of Tumblr pages that mocked various tropes in profiles, such as men with pictures of themselves in front of Machu Pichu.

Data for this study also include online news stories and blog posts about Grindr and Tinder, including online LGBTQ community discourse—via popular YouTube videos and blogs—about race and sexual desire among gay men. These were chosen based on audience

²⁵ Bumble and HER, which come up in later chapters. Bumble was specifically created as a woman-friendly alternative to Tinder and HER is a “lesbian, bisexual and queer app.”

²⁶ Specifically, this included rural areas in the Midwest, New Mexico, Texas and Tennessee, plus Albuquerque, Cleveland, Denver, Houston, New York, Seattle and Montreal, Canada.

²⁷ The name of this account has been changed to @personals and is discussed in Chapter 6, Binary Code.

reach, measured in YouTube views, and theoretical relevance. Specifically, YouTube videos were included if they directly addressed Grindr or Tinder and had over one million views. News stories were gathered from national mainstream news sources such as *New York Times* and *Vanity Fair*. Articles and blogs were chosen based on the audience size of the outlet, such as national news outlets, or direct relevance to my research questions and emerging themes.

This material was collected to provide context for the apps as well as for triangulation purposes. Profiles screenshots were collected to compare interview data with a larger group of users, including groups of users underrepresented in my participant sample. This data on discourses about the apps allowed me to situate claims made by participants about their perceptions and experiences within a larger conversation as well as identify perceptions and experiences that were unique or idiosyncratic to my field site or my participants. The purpose was not to make my interview data generalizable, but the archival data does help identify the ways in which my Chicago-specific findings are similar to or different from what I would have found conducting this study elsewhere.

4. Privacy and Copyright

Content analysis of user profiles raises ethical and legal questions about the expectation of privacy on social media and ownership of content. Social science ethical principles require informed consent, but these users were not given the opportunity to decline to have their profiles recorded by me. The justification in cases such as social media posts, which these qualify as, is that such content is publicly available. Dating app user profiles are public. Anyone can open an account, or look on the app via someone else's account, and see profiles of other users. On social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, users have

options for limiting the visibility of their posts. This is not true of Tinder²⁸ and only true of Grindr in an *ad hoc* fashion, by blocking other users. Users of these and other dating apps regularly screenshot profiles of others in order to share them with friends, even posting the screenshots online. Several of my participants mentioned that they have done this. The expectation of privacy on these apps is low. However, where I have used profile screenshots as examples, here and in presentations, I have omitted names and other identifying features, such as occupation and schools attended, in an attempt to anonymize these users.

Copyright of online material is another issue that researchers, journalists and artists have had to deal with. “Fair use” is the legal term for specific uses of copyrighted material and has been used to reproduce images and text from social media posts in writing and art. Fair use is described in Section 107 of the Copyright Act. For a work to qualify for reproduction under fair use, courts consider four criteria: 1. Whether the purpose is commercial or non-profit, 2. Whether the original was a creative expression such as a novel, movie, or song, 3. The portion of the original that is being reproduced and its centrality to the original, and 4. The effect of the reproduction on the potential market or value of the original (“More Information on Fair Use,” n.d.). In cases involving screenshots, courts have clarified that the original should be tangible, not an idea, that the purpose of using the screenshot is for criticism, education, research, or news reporting, and use of the screenshot should not devalue the original image (Kimalael, 2016). My use of user profile screenshots falls under fair use because I am not reproducing a creative expression (such as screenshotting an artist’s post of a piece they created), I am using the

²⁸ Users recently have the option of hiding their profile but still being able to swipe through user profiles. However, users are not able to be matched if they choose to be hidden.

reproduction for criticism and research, and my use does not affect the potential market or value of the original.

C. Data Analysis

Data analysis overlapped with data collection. This allowed for purposive data collection that increasingly focused on themes emerging from the data. Coding of interview data began with open coding of Tinder user interviews, and then proceeded with a three-pronged, structured coding system based on my research questions and themes that emerged in initial coding. Specifically, I coded for action (what users do, on and off the app), emotion (how users felt about their experiences), and relationality (social connections with others).

I used analytic briefs to analyze profile screenshots and online content. For example, drawing on techniques of situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2018), I used position diagrams to map out the debate over racially exclusionary Grindr profiles. I used social worlds mapping to identify relevant social actors, organizations, and discourses related to hookup apps.

D. Limitations

My findings in this study are not generalizable. Sampling for interviews was a mix of theoretical and convenience, and sampling for digital archive materials was purposive. Without a representative sample, these findings can not be assumed to apply to all Tinder and Grindr users in Chicago nor can I make claims about the materials in my digital archive being representative of all user profiles or all discourse about Tinder and Grindr. Conducting this research in Chicago also means my findings have limited applicability outside of large urban centers with visible institutional support for LGBTQ identities. Chicago also has unique features among large metropolitan areas. Geographic patterns of residential segregation vary among

urban centers, as does racial composition. However, my archival data from online national discourse suggests that the findings have wide applicability for other large cities in the U.S.

I did not interview industry-side actors, such as designers, engineers, app executives, or investors, though I proposed to do so. All of my data regarding industry actors is from secondary sources, such as journalist accounts of interviews with the founders and marketing materials produced by the companies. There are certainly compelling research questions about the design process, many of which would be their own study, that would further elaborate the social shaping of hookup apps. I do not make claims about the role of designers in this process. While the choices designers make matter, as do the organizational and economic contexts in which they make these choices, it is not necessary to know how and why designers and other relevant actors (for example, founders, company executives, investors, and product managers) make decisions in order to analyze the affordances of a product.

III. The “Straight Grindr”:

Sexual Scripts and the Social Shaping of Technology

I think I had just sort of heard about [Tinder] as being like a straight Grindr. I think I had read a blog piece before it came out and it seemed like, I mean, I was very skeptical that there was such a thing as a straight Grindr.

Kyle (straight, white, 28 years old)

Sexualities scholars sometimes ask what happens when a space, social institution, or even an object is transformed by the presence of queer bodies or queer social formations. But what happens when you “straighten” a gay hookup app? Given Tinder’s early start as “the straight Grindr,” how can we explain the major differences between the two apps? Both were marketed as a way to “make connections” with people you might not otherwise meet. Both had, and continue to have, a reputation as an app that is used for casual sex with strangers. Yet, the design of the two apps is quite different and, as I will show in this chapter, user practices vary by app.

My central argument in this chapter is that hookup apps have not brought about an apocalypse, dating or otherwise. To make my argument, I draw on Gagnon and Simon’s (1973) theory of “sexual scripts,” overviewed in the Introduction. The comparative structure of this study, between two apps designed for the same purpose but for different groups of people, allows me to show how pre-existing social scripts influence technology design, use, and impact. While my findings show a high level of continuity, conflicting with the framing of these apps as a dramatic break with previous forms of romantic and erotic sociality.

MacKenzie and Wacjman (1999), in the second edition of their influential edited volume, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, note the success of the first volume in establishing the SST framework as an important and widely accepted perspective in both Science and Technology Studies (STS) and among engineers. They also offer a caution,

At too high a level of generality, the notion of social shaping is vacuous, except as a polemical counterpoint to simplistic technological determinism. If the idea of the social shaping of technology has intellectual or political merit, this lies in the details: in the particular ways technology is socially shaped; in the light these throw on the nature of both ‘society’ and ‘technology’ (xvi)

In this chapter I explain the details of how Tinder and Grindr are used and how these apps are similar to prior forms of social interaction. In other words, I argue that one mechanism of the social shaping of technology is sexual scripts.

First, I describe the pre-app and off-app sexual scripts for both heterosexual interaction and homosexual male interaction, noting that design differences between Tinder and Grindr can be explained by differences in pre-existing sexual scripts. Norms for sexual interaction have key differences depending on whether the participants are a man and a woman or the participants are men. These differences reflect the centrality of gender and gender difference to heterosexuality, and the distinct historical trajectory of identity and community for gay men. The design differences between Tinder and Grindr offer a productive case for exploring the social shaping of technology, precisely because the apps were created for the same purpose but for two distinct groups of users. I focus only on heterosexual scripts and homosexual male scripts because these were the user groups that Tinder and Grindr, respectively, were initially designed for²⁹. In Chapter 6, Binary Code: Queer and Transgender App Users, I address the use of Tinder by other types of users.

²⁹ Focusing on heteroscripts and gay male scripts makes sense for a comparison of the designs of the apps, but LBQWT sexual scripts, both pre/off-app and on Tinder, is an understudied topic that could potentially shed light on the relationship between gender and sexual scripts, for example. I do not have enough interview data from LBQWT users to make claims about Tinder scripts for this group of user. Partly, this is because of my small subsample of LBQWT users, and because an investigation of this would actually require oversampling LBQWT users. LBQWT sexual scripts are, in general, less codified, and the greater variation would likely require oversampling to come to meaningful conclusions.

The apps' designs are different because their target audiences—heterosexual daters and gay men, respectively—had different sexual scripts before the apps existed. Any new product, regardless of how well designed, whether it is a dating app or a household appliance, needs to bear some resemblance to what potential users already do. Otherwise the utility of the product will not be readily apparent to consumers, or it will be too difficult to learn to use. So, it makes sense that hookup apps would combine features of asynchronous messaging, social media platforms, and dating websites in ways that draw on existing patterns of romantic and sexual interaction.

Second, I will describe the apps themselves, and discuss the sexual scripts employed by users of Tinder and Grindr, showing how the pre-existing scripts and technological affordances contribute to producing different practices on the two apps. I argue that these apps have not radically changed sexual scripts. There is a high level of continuity between pre-app sexual scripts and the sexual scripts app users engage in. The affordances of the apps, what their designs allow users to do, create new possibilities for interaction and foreclose others. However, they do not fundamentally change the interactional norms and expectations that constitute heterosexual and gay male sexual scripts because the apps do not intervene in the structural conditions that shape these sexual scripts.

A. Heterosexual Scripts

There is a chain of events associated with heterosexuality as a practice that is widely recognizable and against which all “improvisations” are compared. It is ubiquitous in media representations of heterosexuality and well documented in empirical research. Contemporary heterosexual scripts are remarkably similar to the dominant heterosexual script Gagnon and Simon presented in detail in 1973, 45 years ago, suggesting a recalcitrance of normative gender

relations that is belied by prevalent characterizations of the cultural effects of “second wave” feminism of the mid- to late-20th century as having radically changed heterosexuality. I will begin by describing the heterosexual scripts for “traditional” dating. This is the most familiar heterosexual script. Then, I will discuss the hookup variant of the heterosexual script. Contemporary heterosexual scripts guide patterns of interactions and, as with all kinds of interactions, are historically and culturally contingent. There are important differences across time and within any given society (Coontz, 2016). Some elements of the script however, have broad historical and cultural consistency. Overall, heteroscripts continue to be characterized by gendered expectations of men’s active role and women’s more passive role (Eaton and Rose, 2011; Lamont, 2014; Rutter and Schwartz, 2011)

In normative contemporary heterosexual scripts, men are expected to play an active role, beginning with the prelude to the date. The two actors may be coworkers, acquaintances, friends, or sometimes strangers. The man may approach the woman in a bar and start a conversation. He might ask her to attend an event with him, or to get a meal or drinks together. The two may be coworkers, or they may participate in the same organization, whether a church or a sports league. Regardless of the specific situation, it is the man who is supposed to initiate the romantic encounter with an invitation. What counts as a “date” typically includes some form of leisure consumption and entertainment. It remains common to expect the man to pay for the date.

Once on a date, the man is supposed to be the person to indicate interest in sexual contact and even initiate such contact without prior discussion, such as leaning in for a kiss. If the context is a bar or a party—a semi-sexualized space with others present, not a pre-determined encounter, he may touch her or dance closely to her to indicate interest. Ideally, the woman gives signs of encouragement, including smiling or reciprocating touch, though as the conversations

about sexual assault sparked by #MeToo make visible, in practice these signs of encouragement or reciprocated desire are not required for the heteroscript to progress.

Deviating from the script has consequences beyond interactional friction or awkwardness, particularly for women. While contemporary norms leave room for a woman to initiate, there are limits. Conveying interest to a coworker or acquaintance, for example, may be read as “taking things into your own hands” in the face of a man’s shyness, insecurity or cluelessness. Initiating sexual contact, however, risks not only being labeled as a slut, but also insulting the man’s ego by implying that he is not capable of fulfilling masculine expectations in the situation. Women who take this risk may well be rewarded with a desired outcome that would not have happened had they waited for the man to initiate, and the man may appreciate or even find pleasure in the subversion of expectations. However, there is a clear risk. In other words, the consequences of improvisation, as Gagnon and Simon would describe it, are more serious for the woman because she is already cast in a passive role and any action that suggests otherwise invokes the specter of the slut. The risk for the man of not taking an active role is lesser. He may have fewer desired outcomes in his romantic and sexual encounters, or he may get a reputation as awkward or unable to “seal the deal.” However, many pathways to successful performance of masculinity remain open to him. For a woman, being labeled a slut is a dead end.

Beyond the gendered expectations of the date, the trajectory of heterosexual relationships is also associated with a specific series of interactions. After a date, the man follows up—today this is done over text—to indicate interest in future encounters. Should the pair continue to see each other romantically or sexually, the topic of the “label” or “status” of the relationship must then happen. The exact nature of this negotiation of relationship “status” has changed over time. In its contemporary form it occurs in the context of delayed marriage, high rates of non-marital

cohabitation, and greater acceptance of pre-marital sex. The range of labels for sexually-involved people in the contemporary popular lexicon reflects these changes as well as the fine-tuned negotiations people engage in. “Friends with benefits”, “fuck buddies”, “booty calls”, “non-boyfriend/girlfriend”, “casually dating”, or “seeing” someone are all terms with vague definitions that indicate a sexual relationship without an explicit expectation of a progression toward monogamy, cohabitation/marriage and child rearing. I discuss this emerging stage of adult heterosexuality in detail in the next chapter, where I examine contemporary forms of intimacy and contradictions inherent in the normative expectations of being single for white heterosexual middle-class adults post-college. Despite changes in marriage patterns, both the timing and the number of marriages in a person’s lifetime, there continues to exist a normative life course trajectory associated with heterosexuality, and success, that includes a primary relationship progressing through phases of increased intimacy, convergence of daily life activities, commitment to monogamy, and raising children.

Tinder began as an app for college students at large residential universities in California that have reputations as “party schools” before the app targeted a broader range of potential users (Bosker, 2013). This origin, and the widespread use of the term hookup app to talk about Tinder, points to another set of sexual scripts relevant to analyzing the app. On residential campuses, sexual life revolves around heterosexual hookup culture (Armstrong and Hamilton, 2013; Bogle, 2008; Wade, 2017). The scripts associated with hookup culture largely replace dating scripts, within a temporally and spatially confined context. However, working class students are less likely to participate in hookup culture, (Armstrong and Hamilton, 2013). Researchers have identified hookups as an important contemporary form of sexual interaction, though casual heterosexual sex is not new (Albury, 2018; Reay, 2014). Hookup scripts almost always involve

alcohol, often in large quantities, and initial contact generally occurs in a sexually charged group setting such as a party. Hookup scripts are oriented away from emotional intimacy and relationship formation. Both dating and hookup scripts for heterosexuals are structured around gendered norms. As with dating scripts, men are responsible for initiation and women must make themselves seem available without being perceived as too eager, and should wait for the man to initiate sexual contact. However, a double standard of men's entitlement to pleasure and judgment of women who seem to be too sexually available is more pronounced in hookup scripts (Allison and Risman, 2013; Armstrong et al., 2012; Reid et al., 2011).

B. Male Homosexual Scripts

Gay male sexual scripts also exist in the context of gender norms and heteronormativity, including men's greater access to public space, but developed in the context of the criminalization of homosexuality for much of U.S. history, public sanctions for same-sex relationships, and the emergence of visible sexual minority communities in the 20th century (D'Emilio and Freedman, 2012). For much of the 20th century, sexual scripts for men who have sex with men (MSM) involved anonymous, or semi-anonymous public encounters, often called "cruising" (Bérubé, 1996; Chauncey, 1995; Humphreys, 1975). Cruising and gay public sex culture, thriving in the 1960s and 1980s, has declined since then, in part because of responses to the AIDS epidemic that associated promiscuity, and public sex especially, with HIV transmission (Colter, 1996). Cruising traditionally occurs in bars, clubs, or public spaces such as parks, public restrooms, and pornographic theaters, where men generally signal sexual interest in another man through established non-verbal signals (Howard, 2001; Tewksbury, 2002). Such practices still exist, including in several Chicago bathhouses and bars, though changing cultural norms and increased policing of public spaces have decreased their prevalence (McGlotten, 2013;

Mowlabocus, 2010; Tewksbury, 2008). Unlike heterosexual scripts, which are part of general socialization beginning in infancy, homosexual scripts must be learned later in life.

With the development of gay and lesbian identities (Katz, 2007) and increasing acceptance of same-sex relationships, heterosexual dating scripts were adapted for same-sex dating. These scripts share many of the basic features and sequences of heterosexual dating scripts, such as “going on a date” by attending an event or sharing a meal, and following a progression of increased intimacy; however, gay men are more likely to incorporate sex earlier in the script, and gay and lesbian dating scripts differ in the timing and extent of disclosure to family (Klinkenberg and Rose, 1994). Additionally, LGBTQ dating scripts are more likely than heterosexual scripts to emphasize egalitarianism (Lamont, 2017). Compared with heterosexual scripts, expectations around who initiates a romantic or sexual encounter are variable. While some contexts may include norms of initiation, expectations are not differentiated by gender.

In addition to the cruising script, which does not have a heterosexual counterpart,³⁰ and the lack of gender-differentiated expectations, sexual scripts for gay men include queer kinship. Originally out of necessity, in the context of frequent social isolation from families of origin, “chosen families” of friends, lovers, and former lovers are more common in LGBTQ communities (Donovan et al., 2001; Weston, 1991). The script for what happens after a relationship, casual or serious, allows for a shift to platonic friendship.

In this and the previous section, I have described the sexual scripts that pre-existed Tinder and Grindr, and continue to be relevant for romantic and sexual interaction absent the

³⁰ This does not mean heterosexual sex never happens in public, but there is not a cultural script for this, nor an institutionalization of the practice as with gay bathhouses.

mediation of these apps. In the next section I will explain the features of the apps Tinder and Grindr, which were introduced briefly in the Introduction.

<p>Tinder</p> <p>free version 2016</p>	<p>VS</p>	<p>Grindr</p> <p>free version 2016</p>
<p><u>Profile</u> <i>Required:</i> 1 picture, and name, gender, age, friend list, interests list from linked Facebook account <i>Optional:</i> 5 more pictures, text description</p> <p><u>Viewing.</u> Top picture, name, and age shown, tap for full profile, profiles shown one at a time, with action required in order to view the next profile</p> <p>Swipe feature: left = user cannot message you and you will not see their profile again right = allows messaging</p> <p>Filters: gender, age, distance</p> <p><u>Messaging</u> Direct message with users you have "matched" with</p> <p>Send text, but not pictures</p> <p>Can "unmatch" (block) users</p>		<p><u>Profile</u> <i>Required:</i> none <i>Optional:</i> 1 picture (approval by moderator required), short headline text, distance from other user, optional closed-ended questions: age, height, weight, race, tribe</p> <p><u>Viewing</u> Profiles shown as a grid of thumbnail photos, in order of proximity, tap for full profile</p> <p>Filters: Can block users at any time</p> <p><u>Messaging</u> Direct message any user</p> <p>Send text or pictures</p>

Figure 1: Features of Tinder and Grindr

C. The Apps

Figure 1 summarizes the key features of Tinder and Grindr. Both apps allow users to represent themselves to others via a profile, view other users' profiles, and direct message other users. The design features that create these affordances vary by app. Features have been added, taken away, and experimented with over time. This table shows the key features during 2016, when I conducted interviews with app users.

To create a Tinder profile, a user must first have a Facebook account. Whatever name, gender, and age is listed on the user's Facebook account shows up in their Tinder profile and cannot be changed. Tinder also pulls a user's friend list and interests list from Facebook, which it uses to show shared friends and shared interests with any other user whose profile they are viewing. Users must choose an image from their Facebook photos (now you can upload images directly to the app, by-passing Facebook), and have the option of including up to six images in total.

Grindr does not require any linked accounts. Profiles do not have to include an image, but can have one image. When a user uploads an image to their Grindr account, it first has to be approved by a moderator to verify that it does not contain genitals, or otherwise violate their image policy. Any information on the profile is optional. The only default information on a Grindr profile is the distance from the user who is viewing that profile. However, this feature can be hidden. Users can type in a short "headline" and fill-in the text-box. (The original Grindr allowed only 150 characters, ten more than the Twitter character limit.) Age, height, and weight are optional, as is race (chosen from a pre-set list) and "tribe." The tribe feature allows a user to choose from a pre-set list of subcultural or descriptive identities.

From these differences in features emerges an important difference of affordances. Grindr allows a user to be anonymous, Tinder does not. Anonymity has long been part of the sexual scripts available to gay men. The extent to which Grindr users take advantage of the features of Grindr profiles to remain anonymous depends not only on personal identity (whether a user wants to be seen on an app marketed to gay men), and personal situations (such as cheating on a partner, or avoiding being seen by family or coworkers), but also location. In large cities like Chicago, the density of users means that any given user only sees the profiles of people close by. So, for example, a user need only go to another part of the city to decrease the likelihood of being seen by someone in their neighborhood or workplace. In less densely populated areas, and with fewer Grindr users, the profiles of users several towns over are visible.

Tinder's features prevent anonymity. It is possible to create a "fake" profile, akin to anonymity, but this requires setting up a Facebook account with a fake name, or changing the name on an existing account (which some users do, including one of my heterosexual woman participants who felt the need for greater privacy after being harassed). Existing heterosexual scripts for casual sex, as we saw above, do not include anonymity. The people involved may be strangers, but in the common scenario they meet in a group setting such as a party or a bar, are there with friends, and likely have some connection to each other, even if it is distant.

Tinder and Grindr have different interfaces for viewing other users' profiles, including difference in sequence and temporality. Grindr users see approximately twelve profiles at a time, as a grid of thumbnail images. Users can scroll through the grid, tapping on an image to view the full profile. Starting at the top left and reading the images like text in a book, the user sees profiles in an order based on proximity. A green dot on the thumbnail means that user is currently on the app. Viewing profiles on Grindr is in many ways similar to entering a public

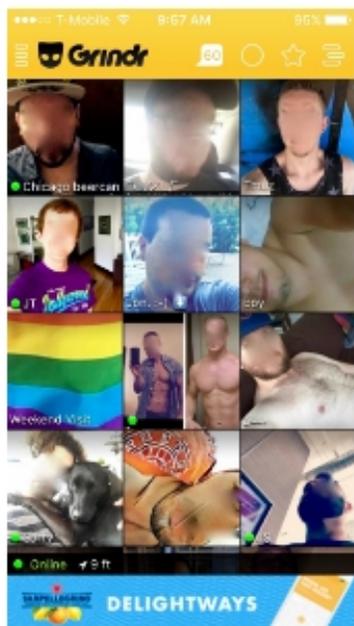
space, such as a bar or an internet chatroom. On Tinder, profiles are presented one at a time. In order to view a new profile, the user must make a decision—swipe the profile “card” left or right. A left swipe means that you will not see that user again and they cannot message you. Swipe right, and you have just consented to being messaged by that user. However, that user does not receive a notification of your swipe.³¹ In late 2016, Tinder introduced a new feature, the “Super Like”.³² A user could swipe a profile up (instead of left or right) and the app would notify this other user that they had been “super liked.” Messaging, however, still required a double opt-in. Tinder’s viewing interface feels more like speed dating than a bar or chatroom. In addition, Tinder does not present user profiles in direct order of proximity. The app allows a user to filter by distance, but the group of users who fit that filter are then shown in an order based on Tinder’s own algorithms and their exact location is never disclosed.

It is not difficult to imagine why Tinder would do this. Women are afraid of men, with good reason. The pervasiveness of violence against women is the setting in which heteroscripts are enacted. Coupled with the lingering “stranger danger” stigma of internet-mediated exchanges, such as buying or selling something on Craigslist, and absent the history of anonymous sex cultures, Tinder would not have become the successful “straight Grindr” by making women feel *less* safe than they already did on dating websites, which have no locative function.³³

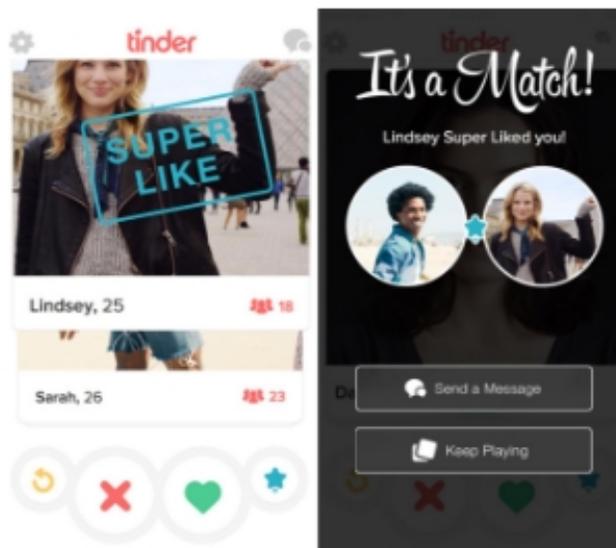
³¹ A number of participants said they believed that Tinder’s algorithm prioritized these potential matches when you open the app, because the first several people they swipe right on are always a match.

³² Participants I interviewed after this feature was introduced did not like it or rarely used it.

³³ In interviews with Grindr users, the safety of the “distance away” feature on Grindr came up several times, but in relation to homophobic hate crimes. Many heterosexual participants specifically stated that Grindr’s distance feature would never work for a heterosexual app, specifically because of women’s safety concerns.



author screenshot
August 28, 2016
Chicago, IL



Tinder Press Kit photo
retrieved October 26, 2016

Figure 2: Viewing User Profiles

While the viewing of profiles on Grindr imitates a public space, messaging on both apps is private and limited to two users. Unlike Tinder, messaging on Grindr is open. Anyone on Grindr can message anyone else, unless they have been pre-emptively blocked. Blocking on Grindr makes a user invisible to the blocked account. On Tinder, this only becomes relevant after the match. Users can “unmatch” at any time, eliminating the possibility of receiving messages from that person. The content of messages also differs between the apps. Grindr has always

supported sending pictures. Tinder does not. Tinder users can now send GIFs and animated emojis, such as a blowing a kiss or throwing the contents of a martini glass in someone's face, but the app does not support sending pictures. In practice, this means that the affordances of Grindr include sending sexually explicit photos—already a common practice dating back to early gay chat rooms—while the design of Tinder prevents this.

Tinder and Grindr both afford users a way to create a profile, view others' profiles, and direct message other users. However, the key differences in the control users have over their privacy reflect differences in pre-existing sexual scripts. In the next section I will explain Tinder and Grindr scripts.

D. App Users' Sexual Scripts

My participants described their typical interactions on the apps and their in-person interactions with other users they met on the apps. They did this by answering questions specifically about, for example, messaging practices. I also gathered this information through their actions and explanations during the walk-through portion of the interview, as they showed me how they use the app and I probed for justifications and posed hypothetical follow through situations. What emerged from interviews was a fairly consistent pattern of user practices and norms. In this section I will describe these typical patterns of interaction, which participants themselves identified as highly predictable, as well as common practices participants engaged in as they constructed and managed their own profile, and sorted through other users' profiles.

1. Heterosexual Tinder scripts

A loose script for Tinder-mediated heterosexual dating has coalesced after an early period of confusion. The general template for what we might call the Tinder script has three phases, swiping, messaging, and in-person meetup. The gendered expectations of pre-

existing heteroscripts are apparent at all phases, and a great deal of “behind-the-scenes” work goes into vetting other users.

Tinder users in my study used a variety of techniques for deciding which user profiles to swipe left, and which user profiles to swipe right (allowing that user to message them should the two users “match”). Some acknowledged the critique of Tinder as making people more “shallow,” seeming self-conscious about their choices. This idea that Tinder, or social media in general, make people shallow, or play on the worst tendencies of humans to be judgmental, has wide appeal. It is a go-to conventional wisdom about technology and about Millennials, who are the largest demographic on dating sites and apps. However, I found participants to be quite savvy. They often made complex assessments of the people whose profiles they viewed. Whether their assessments were accurate or not, participants were rarely “just” swiping on looks. By asking participants to walk me through their process during the interview, it was clear that most of them had given this some thought.

Profile text and profile pictures were both analyzed for physical and non-physical characteristics. Height came up as an important characteristic for some straight participants, with taller men generally being more desirable on Tinder. Kelly, a 25-year-old straight white woman said,

I’ve also noticed that guys that don’t put a height, that usually means they are shorter, but they’ll have a group picture where you can clearly see they’re the shortest of their friends. So that’s another tactic.

Participants expressed several common concerns when assessing another user’s profile, but this varied by the gender of the participant. Straight men were most concerned with being “catfished.” This is a term from the dating website era that refers to being duped by someone who is falsely representing themselves in some way, but is most often used in reference to

someone, typically a woman, not being as attractive in person as in their pictures.³⁴ William, a 28-year-old straight white man, implied this problem when answering a question about differences between dating through apps and meeting someone not through the internet,

So, obviously I think if you met them organically, you already know what they look like, so there's no surprises when someone shows up and doesn't look like their profile.

For William, the appeal of meeting someone in person, at a bar or through friends for example, was not having to be disappointed by their level of attractiveness. He described his best experience with apps,

So, the longest relationship, or the only real relationship to come out of it was on Tinder. I honestly didn't think that she was real, because she only had three photos and nothing written in her profile. And the pictures were far away, like all the telltale warning signs that this person's catfishing you. But, she was actually by far the prettiest girl that I've gone out with. Looked better than her pictures, which was unusual. And, we dated for about four or five months. So, that was the best experience.

The best experience for him was both the longest connection he made, and being pleasantly surprised by his date being more attractive in person than on her profile.

Women, while also placing importance on honesty and honest representations of oneself (discussed further in the next chapter), were most concerned about minimizing harassment by pro-actively weeding out men that seemed like potential harassers, not men who may be less attractive in person. Jennifer, a 30-year-old bisexual Latina had this advice for new users,

There's a filtering process. Make sure you have your own filtering process in place, before you go and randomly start dating, because you're exposing yourself to a lot of dangerous situations. You have to have a clean, solid filtering process, bulletproof filtering process that you're comfortable with, that you know yourself.

³⁴ The television channel MTV helped popularize this term with a reality show called *Catfish*. The show focused on the build-up in intimacy online and the dramatic revelation of the “real” person at the first in-person meeting of the two online daters.

Jennifer did not impose her own filtering system on others, but suggested that users find something that works for them. She said her filtering process was to avoid situations with men who might rape her or who would not respect her boundaries during sex.

Participants had different approaches to when they took the time to view another user's full profile. Some did this on all, or almost all, profiles before they swiped, while others only viewed the full profile if they were undecided about that person, and some waited until the messaging stage. Regardless of their actual approach to viewing full profiles, the logic they used to develop their approach centered on efficiency. Most participants did not spend much time looking at the list shared Facebook friends, which is visible on the full profile, but it did factor into some users' vetting practices. Kelly, for example, said she only takes into account shared Facebook friends,

if it's like somebody that I'm on the fence about, and I see that they have a good friend of mine or somebody that I know, then I might say yes. But, I've also found, like, if I see they have a common connection—so, there's one guy that, I actually don't even know who he is, or why he friended me. I've had him on my Facebook for years, I think he was a friend of a friend. Any person that is friends with him, and I've gone out with a couple of them, they're all douchebags, so I've learned when I see that guy as a shared friend to say no.

A close shared friend, whose judgment she trusted, could tip the scales in favor of swiping right, but being Facebook friends with this particular guy was an automatic no, based on her prior experience.

One of the aspects of pre-existing scripts that remained consistent is the gendered nature of initiation. Despite the lower interactional risk of rejection, or social sanctions for deviating from normative scripts, women generally waited for men to message them first. Exchanging phone numbers was a common part of the script. After an initial exchange to build trust, users will often exchange phone numbers for ease of communicating. Women regularly receive

unwanted pictures of penises, or “dick pics,” from men they met through Tinder. This is why many women put so much effort into vetting at the swiping and initial message phases. Tinder’s online company presence includes what we might call dual purpose educational campaigns that both attempt to make the point to people with penises that they should be more frugal with pictures of said penises, and make a public show of being aware and sensitive to women’s harassment. Harassment of women by men, in the form of unwanted sexually explicit texts and images, came up in all Tinder interviews.³⁵ William, quoted above, gave this advice for new users:

If it was a girl I would tell her to stay away from Tinder, it’s a pretty nasty place for women, from what I’ve heard. From a lot of my friends.

This sentiment came up in all interviews with Tinder users, though most did not say they would advise women against it. There was a general understanding that men and women have different experiences on the app, women may experience harassment, and this is just the price of dating.

The Tinder-spin-off app Bumble provides a useful example of the extent to which harassment plays a central role in both the experiences of women who use dating and hookup apps and the discourse about the apps. Whitney Wolfe, founder and CEO of Bumble, was a co-founder of Tinder, but left after suing fellow co-founder Justin Mateen for sexual harassment (Wortham, 2014). The key design difference between Bumble and Tinder is that on Bumble women have to message first. When a “match” occurs, the woman has 48 hours to message the other user. If she does send a message, the other user can then respond. If she does not message in this time period, the match disappears, along with it the ability to message that person. Bumble has been explicit in their marketing that the app is designed to give women more control

³⁵ Some Grindr user participants also brought this up, as a reflection on the differences between Grindr and what they assumed Tinder was like.

over interactions, and provide another layer of protection for women users. In other words, Bumble was a direct response to the frequency of men harassing women, both in the workplace and online. The design of the app is explicitly based on heterosexual scripts, but allows for same-gender matching. If two men, or two women, match, either user can message first, but the time limit still applies.³⁶

Participants varied on how long they preferred to message with someone before exchanging numbers, and before meeting in person. As with decisions about viewing profiles and responding to messages, time and efficiency were key factors. Length of time spent messaging was also part of an emerging app script related to conveying intentions. Kyle, quoted earlier about his skepticism that Tinder would be like Grindr, was strategic in his messaging, because he knew many women assume a man who wants to meet right away is only interested in sex.

I think it sort of works itself out a lot of times because usually the messaging goes on over like a day or two. So it's sort of clear from that I guess that I'm not communicating to hook up with women.

In Kyle's experience, his willingness to spend time messaging before meeting up was sending his intended signal that he was not looking for a quick hookup. Length of time messaging is one way some users attempt to clarify which script they are using, dating or hookup.

All of my heterosexual participants reported that meeting in person at a bar or restaurant was the typical Tinder "date," even if they sometimes deviated from this, or personally preferred

³⁶ Bumble continues to make attempts to be inclusive of (binary gendered) non-heterosexual users, but these attempts tend to come off as clueless, not inclusive. For example, an in-app survey started with the question "I am:" and offered the following options: A man seeking a man, a woman seeking a woman, a man seeking a woman, a woman seeking a man, I don't identify with the male/female binary (please specify). Apparently, a simple "seeking both, option did not occur to them. Either you are heterosexual, or a gender/sexuality anarchist.

daytime coffee meetings. Their assessment was based on their own experiences, that of their friends or others they knew who used the app. For users more interested in medium to long-term relationships, choosing a meet-up location, like time spent messaging, was often a balance of not “wasting time” and not appearing to be looking for a hookup. Veronica, a 26-year-old straight Latina, said she did not like giving out her number right away. She also preferred to spend some time texting with the person, to decide if she liked them. When it comes to meeting up, she said,

Serious first dates, it’s kind of a bit too much pressure on both of us. I’m more laid back and casual. Like would totally be ok with something public and in the day time...coffee dates are ideal for me. As opposed to like, Hey let’s get dinner at this restaurant. I’m not opposed to it, but it’s not my preference. Then I feel like I have to get dressed up, and then what do I wear? What if I don’t like him, then I’m stuck with him for a while [because] I don’t want to leave him either, that’s not nice, that’s rude.

As part of a general vetting process, both to prevent unwanted messages from a guy, either in quantity or content, and to decide if she likes someone, Veronica prefers a longer period of getting to know someone over text. This is one way that dating scripts show up in Tinder scripts. Here though, she describes other features of dating scripts, such as getting dressed up and eating a meal together, as tedious and a possible waste of time. Meeting for coffee is more casual than dinner, and comes with less potential expectation of sex than meeting for drinks. Carol, a 36-year-old straight white woman, also said meeting for dinner was “too much.” Like Veronica, gender norms requiring women to be nice were part of her calculation. She did not want to end up “obligated” to spend hours with a guy she was not interested in, which is what happened when she met for dinner.

Tinder scripts included aspects of both dating and hookup scripts. Unlike either of these pre-existing scripts, initial contact is typically made in relative privacy. On the one hand, it is not a group environment such as a party or bar and the initial contact does not necessarily happen in

an alcohol saturated social setting. On the other hand, many participants reported swiping with friends or giving their phone to friends to swipe for them. Also common were comments by participants about swiping while drunk, either as a group activity or by themselves. Much of the script-overlap confusion for participants involved expectations around sex and unclear intentions for the future.

2. Grindr Scripts

Grindr's open viewing and messaging design creates the possibility of different scripts for user engagement, though there is substantial overlap with Tinder scripts. On both apps, many users engage in highly predictable text conversation upon initial contact, and "ghosting," or not responding to another user is common. Unlike Tinder, Grindr profiles are often sexually explicit, and initial messages with sexual propositions are more common, though not welcomed by all users.

As on Tinder, some users perceived the length and intensity of the messaging stage to have a predictive relationship with how exclusively sexual the outcome would be. Others, though, preferred to meet up right away, but the time of day and location mattered for signaling intentions. Grindr users complained about boring and repetitive messaging even more than Tinder users did. Derrick, a 31-year-old black gay man, was not looking for immediate sex, and emphasized "connection" and conversation throughout the interview. Regarding messaging he said,

Don't just say "hey"! I mean even in my first line there [on my profile] I'm like "what takes life four minutes takes Grindr six days! just wanna meet instead?" So I feel like a lot of, I like to use the app to actually meet people. Not to just text my thumbs off. I hate texting, I really do. It takes energy out of my brain, and out of my fingers, and I would like to meet. And like I said, my goal and aim with this is to meet someone, so that I'm able to like discern the things that might work. It might not because online you're a stranger until I meet you, you know what I mean?

Derrick's frustration with lengthy texting was echoed by a number of Grindr user participants, even those who did not talk about the app, or online interaction in general, as dis-connected. Derrick's frustrations with Grindr show how the app accommodates a range of scripts, including meeting in person to pursue dating and friendship, but chatting within the app, without ever meeting, is also common.

Josh, a 20-year-old gay Asian man, approached the in-person meeting differently depending whether it was a hookup, or a date, saying, "when I hook up with someone, I don't really make the effort to know them as much, and I will just meet up with them once." Though he often discussed race and the politics of interracial relationships with his white boyfriend, and he was aware that many of the older white men he met with fetishized young Asian men, when he met men on Grindr or Scruff to hookup, "as long as I'm being satisfied, I don't think about it too much." Josh's differentiated approach reflects that the dominant script on Grindr is oriented toward the goal of facilitating sexual encounters.

Overall, scripts on Grindr reflect its use as a digital cruising (Mowlabocus, 2010) technology. The fact that Grindr is a multi-use space creates some script mis-match, but the mis-match happens on initial contact or very soon thereafter. Unlike the ambiguity of the overlay of dating and hookup scripts on Tinder, script mis-match on Grindr was less likely to happen during the encounter. This is partly explained by greater specialization in the apps and websites available to men looking for other men, as discussed below.

3. Non-heterosexual Tinder users

Five gay men participants in this study used both Grindr and Tinder. All of them considered the two apps to be for different purposes. For example, one of these men, César, a 26-year-old gay Latino man, told me that his Grindr and Tinder profiles were quite different,

César: Tinder is linked to your Facebook. So in a way, Tinder, like in order for you to download Tinder you had to connect thru your Facebook.

Jody: Right.

César: And so there was a [long pause] the way that I present myself publicly on Facebook also translated onto Tinder, so that's why there was more of like a, not desexualized, but less sexualized. Where as like with Grindr you can be more anonymous on Grindr.

The apps themselves are associated with specific scripts. While users certainly mix goals and have a variety of outcomes on either Grindr or Tinder, expectations are structured by the medium through which initial contact is made. The availability of multiple apps³⁷ for gay men, including Tinder, allows for specialization, as Josh's explanation of his goals shows,

Jody: What is your goal on the apps?

Josh (20, gay, Asian): It's interesting because I talk to a lot of my straight friends about Tinder, because for me I use it more like dating or just meeting other people, not so much as hookups. Whereas Grindr is obviously for fun and for hookups. When I talk to my straight friends about it, I guess there's not really, Tinder's as close as they have to that, so they use it more for fun, whereas for me it's just casual dates and meeting friends. That's why I like having both of them.

Josh and the other participants who used both apps said they sometimes saw the same people on multiple apps. However, which app was used to make contact typically oriented the script, either towards casual sex, or dating.

In addition to app specialization, non-heterosexual Tinder users were much more likely to have made friends through the app. Several non-heterosexual Tinder users specifically mentioned using Tinder for making friends. For example, Adanna, a 28-year-old black lesbian said her goal for starting Tinder, "was just, for me I was new here I moved here in August, so to make friends and, you know, for dating purposes at all if it happened." Heterosexual participants

³⁷ The most popular gay specific apps include Grindr, Scruff, Jack'd, and Growlr, though there are many more. Gay men, including participants in this study, also use OkCupid, which like Tinder is not gay specific.

did not use the app like this. They may use the app with ambiguous and multiple goals, such as dating and “probably relationships,” searching for friends was not one of the explicit goals of any heterosexual participants.

Richard, a 25-year-old straight Latino, was one of the few heterosexual participants to talk about finding friendship through casual dating. When I asked him about his most positive experience, he said,

A woman named Erica. Her and I were seeing each other for about two months after we had met. Again, totally casual, but we became friends from it.

A brief casual relationship turned into a friendship. Two other heterosexual participants mentioned remaining friends with casual partners, but they discussed these friendships as hanging out in groups, or as becoming “drinking buddies.”

When “let’s be friends” is used in a heterosexual context, after a date or some kind of sexual or romantic relationship, it often has the connotation of being “friend-zoned,” a term meant to describe when a woman ends a relationship with a man by saying she “just wants to be friends.” While “I’m more interested in being friends” is a fairly universal way of letting someone down easy, the sexual scripts for non-heterosexual dating include taking that statement at face value and embarking on a non-sexual friendship. This issue of friendship and queer kinship will come up again in the next chapter when I discuss app user dissatisfaction and longing for intimacy.

One final difference in how non-heterosexual participants used Tinder is explained by Christian, a 31-year-old gay Latino,

Christian: When I came out I went on OkCupid, I changed [settings] on Tinder, I downloaded Scruff. It was to integrate myself into the gay community. Because I had never even, before I came out I was never part of it. Like, I had some gay acquaintances but never really, like, I’d never been to Boystown [Chicago’s primary gay neighborhood]. I’d never been to any gay event like that, so I figured

that the only way I was gonna do it, especially as an adult, no one's gonna hold my hand and be like "this is how you be gay." I just had to go figure it out or whatever, so I downloaded it to kind of chat with people. And try to figure out, I guess, how to talk to guys.

Christian used the apps not just as a way to find dates or friends, but as a means of gay socialization. Christian also downloaded Grindr, after he made gay friends, who told him Grindr was not just for sex. The apps facilitated a process many gay men go through, either when coming out, or moving somewhere new, that is usually done through existing networks or finding gay commercial spaces (Carrillo, 2018).

Structures: gender norms, homophobia

		<u>PRE-APP / OFF-APP</u>	<u>APP MEDIATED</u>
<u>HETEROSEXUAL</u>		dinner/drinks/event escalation of intimacy delayed sex assumed end goal	men swipe right more men initiate messaging women vet for safety exchange phone numbers meet in public, usually a bar may move to a home unclear sexual expectations unknown end goal
		men initiate women gatekeep women consider safety	
		meet in group setting heavy drinking sexual contact (vague) avoidance of intimacy	
<u>GAY, MSM</u>		<u>cruising</u> coded cues (semi-)anonymous (semi-)public	<u>Grindr</u> often made explicit: sexual expectations sub-cultural identity preferences by race, body type, gender presentation, sexual position usually meet in public
		<u>dating</u> dinner/drinks/event escalation of intimacy assumed end goal	<u>both</u> drink may move to a home possible platonic outcome
		<u>queer kinship</u> porous sexual/platonic boundaries	<u>Tinder</u> dinner/drinks/event unclear sexual expectations assumed end goal

Figure 3: Dominant Heterosexual and Gay Male Sexual Scripts

E. The More Things Change

I have argued in this chapter that Tinder and Grindr have not changed the fundamental structure of romantic or sexual interaction. There is a continuity of sexual scripts from culturally hegemonic pre-app and off-app scripts to the patterns of interaction between Tinder and Grindr users that emerged in my data. Heterosexual scripts were even more similar than gay male scripts across pre-/off-app interaction and app-mediated interaction. Figure 3 summarizes the sexual scripts I have discussed in this chapter.

As described above, culturally hegemonic heterosexual scripts involve a specific series of steps. At each of these, expectations for behavior are gendered. Men initiate and pursue. Women respond to these advances in the context of a sexual-double standard, with higher risks for deviating from the expectation that they not be pursued and even, ideally, show some initial reluctance. My heterosexual participants' messaging practices follow this gendered pattern of initiation and the risk of women being perceived as too sexual, or labeled as slutty, came up in most interviews. Heterosexual participants, men and women alike, expressed some variation of the idea that Tinder is not a nice space for women. Dating and hookup apps may seem foreign, even for some people who opt to use them, but they come with the same expectations, and recreate the same gendered heterosexual interactions, as non-digital forms of dating.

In this chapter I have shown how these apps work, and how participants use them. In the following three chapters, I will build on my argument that these apps have done little to change the basic form of sexual interaction by contextualizing claims made about the apps in a larger picture of social relations. However, I will also consider ways in which Tinder and Grindr are reflective of broad changes, such as shifting forms of intimacy, and the ways in which their affordances interact with general patterns, such as racial and sexual ideologies.

IV. The Promise of Tinder

We're embarrassed to be single...

But why should we be embarrassed?

*We're living longer, marrying later, and refusing to leave the party until we're really really done
So why do we always tell our stories through relationships?*

(How to be Single, 2016)

In the 2016 movie *How to be Single*, the audience is presented with three archetypal twenty-something female characters, single, white, heterosexual and living alone trying to make it in New York. Unlike Robin, the casual sex-oriented party girl, (played by Rebel Wilson) and Alice (played by Dakota Johnson³⁸), who does not seem to know what she wants and enters a series of short and unsatisfying romances, Lucy (played by Alison Brie) spends her spare time obsessively and methodically searching through online dating profiles for a prospective husband.

The movie presents a common depiction, in both popular and academic discourse, of the dangers of online dating. Lucy is the stereotypical Type A woman who has decided to find a marriageable man, a tall order given her exacting standards, and according to her plan, marry 18 months after beginning the relationship. Over the course of the movie she falls in love (too quickly) with someone she meets online and gets dumped at the train station right before the holidays. Her character serves as a warning, reminding the audience of the perils of being too relationship driven and too attached to a pre-determined life plan.

³⁸ Johnson is best known for her role in the earlier 2015 movie *50 Shades of Grey*, that portrays a BDSM (umbrella term for bondage, domination and sadomasochism) relationship between Johnson's character, a naïve college student, and tormented millionaire Christian Grey. Intentional or not, casting her for the role of Alice in *How to be Single* links the two characters as part of a popular culture discourse about sexual awakening and sexual freedom, ostensibly through the rejection of normative prescriptions of women's sexual passivity and repression. The discourse frames women's sexual freedom as a project of self-discovery and individual choice.

Online dating has been accused of taking the love, passion and spontaneity out of finding a romantic partner. Lucy's character represents these cultural anxieties about the effects of new technology. With the popularization of apps such as Tinder, a new but related fear has emerged that combines the belief that internet-mediated dating is cold and calculated with the hand-wringing in the last twenty years over supposedly rampant casual sex on college campuses. Unlike dating websites, apps like Tinder are believed to be *less* rational, instead seen as a superficial means of instantly assessing another person based on looks and meeting them in person for an equally superficial sexual encounter. At the same time, they are continually compared to online dating, especially as Tinder's reputation as a hookup app softens, and held up as an example of a dating culture bereft of real intimacy. Finding a partner through such cold and impersonal means as your smartphone is supposedly lacking "real" connection, and hooking up is believed to be inherently unemotional and lacking in intimacy.

Lucy's online dating habit is also presented as a symptom of something more dangerous: letting single young adulthood slip by unenjoyed. Robin's character, always up for a good time, out at clubs and bars most nights and prone to casual hookups with no regrets, is the foil to Lucy. Unlike many romantic comedies, of which this movie situates itself within and against, slutty-friend Robin is the source of wisdom and sane advice for the main character Alice—not a morality tale or merely a comedic prop. Instead, it is Lucy the overly rational online dater and Meg, Alice's older sister (played by Leslie Mann), the classic career-oriented morality character, who serve as warnings. Loneliness for both Lucy and Meg is a symptom of being too outwardly focused, as becomes even more apparent through the main storyline. Ultimately, both Lucy and Meg find love, but only after they stop looking for it and become content with their single-ness.

In Meg's case, she only finds love after she decides to become a single mother using in-vitro fertilization and an anonymous sperm donor.

It is the trials and tribulations, and ultimate triumph, of the main character Alice that hammers home the message of the dangers of being relationship focused. Despite her series of romantic couplings with very eligible men, she only finds happiness by embracing her single-ness. The movie opens with Alice breaking up with her college boyfriend, a happy and quite serious relationship, in order to move to New York City and learn what it is like to be single. Her college relationship had been her first and only serious relationship and she feels that because of this she has missed out on something.

As the movie progresses, the writers lead the audience into multiple easy endings of happily ever after, only to have each cut short for various reasons. In the meantime, while Alice is unhappily coupling and uncoupling, she is learning how to be single. The movie culminates in a final sequence where Alice, helped by the sage advice of her party animal friend, accepts that the best thing for her is to come to know *herself*, in a profound way I will call self-intimacy. The movie ends with her monologue about this realization as she stands on a breathtaking overlook at the Grand Canyon. The happily ever after is a solo backpacking trip—a trip we learned in the opening sequence of the movie has been a life long goal that, at least in Alice's mind, never happened because she was too busy being in relationships.

We learn through the ending voice-over monologue, however, that this journey to self-intimacy is not an end in itself. Rather, it is necessary for later successful partner intimacy. Her series of failed relationships after breaking up with her boyfriend were a result of an inability to be alone, yet the goal of being happily alone is to lay the ground work for future successful

relationships. It is a paradox that, I will show, is felt by the Tinder users in my study and is both a driving force for their app use and a source of their dissatisfaction with Tinder.

In this chapter I will show that Tinder users have various goals, sometimes including searching for a long-term relationship, but that their app use is most often marked by ambivalence, indifference and cynicism. Many are dissatisfied with the app, yet continue to use it. Scholars and social commentators have suggested that as a society we have become dissatisfied and anxious because we have “too many” choices in our lives (Salcel, 2011; Schwartz, 2016). Others argue that contemporary forms of communication technology stunt our ability to form and maintain meaningful social relationships (Stivers, 2004; Turkle, 2012; 2015). These narratives are especially strong when applied to internet-mediated dating.³⁹

I will argue in this chapter that many of my participants use Tinder for contradictory, or ambivalent reasons. They want a romantic relationship and the intimacy that entails, and because they feel pressure to be single in an active way in order to pursue what I will call self-intimacy. They are not dissatisfied with the number of choices. In fact, the number of other users and the efficiency of sorting through these potential partners with the app are part of the reason dissatisfied users continue to use the app. Rather, the negative associations relationship-seeking users have with Tinder is a result of a failure to find intimacy. While they often blame the app, or other users, their ambivalence and cynicism creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of Tinder as difficult place to find a medium to long-term partner. Participants who are not looking for a traditional long term relationship, or at least not now, are still looking for intimacy—but with a different temporality.

³⁹ There are hundreds of studies in psychology alone supporting “choice overload” theory in relation to online dating.

I focus on Tinder in this chapter because relationship formation is more often a goal for Tinder users than Grindr users. In addition, intimacy figures prominently in Tinder's marketing and self-styling, unlike Grindr which presents itself and the possibilities of app use as a means to more casual social connections. Heterosexual participants did not use Grindr, and only one participant among the group of lesbian, bisexual and queer women, and transgender users (LBQWT) used Grindr. Gay men who used both Tinder and Grindr used Tinder for dating—that is, for short-term to long-term relationships that included a romantic component in addition to a sexual component—and used Grindr for more casual relationships. The extent to which Grindr users sought out and found intimacy on Grindr is discussed in the end of the chapter.

I will begin by reviewing several theories of intimacy as it manifests in what is variously referred to as high modernity, late modernity, late capitalism or advanced capitalism. I will elaborate how I define and deploy the term intimacy. Definitions of liberalism and neoliberalism that form the basis of my argument about self-intimacy will be reviewed as well. Then I will turn to Tinder's reputation management and marketing strategies, showing how the company successfully capitalizes on the contradictions of contemporary norms of singlehood. These norms are associated with middle-class or upwardly mobile heterosexual young adults with few family obligations. This is not the only demographic who uses Tinder, but it is the focus of Tinder's marketing and presentation of itself as an app. In Chicago, where this study was conducted and where interview participants were drawn from, there is a large population of young single adults and swiping through the app in the city reveals that the majority of users fit this demographic.

The argument in this chapter began with an observation that my participants did not seem particularly satisfied with their app use. A central research question of this project was, "How are

people using Tinder and Grindr, and why are they using these apps?” Therefore, I asked participants during interviews what their goals were for using the app(s). I also asked them if they were satisfied with the app(s). The simple answer is, not really. Yet, they continue to use the apps, even if they “take a break” from it now and then. Why would people continue to use something that they have, at best, mixed feelings about?

I find that participants are most satisfied with the apps when they facilitate an intimate connection. This intimate relationship need not be long term or even romantic. Many participants do not want something long term, are not actively searching for such a relationship, or are quite ambivalent about developing a long-term relationship. Rather, people continue to use the app, despite indifference or dissatisfaction, because they are looking for intimacy. Some are satisfied with short-term intimacy, platonic intimacy, or other non- long-term intimacy, suggesting we reconsider the temporal nature assumed by intimacy. To the extent that app users are dissatisfied, it is because of the ephemerality and fragility of intimacy. Choice is experienced as a pleasure, not as a source of anxiety. The plethora of choices is sometimes associated with dissatisfaction, as a barrier to intimacy, but users with more flexible boundaries of forms of intimate relationships—generally non-heterosexual users—were more satisfied with the intimacy they found.

A. Theoretical Framework

Intimacy is not a static concept. Even beginning from the perspective of intimacy as a socially constructed form of relationality, “like most value-laden terms, intimacy scintillates with multiple meanings, ranging from cool, close observation to hot involvement,” writes Viviana Zelizer (2009:14). In *The Purchase of Intimacy*, Zelizer (2009) considers a range of relationships commonly considered “intimate,” including romantic, familial, and therapeutic. Understood as

closeness, intimacy is a measure of emotional distance, of intensity, though not of strength. “Let us think of relations as intimate to the extent that interactions within them depend on particularized knowledge received, and attention provided by, at least one person—knowledge and attention that are not widely available to third parties,” (15) Intimacy depends on knowledge and attention, in other words time, and is dependent on its own scarcity. The romantic relationship is only one form of intimate relations, but a highly symbolic one, overdetermined by discourses of love, marriage, family, gender and sexuality. Any form of intimacy entails a shared vulnerability produced through closeness and, as Zelizer describes, the sharing of private knowledge. This requires that the intimate parties trust one another.

Positively, trust means that the parties are willing to share such knowledge and attention in the face of risky situations and their possible outcomes. Negatively, trust gives one person knowledge of, or attention to, the other, which if made widely available would damage the second person’s social standing (15).

Trust need not be symmetrical, according to Zelizer, as in the parent-child relationship or professional therapeutic relationship. However, “...fully intimate relations involve some degree of mutual trust,” (15). Drawing on Zelizer’s definition, intimacy as I will discuss it here is marked by a willingness to be vulnerable to another, typically through self-disclosure.

For Giddens (1991; 1992), intimacy in late modernity is qualitatively different than prior eras in the West. Romantic relationships are only one form of intimate relations which Giddens (1992) calls “pure relationships.” Pure relationships can be found in friendships or family relations as well as romantic relationships. Because the self in late modernity is a continually self-reflexive project, the intimate relationship is continually open to reassessment. Commitment in a pure relationship lacks the external pressures of tradition and economics. The committed person is “someone who, recognizing the tensions intrinsic to a relationship of the modern form, is nevertheless willing to take a chance on it, at least in the medium term- and who accepts that

the only rewards will be those inherent in the relationship itself” (1991:92). Giddens’ assertion is evident in the colloquialism “take a chance on love.” Late modernity is uncertain, marked by doubt and risk and the intimate relations of sexual, romantic, or friendship relationships increasingly approximate the pure relationship, requiring a willingness to risk loss if we are to experience intimacy (Giddens, 1991). Individuals are willing to engage in this gamble because, “In the conditions of high modernity...the pure relationship...comes to be of elementary importance for the reflexive project of the self,” (1991:87). In other words, intimacy is both scary and necessary.

The romantic form of pure relationships he calls “confluent love,” and it is distinguished by the earlier but still relevant “romantic love complex” by its reflexivity and its contingency. “Confluent love is active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the ‘for-ever’, ‘one-and-only’ qualities of the romantic love complex,” (Giddens, 1992:61). The contingency of confluent love is a result of its dependency on intimacy as the binding feature. Similar to Zelizer (2009), Giddens defines intimacy as, “the degree to which each partner is prepared to reveal concerns and needs to the other and to be vulnerable to that other,” (62). This willingness to shared vulnerability is ironically self-serving, contributing to the contingency of such relationships. “What holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, ‘until further notice,’ that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile,” (63).

Eva Illouz offers an additional perspective on changes in the nature of romantic intimacy. “Postmodern romance has seen the collapse of overarching, life-long romantic narratives, which it has compressed into the briefer and repeatable form of the affair,” (Illouz, 1998:175). What Illouz calls the “repeatable affair” we might alternately call serial monogamy. These

relationships are marked by emotional intensity, short-to-medium duration, and the pursuit of pleasure. “In its intrinsic transience and affirmation of pleasure, novelty and excitement, the affair may be dubbed a postmodern experience and contains a structure of feeling with affinities to the emotions and cultural values fostered by the sphere of consumption,” (Illouz, 1998:176). For Illouz, capitalism plays a double role. It drives the rationalization of intimacy and partner sorting (1997), as well as the emotional and temporal structure of the romantic relationship (2007).

Giddens (1991; 1992) and Illouz (1997; 2007) are not the only scholars to analyze cultural changes accompanying the structural changes in capitalism in the last half century. Michel Foucault (2010) and Nikolas Rose (1999) have both argued that “neoliberalism,” or alternately “late liberalism,” is marked by an extension of capitalist logics to constructions of the self, and to domestic life. Foucault (2010) argues that American neoliberalism in particular extends market principles into the domestic sphere. “Liberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking,” he argues (218). This has remained true with the shift to neo-liberalism,

The generalization of the market beyond monetary exchanges functions in American neo-liberalism as a principle of intelligibility and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and individual behavior. (243)

This includes, he argues, family life. The economic ideals of liberalism and neo-liberalism are part of the logics of everyday domestic life, not just logics of political economy. One key difference between liberalism and neo-liberalism is the idea of human capital, as both innate and something to be cultivated. Parents are encouraged to cultivate it in their children through, for example, spending time with them.

In neo-liberalism—and it does not hide this; it proclaims it—there is also a theory of *homo economicus*, but he is not at all a partner of exchange. *Homo economicus* is an entrepreneur of himself (226).

If *homo economicus* is central to the logic of neoliberalism, and neoliberal logics are regularly generalized to non-market social relationships and individual behavior, then we could predict that the idea of human capital is not just applied to investment in one's self for future economic gain, but also to non-economic spheres of life.

Nikolas Rose (1999) takes Foucault's theory of governmentality as a starting point for theorizing the use of "freedom" as a practice of governing and of creating governable subjects in what he refers to as "advanced liberalism". Far from being restricted to matters of government, Rose argues that freedom itself has become an imperative of personal responsibility. Whereas liberalism emphasized individualism and personal liberty, "modern individuals are not merely 'free to choose,' but are *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice," (87, emphasis in original). Domestic relationships are no longer regulated through morality, he argues. Rather, they have come to be seen, "as lifestyle decisions made by autonomous individuals seeking to fulfill themselves and gain personal happiness," (86).

Happiness, according to Sara Ahmed (2010), "is an expectation of what follows," and as with any expectation, "provides the emotional setting for disappointment," (29). This promise of happiness

...directs us toward certain objects, as being necessary for a good life. ...
Heterosexual love becomes the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life direction or purpose, or as what drives a story. (90)

Happiness, heterosexuality and futurity are linked. We learn years in advance, for example, that our wedding day will be the "happiest day of our lives." Being oriented toward the "good life," a happy life, directs us towards certain types of relationships and expectations of those relationships.

This point is useful for thinking about the practice of casual sex via hookup apps. The use of hookup apps can be construed as a lifestyle choice—a lifestyle, in fact, that emphasizes choice and freedom. The promiscuous urban single became a star of pop culture in the TV series *Sex and the City* that ran from 1998 to 2004. It portrayed a lifestyle of sexual freedom and an endless series of choices to be made about whom to date, when to have sex with them, who was a “keeper” and who was worth keeping around in the meantime. This freedom was associated with a particular type of successful life of educated white professionals with few familial obligations. Tinder, whose target audience is exactly the free urban heterosexuals of *Sex and the City*, is designed to facilitate the consumer choices required of these subjects. Foucault’s (2010) conceptualization of American neoliberalism is a compelling theoretical framework for this task. Giddens’ argument about the characteristic reflexivity of late modernity is a useful complement to Foucault’s argument that neoliberalism, particularly the American version, is characterized by *homo economicus* as self-entrepreneur. I argue that self-intimacy is both highly reflexive and a process of the development of human capital in the intimate realm.

Arguments about the alienating effects of technology, more often than not, do not take into account the bigger picture of societal change. They take instead a more narrow and deterministic view and embrace a unidirectional cause and effect relationship, assuming that technological change is a primary driving force of social change. Arguments about intimacy on the other hand, often use technologically mediated relationships as a quick and easy example to prove their bigger point, often without much if any empirical evidence to back up their claims, and again falling back on technological determinism. What is needed, and what I will do in this chapter, is consider the ways in which contemporary forms of intimacy interact with the technological possibilities of our moment.

I make three claims about intimacy and mediated sexualities in this chapter. I argue below that the most pleasurable experiences of my participants involve the experience of intimacy in the form of pure relationships, and that the pursuit of this intimacy motivates many app users. In spite of Tinder's reputation as a technology that facilitates "meaningless" non-intimate encounters many users are searching for intimacy. User satisfaction depends to a large extent on whether they find this intimacy. Second, related to changing norms surrounding young adulthood and marriage and a neoliberal ethos of self-entrepreneurship, many app users associate their experiences on Tinder with part of a larger project of self-discovery and self-actualization. Similar to the cultural narrative represented by the movie that starts this chapter, this project is both internally focused and outwardly oriented, creating a tension that contributes to many app users' ambivalence and cultivated indifference. I introduce the idea of self-intimacy as a neoliberal project that is an emerging part of the young adult life stage. Third, I argue that the relatively higher levels of satisfaction with hookup apps among LGBTQ participants is related to norms of queer kinship that allow these users to have long-term intimacy with people they met on the apps, but with whom they are no longer in a sexual or romantic relationship with. I argue that heterosexuality is an obstacle to intimacy.

First, I will explore Tinder's marketing and self-promotion and the ways in which it simultaneously sells the experience of being single and the potential of finding a long-term partner. I will then turn to my interview data, revealing how my participants' motivations and ambivalence match the company's multi-faceted promise of happiness.

B. The Promise of Tinder

In response to the unflattering *Vanity Fair* exposé described in the previous chapter, Tinder took to Twitter to defend its reputation. "The Tinder Generation is real. Our users are

creating it. But it's not at all what you portray it to be." They had reason to be defensive. Already 2015 had been a rough year of public relations for both Tinder and Grindr. The AIDS Health Foundation paid for billboards in Los Angeles that connected Tinder and Grindr to the sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) chlamydia and gonorrhea, echoing a number of public health officials who were pointing the finger at these apps to explain rising rates of STDs.

The anxiety these billboards represented was based in part on a sense that Tinder represented something new, not just another online dating site. Tinder's dilemma then, was to maintain that they are different (and better) than dating sites, but that their app is not as sordid and sex-saturated as its reputation. Tinder, and the cohort of apps that followed, are in fact different than websites. As detailed in the prior chapter, Tinder's minimalist profiles and location-based matching prioritize proximity over compatibility and their gamification⁴⁰ of profile viewing gives the app a low-stakes feel. The app is transparently structured around a sense of casualness and immediacy.

In July 2015, Tinder co-opted an already existing #SwipedRight hashtag on Twitter and Instagram to show pictures of couples who met on Tinder and were now getting married, moving in together, or otherwise self-defined as committed. Their website showcased "#SwipedRight Stories," with testimonials by happy-in-love couples, and the company managed to shift the use of the hashtag toward similar stories. One such testimonial on Tinder's website stated, "He was only my second Tinder date! Six months later, here we are. Moving in together!" Another said,

⁴⁰ Gamification refers to the use of design features typically associated with games, such as competition or achievement and rewards systems, in non-game contexts. One example is earning badges for checking in to a location using the app Four Square. Tinder's innovative swiping feature, where you make a decision about another user by swiping your finger left or right on the screen, often in rapid succession, has clear similarities with the interactive features of many mobile phone games.

“We had an instant connection. Our first date lasted 6 hours and we just had to meet again the next day! Thank you Tinder for helping me find the love of my life.” Stories such as this highlight the promise of (unexpected) love. Tinder does not want to distance itself completely from its reputation as a more casual counterpart to dating websites, but it does want to encourage optimism and hope among its users and potential users. Crucially, romantic love in this narrative retains the aura of serendipity that is associated with pre-internet relationships, shedding the baggage of traditional online dating sites. The emergence of a relationship-oriented marketing campaign after the negative publicity did not, however, represent a new direction for the app.

Seemingly satisfied with the dying down of the STD and *Vanity Fair* public relations crises—the internet has a short memory after all—Tinder launched a new marketing campaign in Spring 2016. The video, which started playing when you entered Tinder’s website gotinder.com and that they ran on ads on social media, featured a 20-something white woman on vacation, taking pictures at popular European tourist destinations. She meets a man through Tinder, a handsome Swede, and they have fun and romantic travels together, sharing wine, hot air balloon rides, and a bed. Tinder tries to have it both ways, to offer the hope of a happily ever after and to capitalize on the appeal of unencumbered single life. By distancing themselves from the image of online daters like Lucy of *How to be Single*, Tinder can present itself as part of an unencumbered and spontaneous single lifestyle, still with the promise of finding “the one.”

Long-term committed relationships continue to feature prominently on Tinder’s website and in their self-promotion.⁴¹ Simultaneously, on the company’s Instagram account they regularly refer to activities associated with young single life such as going out with friends,

⁴¹ In Chapter 7, I discuss the company’s marketing of transgender inclusionary features as offering equal opportunity to finding “love” and “real connection.”

hangovers, staying in your pajamas all day or ordering pizza. So, what do Tinder users want when they download the app or when they login and swipe away? Are they looking for love, or someone to “Netflix and chill”?

My participants were sometimes quite intentional about their use of Tinder, either for searching for a long-term relationship or for casual hookups, but often these goals were flexible over time. William (straight white man, 28) started using Tinder after “a pretty ugly breakup.”

Jody: Did you start up on the apps right away? Or did you take some time off?

William: Yeah, I mean I think I started right away. But at that point it was more like a reactionary thing. I wasn’t looking for a relationship, probably. And then over time, it evolved into wanting another relationship. Using it more seriously.

Using Tinder or Grindr after a break up, as a way to fill time and alleviate boredom or distract from the emotional fallout of the breakup, was a common experience among my participants. William’s description of his goals reveals another common characteristic of app use, ambivalence of intentions. He started using Tinder as a reaction to a breakup. During the interview he described this period of use as “not looking for something serious,” just “something casual.” But here he qualifies this, adding “probably” to the statement that he was not looking for a relationship at that time.

This type of rhetorical ambivalence when describing intentions emerged in many other interviews, as in Veronica’s (straight Latina, 26) explanation of her goals for using Tinder,

Um, once I started to [use Tinder] heavily—I don’t want to say take it seriously as if I was going on there to find a husband—it was just more like OK I’m going to actually give this a chance. This isn’t just curiosity anymore. I’m going to actually put some time into it. Um, it’s weird. I want to say long term dating but I wasn’t opposed to short term dating. I just wanted to kind of test the waters and get to know people and depending on what the outcome is with that particular person that could tell me whether that person could be a short term or long term dating potential. Definitely no hookup.

After distancing herself from the kind of app user who, much like Lucy in *How to be Single*, is too intentional, too “serious” and too ready to get married, Veronica tries to explain what her intentions are and realizes that they are not that clear cut. That is, except not looking for a hookup, and not just browsing profiles out of curiosity.

Throughout her interview, Veronica expressed frustration with men who were just interested in sex, whether she met them on an app or not. She wanted someone who would show interest in her life, who would take her to dinner instead of texting her at 2:00am “Hey, what’s up? Wanna come over?” Dinner in fact was not necessary. As a working class woman currently unemployed, she was more aware of the costs involved in a traditional date than most other participants. Meeting at the park to hang out or go for a walk also constituted a “real date” for her. As discussed in the previous chapter, “real date” often referred to a particular script, pre-existing the apps, but it was not the scripted series of events of consumption typically associated with dates that Veronica was most interested in. It was the conversation, the personal communication, the “getting to know one another” without a clear expectation of sex that was the distinction for her. It was a particular form of intimacy that made it a real date.

However, Veronica’s actual use of the app exemplifies a pattern that emerged across interviews. Her goals and her use did not always match. She did sometimes use Tinder for casual sex, such as when she met up with someone from Tinder while traveling.

It was a really great first date. I would have never thought it would’ve ended up just being a hookup. I was like, this is what a first date should be like. But it ended up in tipsy-I’m-leaving-in-a-couple-days-because-I’m-from-out-of-town sex. So that was sad. But it was a good positive experience. Like, ok so good first dates are possible, [I’m] not crazy.

By using the app while on vacation in a different city for a few days, she was looking for something casual and temporary. She had already stated that she did not do long distance

relationships, and considered someone in Chicago who lived over an hour from her “basically long distance.” So why was this casual hookup, with someone several states away, a positive experience? Despite its short term and terminal nature, it included the type of intimacy she discussed as desirable throughout the interview. That is, a first date for her should involve “getting to know” the other person. In other words, the mutual disclosure that is constitutive of intimacy, even when it is short term.

Over and over again participants referred to looking for a long-term relationship as “serious,” whether describing their own current or future intentions or describing other users’ known or presumed intentions. One-time sexual encounters and short-term dating relationships, meaning relationships that involve more than sexual interaction, that may or may not be monogamous but have no clear expectations for the future, were consistently referred to as “fun” or “just something to do.” It became clear that participants did not find dating with the purpose of finding a long-term partner particularly fun—it was seen more as a form of labor—but using the app with less long-term intentions was portrayed as something they could take or leave, something they often did out of boredom or out of a seeming imperative to enjoy their young adult years.

C. Disappointment

Participants expressed a variety of emotions, both self-reported emotions about the apps or about particular experiences, as well as emotions expressed during the interview itself. Negative or neutral emotions were overwhelmingly more prevalent for all participants, but especially for heterosexual Tinder users. Coding for emotions, as described in my methods chapter, revealed that even users who said they were satisfied when asked this question directly revealed very little positive affect during the interview, and typically relayed stories about their

app use that lacked any positive valence. Rather, their accounts were marked by ambivalence or indifference. Jill, a 31-year-old straight white woman, expressed explicit dissatisfaction.

Jody: So are you satisfied with Tinder?

Jill: I am unsatisfied. I would say.

Jody: Okay, how come?

Jill: I mean a lot of the [pauses]. You know it's [pauses]. It's brief there's not much to like a profile. So, I feel like a lot of the contact initially is really *generic*, or just like flagrantly sexual. And sometimes you don't see that coming, like I'll be messaging with someone and I'll think that it's going well. And then maybe we get to like texting and then it's just like, a dick pic out of nowhere. It's just like I didn't even, I wasn't prepared for this [laughing] where is this coming from? And I'm always like an advocate for online dating sites to my friends. I'm always encouraging everyone to get on them. And then, I'm always the one that gets like inundated with overly sexual messages. [laughs] So, if I was just seeking that I'd be satisfied but. And then it takes—I'm mean there is just not a lot of creative contact. I only really respond to messages that I feel are like, funny or creative. But, I get a lot of just like generic stuff that I can't even keep up with. I don't want to say "hello" back to twelve people [chuckles] in a day. I don't have time for that. [chuckles] So, I don't love it. I keep coming back, but I don't love it.

For Jill, Tinder use was associated with disappointment. She keeps using it, but is often disappointed, annoyed, or frustrated with the interactions she has on the app. Instead of interesting dates, she ends up with boring small talk and unsolicited pictures of penises.

Participants who had "low expectations" or used the app primarily to distract themselves after a breakup or pursue casual or short-term dating relationships expressed satisfaction when asked directly. Blake (straight white man, 37) said, "Yeah [I'm satisfied with Tinder]. I wasn't—my expectations weren't that high, you know what I mean? It was something to do. It was fun." Participants who were happy with the app and suggested other people should use it were not necessarily enthusiastic. Throughout the interview, despite their stated satisfaction, positive emotions associated with narratives of their experience were few.

Heather, a 32-year-old straight Asian woman, joined Tinder out of boredom when she was stuck at home with the flu. At the time of our interview, she had been using the app for about a year.

Jody: What was your goal when you started using Tinder?

Heather: [long pause] I think probably to date, to find you know, someone.

Jody: Okay, so finding someone. How long were you hoping it would last?

Heather: I didn't think that far ahead. Like someone normal, someone to enjoy company. I wasn't using it to hook up. I was looking to date, but I didn't think into the future.

Like William above who said he “probably” was not looking for a relationship, Heather's intentions were not entirely clear, even to her. I asked Heather if Tinder met her goals. “Like on a scale from 0 to 10? It's just something to do once in awhile to pass the time,” she said, “so yeah, it works.” Heather's satisfaction with the app was implicitly connected to low expectations.

Jody: Tell me about your most positive Tinder experience.

Heather: Ah. Well I mean the guy that I was dating for like three months, that was positive until it ended. So I think Tinder, I mean I talk shit about it too, but I think Tinder has a bad rap. [The reputation is that] it's really grimy or whatever, and I definitely think that it can be, and I think we can use it as a hookup app, but I also think that whatever you want from it is what you're going to get. So like for me, I want to use it just to date, and if it turns into something else, there's potential for that, but if I want to use it to hookup, I can totally do that too.

Heather's flexibility and emotional distance from the app made room for her satisfaction. She viewed Tinder as an imperfect but adaptable tool for meeting her needs. She was hoping for “dating,” something in between the “serious” relationships participants eventually wanted and the hookups that many of them distanced themselves from or seemed unhappy with. Heather's answer here points to another important pattern of participant's levels of satisfaction. Many considered short-term relationships, in this case three months, positive as long as they were intimate. During our interview, Heather described this relationship, and other positive experiences, as emotionally rich. The emotional intimacy was more important than the longevity.

Like Heather, Karen, a 30-year-old straight white woman, was on Tinder for “dating, [to] meet people, get to know people.” Her dating goal did not have a clear definition. I asked her if she was satisfied with Tinder,

Karen: Uh, can I give you a complicated answer?

Jody: Sure. Many people’s answers to this are complicated.

Karen: So I guess I go back and forth on if I’m satisfied. Because there are times I meet people I really like, and sometimes it’s just bad timing and they’re not looking for what I’m looking for. And other times I get a lot of smarmy messages and I’m like, this sucks, Tinder’s awful. But I don’t think it’s any different than real life dating.

For Karen, Tinder was a source of frequent disappointment, whether through false starts with people she really liked, or sorting through unwanted sexually explicit or just rude messages. Karen’s mixed feelings about Tinder showed up throughout the interview. She seemed disconnected and resigned as we swiped through her Tinder together.

The prevalence of negative emotions associated with app use, particularly Tinder, raises an important question. Why do people continue to use the app if they are dissatisfied or at best indifferent? There are two caveats that must be addressed before answering this question. One, my sample did not include people in monogamous relationships who had met their partner on Tinder or Grindr. These former app users are, presumably, satisfied with the app. Whether or not these satisfied users also felt dissatisfied or indifferent during their time using the app is beyond the scope of this study. Second, app users who were so dissatisfied with the app, or who were so indifferent to app use, as to have deleted the app, discontinued use of the app, or rarely log in were not eligible for the study. Many users, including a number of my participants, intermittently delete or ignore the app for periods of time because of their dissatisfaction or indifference. The study then, only captures experiences of people who happened to be actively using the app during the period of recruitment. People who were satisfied or very dissatisfied during

recruitment are not part of this study, but given the prevalence of intermittent use there may be overlap of my participants' experiences and the experiences of former app users.

With these limitations in mind, how can we explain continued app use? The most straightforward answer is that users find that the app maximizes both options and efficiency. William used three apps, Tinder, Hinge and Bumble. He preferred Hinge because he had a higher response rate, due he thought to a "higher level of accountability" because of the way the app connected you through mutual friends. Bumble he did not like because he was not convinced most of the profiles of women on the app were profiles of real users, not bots. As far as Tinder,

There's more people on Tinder, so it's I guess a wider pool of people, bigger pool of people. That's probably the main thing that I like about that one in particular.

In William's interview he emphasized the number of other users as an important aspect of the app. Often, when users described differences across the apps and websites they used they would end up pointing to efficiency or even the language of time investment to describe why they liked some better than others. Kyle (straight white man, 28) had previously used OkCupid, but now preferred Tinder.

Kyle: I was getting less *return* [on OkCupid], I felt like. I don't know, the investment. You know reading a profile and actually like crafting a message that's related to it. In my experience, maybe 10% of the messages that I sent would get responded to. And then of that maybe half of those would actually agree to a date.

Jody: Sure.

Kyle: So in that sense, it was a lot more investment, time, and energy. I didn't feel like I was getting better matches or anything like that than on Tinder.

Jody: Right.

Kyle: I just sort of shifted to [Tinder], and it just has a higher return out of it I guess.

For this participant, decisions about his app use were driven by cost-benefit analysis. Tinder's barebones profiles meant not having to read long profiles in order to craft a message for initial contact.

My participants' experiences of choice as a positive feature of the dating and hookup apps they use contradicts a belief popular with both mainstream social commentators and academics (Salecl, 2011; Schwartz, 2016). The suspicion of choice goes beyond the attribution of contemporary malaise to a growing number of choices. The increasing rationalization of everyday life, epitomized for some by online dating, is another common suspect. The increasing rationalization of modernity has been offered as a frame for understanding online dating and hookup apps. This is an enticing explanation and a very good partial explanation. Questionnaire-based online dating sites are especially good cases of this. Eva Illouz (2007) states, "No technology I know of has radicalized in such an extreme way the notion of the self as a "chooser" and the idea that the romantic encounter should be the result of the best possible choice," (79). While I think the nature of pre-internet dating is romanticized as somehow pre-rational in this quote, the importance of liberal ideologies of choice to the practice of internet-mediated dating is clear. Even Tinder and Grindr, with their geo-locative technology and abbreviated profiles, are structured to optimize rational decision-making. Though the short profiles, and lack of a personality and lifestyle questionnaire, makes the apps seem more spontaneous, or at least less calculated. I have shown in the previous chapter that users have sophisticated vetting practices that retain many of the features of rationalization attached to the image of early generation internet-mediated dating.

Focusing on rationalization has led some scholars, including Illouz (2007) and Turkle (2012), to continue to theorize internet-mediated interaction as cold and even disembodied. But this approach also misses the motivations of users by staying stuck in a technophobic narrative of disintegrating social ties. Users want more choices, and they want to be able to sort through these choices in a way that does not overwhelm other things they are doing in their life. This does not

make them unable to form intimate relationships or connect with other people. It means they are a product of their time. In the next section, I will analyze the goals of heterosexual participants and the types of app-mediated interactions they found most fulfilling. Participants wanted intimacy, and their satisfaction with the app depended to a great extent on whether or not they found it.

D. Searching for Intimacy

As shown in Chapter 3, the sexual scripts for initial contact on Tinder were felt to be more superficial and routinized than in person initial contact. However, even this scripted small talk often included disclosures of personal information, such as how many siblings a person has or where they grew up. Such information is not particularly emotional, though these conversations can go into how the person feels about their family or their childhood. These details of biography are also a form of intimacy, even if only nascent. The importance of these exchanges, and the importance participants placed on honesty reveal that the intimacy many users are looking for approximates the “pure relationship,” an intimacy characterized, according to Giddens (1992), by mutual self-disclosure, shared vulnerability, and emotional reciprocity.

Regarding Tinder’s reputation as a hookup app, Kelly (straight white woman, 25) said,

For me, I just don’t understand [trails off]. I mean, again, I have no judgment for anybody that does like, have fun doing that. I mean I watch *Sex and the City* that’s all Samantha ever did pretty much, but for me, without some measure of trust or like, a connection, like a deeper connection, to me that just doesn’t seem appealing at all.

Kelly’s emphasis on “deep connection” and trust was brought up by many participants, as characteristics they desired in a “serious” relationship. This type of connection was often described as something achieved through conversation and honesty.

Richard, a 25 year old straight Latino man, described what he liked about Tinder this way,

It's pretty accessible, it's easy to do. I can do it on my way to work. I can do it when I'm just laying around. I'm not sure. I think it's a little bit more friendly, in terms of how people describe themselves. I think people are more honest on it than I think on other [apps]. I'm not sure why. Especially when you start talking to them. I'm not sure if that's something that's specific to the [app], just something that I've noticed. I think I've just had better conversations on there than I've had on other [apps].

Here Richard combines the efficiency of the app and his experiences of better conversations, more honest conversations, on Tinder than on other apps. This was not universal. There were mixed opinions among participants on which apps were most conducive to conversations that lead to “opening up” or “getting to know someone.” The important point in Richard’s statement is that honesty and conversation are central to his definition of positive interaction. This was quite common. When asked what their most negative experience with Tinder was, many participants recalled a story about a time someone was not honest with them.

Heather, the 32-year-old straight Asian woman quoted earlier, discussed the importance of honesty as she explained being catfished by a man she met on Tinder. When they met in person she could tell he did not look like his profile picture, and she later found out that he had used a picture of his (slightly more attractive) brother. They had a great first date, she met with him several times over the next two weeks and they had sex. Ultimately, she decided that the dishonesty was a dealbreaker. “I think he’s not a bad guy,” she said, “That’s the thing, I know he’s like a nice guy, it’s just if you're not honest with yourself, how can you be honest with anyone else?” Despite the connection she felt with this man, more than most other men she had met from Tinder, she was not convinced that he would be honest with her.

Heather was not the only participant to connect honesty with one's self to honesty with others. Karen, who had a "complicated" answer when asked if she was satisfied with Tinder, explained her profile decisions,

Jody: So, your Tinder profile, what kind of pictures do you put up, what kind of information do you give?

Karen: So, I feel, that it serves no purpose, to me or other people, to put up just my all time greatest photos from ten years ago. It's not my goal to deceive anyone. I want to be as truthful to my self and my place at this time. So hopefully someone will respond to that, and not you know a glamor shot or a selfie. That being said, I still put up good photos. I don't put me with no makeup, sitting in my pajamas or something. But I try to include a body shot. I know I'm not everyone's type and I don't try to hide that.

Part of Karen's experience on Tinder, and in dating more generally, was about becoming comfortable with herself. If intimacy is built on honesty and knowledge, then being "truthful to myself," and, as many participants mention, "learning about myself," are about developing a *self-intimacy*.

Kelly, a 25-year-old straight white woman, downloaded Tinder when it was relatively new, after hearing about it from a relative. "It first started out as a Grindr for straight people, I feel like... I thought it was hilarious and I was like no way is this real." After initially swiping through out of curiosity, at the time of our interview Kelly had been actively using Tinder for eight months. I asked her what advice she would give to a new user,

It can be really demoralizing sometimes, and it can be just a huge pain in the ass, but if you keep at it, you will—I feel like I'm at the point you know like Jackie Chan in karate movies where you try to punch through and you have to break your bones enough times that they heal over stronger? I feel like that's me with dating right now. Like I've been on enough of these dates and I've had enough crappy and good experiences, that I feel like I have overall benefitted from it. I'm way more confident than I used to be, so it can be—as silly as it might sound to somebody whose never tried this, who thinks it's like nonsense—it can actually be a really good learning experience for you, personally. I would just say be careful. Be safe. Have fun if you can.

Kelly had told me earlier that she was satisfied enough with Tinder. Here, though, she describes using the app as demoralizing, and compares it to breaking bones! The rest of her advice suggests that a reason for continued app use is a sense of self-improvement, recasting negative aspects as a “learning experience,” and highlighting how her confidence has increased.

Despite some users’ longing for intimacy that takes the form of the pure relationship, or at least approximates it for a short time, many users approach the app cynically, with an intentional distance.

Jody: What is your goal on the apps?

Jennifer (bisexual Latina, 30): I get bored, because I'm new here, so I'm just bored and I'm trying to meet people. It's just an easy fix, versus actually, spending time to go to the gym and meet somebody. It's just a quicker way to kill my boredom, I guess. I would say, "Oh, I'm looking for a boyfriend," but in reality, that's not going to happen on Tinder.

This user expresses cynicism that any other users are looking for a relationship or that the “easy fix” of Tinder is an avenue for such a relationship. Participants were mixed on whether there are users looking for something more intimate than a hookup. Those looking for a longer-term relationship, or just something to last more than a few weeks and involve non-sexual time spent together, often expressed frustration that, in their perception, few other users were looking for the same thing.

This general cynicism creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Users approach the app cynically, often projecting indifference or detachment, thereby contributing to the perception that the app is less effective for intimate relationships.

Jill: Sometimes I just don't even put the energy into that. That's something about Tinder is I feel like I can almost become like, it doesn't feel real. You're very detached and so it feels kinda like it doesn't really mean anything to swipe right or left on anybody. You know.

Jody: Okay

Jill: I've had nights with my friends where you're drinking and you switch phones. And you're using someone else's Tinder. You know. I never know what's happening on it. So that being said it takes a good stand out message for me to actually feel compelled to respond.

This participant expressed boredom with the app, and a sense of the app as a low stakes form of sociality. Switching phones and letting your friends swipe through on your account is not uncommon among my participants. It shows the casual indifference required of the successful single lifestyle, and it can be seen as a dissatisfaction with the app or as a performance of indifference in order to not seem too eager or too serious about the app.

David, a 31-year-old heterosexual Tinder user told me this when I asked him what his goal was when using Tinder.

David: You know, most of them are fine and then you know it's like, "Alright cool. Never see you again. Bye!"

Jody: Right

David: But I don't have a goal. It's just kinda like let's see what happens.

Jody: Okay

David: Like I have a friend who has been in a relationship for a year and a half with somebody he met on Tinder. Nobody expected it to go past that night.

Cynicism or a projection of indifference can also be seen on Tinder profiles, where people frequently use text to portray themselves as disinvested in the outcome of a meetup, such as these excerpts from profiles of users in Chicago:

Looking to meet cool, easy going people.If [sic]⁴² something develops from that later on, cool. If not thats [sic] cool too.

Wicker Park, adventurer, partier, up for trying/visiting new places/things, meeting new people, maybe even the right someone....can't expect too much from tinder but giving it a shot anyway

Sense of humor a must. Yeah...that's pretty much it.

Looking for someone I can have a blast with. If it goes further and feelings build up, great...if not, cool.

These and other users with similar profiles cultivate a casual indifference, suggesting they want someone fun but are not invested in an outcome beyond a fun interaction.

Other users used their profile text to express an explicit or implicit desire for intimacy.

I'm hoping to find someone to connect and spend time with. Share adventures and new experiences... and possibly have something long-lasting.

This user specifically wants to “connect” in addition to the fun encounter. Yet, the ellipses and modifier “possibly” in this profile create cool distance even while expressing a desire for intimacy. Some users include phrases such as “all you need to do is ask,” or “If you want to know more, just ask.” Such statements do not explicitly say the user is looking for intimacy, but they serve as an invitation to intimacy—to the “getting to know” someone that many users are looking for—without projecting a sense of urgency or emotional investment either way.

Some users express a desire for intimacy with the common phrase “looking for a partner in crime.” On the one hand, partner implies an egalitarian relationship, the kind of equality

⁴² Typing errors such as these similarly project a detached, ostensibly confident approach to app use by implying that the user does not spend much time worrying about how they come off to other users.

Giddens (1992) claims is inherent in the pure relationship. This profile statement is a particular type of partner though. A partner in crime. The phrase evokes a mischievousness, a sense of adventure to the partnership. The user is not looking for someone to stay at home and cook dinner with, they are looking for something intriguing and exciting. Someone figuratively interested in transgression. Illouz (1997) claims that, “Love thus projects an aura of transgression,” (9). She connects love to transgression because the history of the idea of romantic love in the West is a history of the end of endogamous marriage. The rise of romantic love as a legitimate—*the* legitimate—reason for marriage was a challenge to the social class structure and a challenge to the authority of family and community. There is continuity from the emergence of romantic love in the West and the eroticism of transgression in these Tinder profiles. The contemporary notion of partner (or significant other or spouse) is about a dyadic relationality removed from external authority and assessed based on what it offers to the individuals involved. The type of relationship solicited then is both free of external constraints, a characteristic of the pure relationship, but also intimate in the sense of “having something on one another,” which Zelizer (2005) associates with intimacy. Committing a crime together makes people vulnerable to disclosure by the other. While the colloquialism “partner in crime” is not meant literally, crime becomes a metonym for shared vulnerability. Romantic love remains implicit in the desired intimacy of many users, whether on the app or in their future plans, the someday of their life, the point at which they have fulfilled their responsibilities as a single person, attained enough self-intimacy to be prepared for a relationship and found “the right person.”

E. Conclusion

Returning to the movie quote that I began this chapter with, we can answer Alice’s question, “Why do we always tell our stories through relationships?” These temporally bounded

pure relationships are not isolated, they are part of a narrative of *self*-intimacy that is increasingly requisite to the self-reflexively constructed late modern subject. Self-intimacy is a self-entrepreneurial process, an accumulation of human capital by the neoliberal *homo economicus*. The self-reflexive project of the self for many young adults today involves a temporary lifestyle choice to be (actively) single in the pursuit of self-knowledge. And yet, what I have identified as the contradiction of singledom pushes these same singles to look forward while resisting the urge *move* forward. The pursuit of self-intimacy is a type of purgatory, full of promise for future happiness, but without a clear path or timeline to that happiness.

I argue that what Illouz (2007) calls “repeated affairs” are not isolated. They are part of a larger narrative of self-discovery, self-intimacy. Furthermore, singlehood has come to be its own kind of affair and a requisite one for the accumulation of human capital. Self-intimacy in the end is oriented outward and forward in time. The neoliberal self-entrepreneur invests in an intimacy with her or himself, betting on a high return for investment in a future relationship that approximates the pure relationship. As Alice, our serial monogamist in *How to be Single*, stands at the edge of the Grand Canyon, her voice narrates,

...the time we have to be single is really the time we have to get good at being alone. But how good at being alone do we really want to be? Isn't there a danger that you'll get so good at being single, so set in your ways that you'll miss out on the chance to be with somebody great? ...The thing about being single is you should cherish it. Because in a week, or a lifetime of being alone, you may only get one moment. One moment, when you're not tied up in a relationship with anyone. A parent, a pet, a sibling, a friend. One moment when you stand on your own. Really, truly single. And then, it's gone.

To truly be single, one has to be isolated from all social ties that might pull you in, might expect something from you. Your family, your pet. Singlehood as represented here is an extreme

individualism. Complete social autonomy, self-intimacy and only self-intimacy. But it will not last.

There is an inevitability to social integration in this narrative. Cherish the time you are single because it is a temporary condition. We have already learned from Alice's journey of self-realization in the movie, and seen evidence of in the goals of Tinder users, that how well you use this time in your life affects your future intimate relations. Singlehood may be a time for fun and adventure, but make no mistake it is serious business. The competing pressures of fun and accumulation of human capital—accumulation through the experience and performance of fun—is the source of malaise for the dissatisfied, indifferent, annoyed, bored, disappointed, frustrated, yet ever hopeful Tinder users I interviewed.

These negative feelings are widely attributed, in popular culture representations, as well as by some users themselves, to a the rationalizing effect of an app that presents humans as options (in brevity) that must be voted yes or no, and creates the illusion of endless options. However, I am arguing that choice/rationalization does not make participants unhappy and Tinder does not keep users from intimacy. They are unhappy when they are not finding the intimacy they want, but they keep using the app because of its promise of fulfilling both fun singledom, and the potential for long-term intimacy. The contradiction of singledom keeps them from intimacy with others because they are supposed to be seeking self-intimacy. To maintain the two in proper tension, many users approach Tinder with a non-chalence, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of limited intimacy through cynical engagement with the app and other users. In other words, it is not the technology creating unhappiness or isolation (the determinist stance), it is the available forms of intimacy in late capitalism. As I have already argued in the

previous chapter, and will argue throughout the dissertation, only by placing technological change within its broader social context can we really assess the effect this change has on culture.

Tinder users in my study were looking for intimacy. Their experiences and longings suggest we expand our definition of intimacy to include forms of intimacy not directly attached to a romantic narrative. For some, these intimacies are in the service of self-intimacy, itself in the service of the accumulation of human capital for future investment in “serious” intimacy. For others, shortened or necessarily terminal forms of intimate relations are rewarding on their own terms.

The promise of Tinder is a promise of happiness. It purports to offer the freedom and fun that is both a goal in itself, for the emerging adult life stage of the middle and upper class, and a route to self intimacy. This self-intimacy is itself oriented toward the expectation of happiness via committed coupledness and the “good life,” and the app also frames itself as a means for finding love, the ultimate happiness. The disappointment of Tinder is not, then, an overabundance of options nor a result of technology ruining intimacy. It is the latent disappointment of the promise of happiness. The happiest heterosexual Tinder users were those least invested in the promise of happiness.

What I have argued in this chapter, though, is more than that. Heterosexuality, an orienting object for the promise of happiness (Ahmed, 2010), is also an obstacle to happiness. The norms for heterosexual conduct, the scripts readily available for heterosexual dating and friendship, limit the longevity of intimacy. To maintain close friendships across gender lines, particularly after a sexual or romantic relationship, requires off-script improvisation, and meets resistance from others and from the ways in which social life centers around the couple and (ancillary) homosocial friendship. Additionally, the contradiction of singledom—the pressure to

invest in one's future intimacy with others by not pursuing intimacy with others, to plan for the future by not focusing on the future—constructs happiness as a state that will always be unfulfilled.

The case of Tinder and its discontents reveals the importance of contextualizing claims of technology and cultural change. To blame Tinder for thwarting intimate relationships is to assume that the affordances of the app are the only factor in users' behaviors and emotions. However, what seems to be an effect of a particular technology may have been there all along, or at least already shifting. As I argued in the previous chapter, new technologies do not emerge out of nowhere. They are connected to prior forms of interaction such as sexual scripts. In this chapter I have taken up intimacy, the thing we seem to always be losing with each new ICT, and shown how intimacy is desired, pursued, and constrained. Users' emotional engagement with the app, and with each other, is structured by broader social forces. In the next chapter, I start with Grindr, and the accusation that the app has created a space for racism to flourish. I contextualize the racial exclusion on Grindr in the larger debate in gay male communities about sexual racism, and compare exclusionary practices across Grindr and Tinder to parse out when and why exclusion becomes an affordance of a hookup app.

VI.

Race and Sexual Preferences on Grindr and Tinder

In this chapter, I compare the types of exclusionary profiles found on Grindr and Tinder, and the stated opinions of participants about such profiles. I argue that differences in the filtering and messaging features of the apps is a partial explanation for differences in the types of exclusionary profile statements. However, the affordances of Grindr do not cause racism, anymore than Tinder causes men to send women unsolicited dick pics, as discussed in Chapter 3. A comparison of the cultural logics used to justify and condemn exclusionary statements reveals that gay men in the study rely on cultural logics of innate desire more than other participants, suggesting that culture, not just technological affordances, affects user behaviors.

I will start the chapter by describing the types of racially exclusionary profiles found on Grindr. I will analyze gay men participants' statements about such profiles, and about racial preferences in general. After that, I will compare this to the types of exclusionary statements found on Tinder profiles, then discuss the views expressed by heterosexual and LBQWT participants regarding racial exclusion and racial preferences.

Despite ongoing systemic racism in the US—in fact, as an enabling factor for ongoing systemic racism—the hegemonic racial ideology today insists that race doesn't matter, that racism is a relic of the past and that individual members of society who express explicitly racist views are backwards. Yet, on the gay hookup app Grindr, racially exclusionary statements on public profiles are not uncommon. Statements on Grindr profiles such as “no Asians, no blacks” or “only interested in whites” are controversial, but tolerated. These statements both insist that race matters and that categorical exclusion based solely on race is acceptable. Furthermore, gay men who condemn such profiles as racist often fail to produce a coherent critique. The

exclusionary nature of the statements is called out as racist on its face, but often the critique is mired in contradictions and rhetorical incoherencies. How can racially exclusionary profiles exist and remain defensible in a self-proclaimed colorblind society? In this chapter, I argue that the prevalence of essentialist cultural frames for explaining sexual desire produce an environment where racially exclusionary statements are tolerated on Grindr.

The belief that sexual orientation is innate was fundamental to the success of the marriage equality movement. A shift in public opinion toward legitimizing same-sex relationships was accompanied by a shift in how sexual desire was understood (Powell et al., 2010). The idea that sexual desire is something we are born with and unable to change was used to bolster a claim to same-sex marriage as a civil right. This movement has frequently invoked a comparison to the fight for interracial marriage that culminated in the Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia* (388 U.S. ____ 1967), analogizing the immutability of racial identity to the immutability of sexual identity.

When Grindr came out in 2009, it was on the heels of Obama's historic victory and the claims that we had entered a post-racial United States. Explicitly exclusionary profiles on Grindr seemed to fly in the face of this optimism. It was precisely the convergence of a renewed and seemingly evidence-based claim that America had finally overcome its "race problem" through the election of the first African-American president, the development of a new technology (the geo-locative mobile phone application Grindr), and the increasingly successful movement for same-sex marriage across the U.S. that produced Grindr as a symbolically powerful site for debating racism in gay communities.

The continuation of vast racial inequalities since the Civil Rights era has been supported by a racial ideology that denies the significance of race. This "color-blind" racial ideology relies

on four central frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Whites use these frames to explain away racial inequalities and justify their own actions and privileged social status. To a lesser extent, some blacks use these frames—particularly abstract liberalism—to explain racial matters; however, the effect of these colorblind frames is indirect and blacks still see racism as structural (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Bonilla-Silva suggests that non-black racial minorities draw on colorblind frames to a greater or lesser extent depending on their “closeness” to whiteness in the US racial hierarchy.

Abstract liberalism is the most common of the four frames and is a cornerstone of contemporary racial ideology. As a cultural frame, abstract liberalism applies the central tenets of liberalism—equal opportunity and individual choice—to explain racial issues. “By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear ‘reasonable’ and even ‘moral,’ while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014:70). This framing plays a central role in white resistance to affirmative action and de-segregation. In this chapter, I expand the scholarship on colorblind racism by showing how abstract liberalism, particularly the framing of racial issues in terms of choice and individualism, supports sexual racism in gay male communities.

These colorblind frames, or “paths of interpretation,” as Bonilla-Silva (2014) calls them are not the only cultural frames available for people to make sense of their social world and their own actions. Ann Swidler (2003) argues that the “tool kits” or “repertoires” people use to explain their beliefs and actions often contain contradictory logics and people shift between cultural frames, sometimes mid-explanation, when a particular cultural frame proves an ill fit for a situation.

Here a person operating within one set of assumptions comes to a problem he cannot handle within his dominant scheme. Then, after floundering for a while

trying to adapt his frame to unexpected difficulties, he may quite abruptly jump from one frame to another. This does not signal a loss of confidence in the first vessel, but simply a temporary abandonment of one craft while one navigates choppy waters in another. (31)

The use of multiple frames allows for a kind of semiotic flexibility that draws on existing explanatory resources to make sense of a situation. For example, in her work on white middle-class American's understandings of love and marriage, she finds that her participants mixed the frame of "prosaic-realistic" love—which emphasizes the voluntariness of marriage and the work required to maintain them—with the frame of "mythic" or "romantic" love—which emphasizes the selfless commitment to the person deemed "the one." This article brings the insight from Swidler's work on the deployment of cultural repertoires to bear on the way gay men talk about racial sexual preferences. In so doing, I show how explicit racial exclusion can coexist with colorblind racism to reproduce racial hierarchies.

While recent research has investigated racial hierarchies in online dating (Bany et al., 2014; Feliciano, Lee and Robnett, 2011; Feliciano and Robnett, 2014; Lin and Lundquist, 2013; Lundquist and Lin, 2015; Rafalow et al., 2017; Robinson, 2015; Robnett and Feliciano, 2011; Tsunokai et al., 2014; Yancey, 2009) most of this literature focuses on heterosexual daters, and the cultural logics used to justify or condemn these patterns have gone largely ignored. Personal ads in print media, a clear precursor in gay male communities to apps such as Grindr, frequently included (and still do) an indication of not only the poster's race, but the race of who they are looking for. A hierarchy of desirability that privileges white gay men is not new. There is a long history of explicit and implicit racism in gay communities. In mixed race spaces black men especially continue to be treated as fetishes, when they are acknowledged at all (Green, 2008), and Asian men frequently feel invisible or undesirable (Han, 2007). In the language of Adam

Green's (2008) theory of "sexual fields," these men possess a racialized form of "erotic capital" in gay commercial spaces such as bars and clubs that places them at a disadvantage in a highly stratified field. Gay men of color navigate this hierarchy in a variety of ways, including drawing on racialized erotic capital (Green, 2007).

Scholars have looked at the language of racial "preferences" in gay male communities, with some arguing that it is part of the racial order that privileges whiteness and is in fact a form of racism (Callander et al., 2012; Robinson, 2015). Researchers in Australia⁴³ have found a correlation between racial sexual preferences among gay men and what they refer to as "generic racism," using an index of attitudinal questions about "diversity and multiculturalism" (Callander et al., 2015). While racial stereotyping, particularly by white gay men, can have negative effects, racial stereotyping can also be a source of empowerment and cultural affirmation for men of color (Carrillo, 2018).

Grindr itself is not a radical departure from pre-mobile-internet sociality, rather it operates as a technological (re)mediation of earlier forms of erotic interaction (Ahlm, 2017; Licoppe et al., 2015). The difference on Grindr has been the heightened level of explicitness of these racist patterns of fetishization and desexualization that occur in gay bars, bathhouses, community events and other gay male spaces. What is new with the internet and mobile apps is not necessarily the salience of race, nor the willingness of individuals to overtly state a racial preference in dating ads, but the visibility of a debate about exclusionary comments and the ubiquity of the language of "preference" to explain racial exclusion. This chapter takes up the

⁴³ While the racial histories of the US and Australia are different, they share a white supremacist hierarchy. In addition, discussions both in and outside of the academy about racial preferences in gay male communities, including statements on Grindr profiles, are quite similar in the two countries.

task of examining the positions in the debate over racial preferences and racial exclusion, offering a sociological framework for understanding the cultural forces at work in the debate. Using my user interview data, I argue that the cultural logics users bring to bear on their app use is at least as important as the design features of the apps.

A. Racially Exclusionary Grindr Profiles

There are four general types of exclusionary statements on Grindr profiles: 1. Racial epithets or disparaging references to men of color, 2. Direct exclusions, 3. Apologetic exclusions, and 4. Implicit exclusions. The first is the least common and, depending on the severity, these profiles are taken down by Grindr. An example of the first category, posted to the website Douchebags of Grindr, is a profile with a picture of a white torso that says “squinty eye no reply,” referring to Asians. Josh, a 20-year-old gay Asian participant said, “I’ve heard ‘no rice, no spice,’ or, ‘no chocolate, no rice.’ I feel like that’s very uncalled for listing that. In Grindr and Scruff [a similar app] there’s filters you can filter through, so I don’t see why you would need to write that out.” Explicitly racist statements, such as the ones Josh references, are ways around the prohibition of specific, historically laden, racial epithets that are unquestionably inappropriate, even by Grindr’s standards.

As Josh points out, such statements are not necessary and seem to be meant as provocations. There are features of the app such as the ability to block other users and to filter profiles by desirable characteristics that are more efficient ways to connect with desirable users. Like much of the internet, Grindr sometimes serves as a space for social behavior that would be less tolerated offline, because of the difficulty of moderating online public and semi-public spaces. This is one explanation for the presence of racially exclusionary profiles, but their

pervasiveness, and the extent to which the debate about them has spilled over into the non-digital world, suggests there is much more at work than internet trolling.

Direct exclusions, the second category of racially exclusionary profiles, do not use racist or racialized derogatory language of the profiles above, instead saying simply “No blacks, no Asians” or “Will only respond to Whites.” These users offer no explanation or defense of these statements. Craig, a 22-year-old gay Asian man, brought up this type of profile. Asked whether Grindr works for him, he said, “For me, personally, I get mixed results. I feel like a lot of people don't respond to me because of my race. Especially because, you see it in their profile that it's like ‘Whites only’ or ‘No Asians’,” stuff like that.” Craig’s perception of Grindr as a racialized space in which he had low erotic capital was not unique among users of color.

When I asked Xavier, a 25-year-old black gay man, about his most negative experience, he replied,

Um, I've—well I've never been blatantly told, “No, sorry I don't do blacks.” However, you can see profiles that say it. And then knowing, just in the back of my head, at least on Jack'd, that people can block races, there'd be people that would block me because I was black and never see me. So, subtle things like that.

Xavier’s experience on Grindr was tinged with his reasonable assumption that other users were blocking or ignoring him simply because of his race. The question, “What was your most negative experience [with this app]?” was asked in all interviews in this study. For men of color on Grindr, the majority of their answers were racialized interactions. This was not true for white Grindr users or for Tinder users. For some men of color, such as Xavier, the general exclusionary climate on Grindr was enough to create a negative experience, even in the absence of a single memorable act of racism. Such direct exclusions, seen over and over, take an emotional toll on men of color who use Grindr and similar apps (McGlotten, 2013).

The third category of racially exclusionary profiles I call the apologetic exclusions. One exemplary profile reads, “Recently out of a relationship, looking for guys to have safe fun with, Not quite ready to start dating. If you have a blank profile with no pic and you message me either send a pic or get deleted. Sorry not into Asians (Indian ok).” This user gives a general sense of what he is looking for in terms of level of commitment, safer sex practices, and messaging expectations. He ends with an off-hand statement about not being “into” Asians. Why he is not interested in having “safe fun” with Asians, or why he is “ok” with Indians goes unremarked. However, his apologetic framing indicates his recognition that such statements are controversial or at least potentially socially inappropriate.

Similarly, another profile reads, “Whites only. Sorry guys, just a preference.” Here, a statement that would, in another context, evoke pictures of signs placed above water fountains in the Jim Crow South is followed by a casual “sorry guys,” and the qualifier that the statement is “just” a “preference.” The fact that the words “Whites only” are symbolic of an era of legally sanctioned racial segregation in the U.S. becomes meaningless under the moral weight of individual preference. The existence of these apologetic exclusions signals a recognition of, and defensiveness about, the controversial nature of racial exclusion, but the apology often serves to trivialize what would be considered blatant racism in any other context.

Another user’s profile says, “No disrespect, but please don’t waste your time if you’re unattractive, out of shape, Asian, black, femme.” His headline, at the top of the profile, is “View profile first,” ostensibly because he is considerate and does not want others to waste their time sending messages he will not respond to. Perhaps, for the user who means “no disrespect,” racially exclusionary profile statements are a matter of efficiency. For the most desirable users, keeping up with messages on Grindr can in fact be daunting. Xavier, quoted above, found this

out when he tested his hypothesis that the small number of messages he received on Grindr had to do, at least in part, with his blackness. He shared with me that he had recently set up a fake profile on Grindr. I asked about his reasons behind this.

One, I run on this theory that there is a particular type of person that everyone will attract, that everyone will want to say hi to. And I also have the assumption that that person is not me. From both interacting on Jack'd [gay male hookup website], OkCupid [dating website], and Grindr. And seeing how many hits my [non-black] friends have received, in comparison to what I get, I understand that I am not that type. So I thought it would be fun to see how many people I can hit up with this fake account. So I went and found [a torso picture of] the stereotypical, mid-20s, skinny white guy that the Grindr community would love. And I was right, because I know—I think it's been two weeks, and I have 71 unread messages.

On his own Grindr account, Xavier, a mid-20s, fit and conventionally attractive black man, said he generally received one to two messages in the same amount of time. The pretense that a user who is not interested in anyone who is “unattractive, out of shape, Asian, black, femme” is putting it out there to save those people time is weak.

As Josh points out above, such statements are unnecessary. It is simple to just delete messages, and even with a free account users are allowed a certain number of blocks per day. It is an efficient way of enacting what Brandon Robinson (2015) has called “racial cleansing in cyberspace.” Some use this feature to prevent messages from users they find undesirable, freeing up room on their screen of profile thumbnails and preempting unwanted messages filling up their inbox. The user quoted above essentially shifts the burden of labor to “unattractive, out of shape, Asian, black, femme men” who do emotional labor to exist in a hostile environment of Grindr, saving himself the work of sorting through profiles to block or sorting through messages.

However, because of the direct and judgmental nature of his exclusionary statement—assuming, for example, that he is better than “unattractive” men, who must know they are unattractive—this user likely gets angry messages from other users, calling him out on his

exclusionary statement. For example, Tyrese, a 27-year-old black gay man, challenges users who have anti-black statements on their profiles. We might wonder why, then, users such as this one make exclusionary, even hostile, statements like this. Are they really saving themselves time and hassle? Apologetic exclusions are simultaneously an acknowledgement that racial preferences are controversial, and a public declaration that the user feels entitled to these preferences.

Like the apologetic exclusions, the fourth category—implicit exclusion—is in part a response to criticisms of racially exclusionary profiles as offensive, mean or unnecessary. An example of these profiles is “White+, Latino+, mixed+, black+.” Instead of saying no Asians, this user states what he is into—all general racial categories except Asian. This user’s headline “Masc4Masc,” meaning a masculine man looking for other masculine men, also acts as a stand-in for saying “no femmes,” or feminine men. Stated preferences for masculine, or “straight-acting,” guys are common on Grindr and often accompany racially exclusionary statements, though they can be found on profiles with no stated racial preferences. The discourse about racial preferences in gay male communities often incorporates or overlaps with discussions about hierarchies of masculinity. Whiteness, as an ideal, is coupled with masculinity, implying that non-white masculinities are inherently lacking (Asian men) or excessive (Black and Latino men). Another common form of implicit exclusion is to say something similar to the profile that states, “Whites, bears and muscle boys to the front of the line.” The rhetorical implication here is that non-whites will still be considered, but only after more automatically desirable candidates. Here, too, is the metonymic association of whiteness and (desirable) masculinity that reflects a larger pattern on the app. Whiteness and masculinity are repeatedly linked like this in profiles.

The language “to the front of the line” is meant to pre-emptively defend against accusations of racism. It reflects the fact that the language of “preferences” is contested, even as

it has become ubiquitous. As I show in the next section, this language encompasses much more than race and is part of the underlying cultural frame of consumerism and individualism on the app and more generally in contemporary discourses about sex and relationships.

The language of sexual preferences came up frequently in interviews, regarding a range of individual characteristics, many less controversial than race. As Victor, a 26-year-old gay Hispanic/Filipino man says, “If someone hits you up that you don't visually think is attractive on their picture, most people won't respond in that case.” He concludes that, “it's all personal preference on what you think is sexy, or attractive.” The term “personal preference” makes explicit the authority of the individual in matters of ranking sexual desirability as well as the prioritization of logics of choice. The language of preferences invokes a consumer logic, where we might prefer a particular brand of peanut butter or laundry detergent over others.

The ubiquity, and detailed specificity, of statements of preference speaks to the power of the cultural logics of consumerism and individualism underlying the “sexual field” (Green, 2008) of Grindr. Kevin, a 30-year-old white gay man said,

I'm more likely to respond to somebody, for example, who has a shirtless picture that's clearly physically fit...I don't necessarily find a larger body size super attractive. Personally I have a preference for short men. If I look at their profile and they're 6-feet tall, ehhhh. If you're 5'5 to 5'10, I'm probably going to be more likely to interact with you. And that just kind of is a personal preference I have. That I think exhibits what I find attractive outside of that electronic world, too.

Desire here is individual, specific, and inherently legitimate. The limited profile on Grindr—only one picture—is supplemented by the fact that the norm is to include your height and weight, or your stats, even if you include no other information. Many users are quite skilled at reading these and getting a general picture of what someone looks like, and basing decisions on that.

In profiles, body type is a very common exclusionary statement, particularly statements of preference for muscular men. Other body types came up in interviews with the language of

preferences, sometimes referring to muscularity or being “fit,” but sometimes “heavier” or “large.” Age is common on profiles as an exclusionary and/or preference statement and was almost ubiquitous in interviews as an aspect of both attraction and willingness to engage with another user on Grindr. Subcultural identities such as bear, leather, or geek came up in profiles and interviews.

This hierarchy of bodies, and the fine-tuned preferences of users, are similar to patterns researchers have identified elsewhere online (Campbell, 2004; Grov et al., 2014; Mowlabocus, 2010), and as is the case for Kevin, preferences on and off the app are similar for many users. Interviewees were not hesitant to list these various aspects of what they find desirable in other men or even what they require for online interaction. Race then is not the only characteristic that is used as a filter (formal or informal) on Grindr, nor is it the only characteristic discussed as a preference. Participants conveyed an understanding of their specific qualifications as legitimate, but also as a taken-for-granted part of sexuality.

The frame of individualism and consumerism used to justify sexual preferences is not limited to Grindr or to gay men. Contemporary understandings of sexuality are dependent on this cultural frame. What is particularly salient in the case of Grindr—and the larger debate that has crystalized around it—is the intersection of this cultural frame with that of innate sexual desires. On their face, the two are incompatible. In the first, choice is prioritized and even raised to a moral issue or an individual right; in the second, choice is explicitly denied as a factor in sexual desire. I turn next to the specific case of racial sexual preferences, where this contradiction is made most apparent. The frames used to justify sexual preferences in general merge with the colorblind frame of “abstract liberalism,” but mix with the cultural frame of innate sexuality.

B. Justifying/Condemning Racial Preferences

How do participants justify their own or others' racial patterns in dating or statements of racial preferences on Grindr profiles? White and Latino gay men in this study were least critical of racial preferences. Asian men in this study were split, and Black men were most often highly critical. As I will show in this section, however, the coexistence of the two cultural frames—on the one hand abstract liberalism, on the other innate sexual desires—was present among all Grindr user participants. Defenders of racially exclusionary profiles mixed the two frames with ease, unconcerned with their contradictory logics, however the coexistence of two contradictory frames created difficulties for those trying to articulate critiques of racial preferences.

Victor, quoted above, extended his beliefs about preferences in general to racial preferences,

...the people I chat with, it's predominantly Hispanic and white. It's just my sexual preferences of the races. I don't judge anyone if they say I exclusively date black guys, or I exclusively date white guys or Hispanic guys. It's just what you find attractive. Like in the straight world, guys saying, "I want to date a girl with big tits, it's what I find attractive." I don't really judge anyone on that, precisely, for me personally I don't find black men attractive and Asian men remind me of my family because I'm part Filipino, so I don't want to feel like I'm dating my uncle. That's why I'm attracted more to white and Hispanic.

While Victor is clear that he believes attraction is biological—at one point in the interview he discusses body and face symmetry as an evolutionary factor affecting what makes some people more naturally attractive than others—here he mixes an essentialist logic with a social-relational logic more common among heterosexual participants. He does not want to feel like he's "dating his uncle." Victor also makes an analogy to straight men who prefer "big tits." In doing so, he equates race and body type in a way that makes race seem like a minor, though highly eroticized, physical feature. Similar to the logic of colorblind racism, the historical and structural features of race are stripped away. Race becomes just another idiosyncrasy of individuals. This logic formed

the basis of Victor's belief that stating racial preferences on profiles is ok and even helpful, reducing inefficiencies produced by messaging people who are categorically uninterested in you.

While some men found stating racial preferences on Grindr profiles unproblematic, others felt that it was rude or disrespectful, despite believing that racial preferences are acceptable. These men's opinions tend to rely on cultural logics grounded in what Bonilla-Silva (2013) calls "abstract liberalism," even as they also sometimes drew on essentialist logics.

Paul, a 52-year-old white gay man, when asked if he ever saw exclusionary profiles, said

Yeah. ...if I was one of those groups I would feel, if I kept seeing that, I would feel very maligned by this and left out. I would say either leave that out, or there's other ways to say that, with saying "I'm white, prefer the same." Or just leave out the negatives, [such as] I don't want this or this or that. If that is important or whatever. Or just wait 'til people respond, and respond to the people you like out of the batch, without having to tell people why you're choosing someone over another. But yeah, I don't like the negative spin on that. It seems to be just kind of rude.

Paul is fine with people having racial preferences, but he finds the implicitly exclusionary statements more acceptable. He expresses an uncommon empathy among my white participants toward those groups of men often listed in exclusionary statements on profiles, but ultimately thinks it is a matter of rhetorical reframing, not of patterns of racial preferences that show a clear racial hierarchy. The imperative to avoid talking about race is apparent here, where Paul recommends just ignoring messages from people you are not attracted to, instead of telling them you are not attracted to people of their same racial group.

In contrast to Peter's lack of concern with the source of his specific attraction, Paul, when asked who he tends to message with and meet up with, said,

That's a good question, if I have a type or something? Generally, I would say my demographic tends to be guys close to my age, I would say I'm generally attracted

to other white guys. Not for any particular reason. Just how I was socialized or whatever.

Paul's matter of fact answer points to his own socialization even as he frames attraction as self-apparent and static. However, he did not need these preferences to be biologically based to be justifiable. Under this logic, early life experiences leave a mark on our sexuality, and people tend to be more comfortable with others like them because that is who they have generally been around. In some ways, this stance mirrors individualized arguments about racial segregation that draw on the conventional wisdom that "birds of a feather flock together." It fits the "naturalization" frame colorblind racism.

This argument about childhood origins has co-existed with genetic and in utero arguments in debates about the origins of homosexuality, and emerged in my participants' explanations. In Brian Powell's (2010) study of Americans' attitudes on what they consider a family, he and his colleagues found that belief in an immutability of sexual orientation, regardless of whether it was believed to originate in biology, early childhood, "god's will," or "something else," was associated with higher rates of acceptance of same-sex couples as families. As long as homosexual orientation was associated with immutability, it was acceptable.

Not all gay men, including some of my participants, accept racial preferences as unproblematic or believe that they are attributable to other factors besides racism. Yet, some of these expressed the opinion that racially exclusionary statements should not be removed from profiles. This position is captured by the statement, "at least I know who the racists are." These statements seem to be part pragmatism, and part defense mechanism against the emotional toll of the constant reminder of one's lower erotic capital. Most participants with a critical stance on racial preferences also disagreed with allowing racially exclusionary statements on profiles. In

both cases, participants who condemned racial preferences had difficulty finding a cultural frame or “path of interpretation” that would get them to their conclusion.

Unlike the biological explanation, socialization was an explanation also used by men who said sexual preferences *are* racist. César, 26-year-old Latino gay man, says,

It’s always, it’s kind of like a sticky situation. So I think that... yeah it’s okay for us to have preferences, but also to understand that our preferences are also predicated on a lot of like sexist, racist conditions of stereotypes we have of people.

César claims that our social environment conditions us, ingrains racial stereotypes, but sticks with his belief that sexual preferences are unquestionable. Unlike most participants who espoused the socialization explanation, César acknowledges the logical contradiction—“it’s a sticky situation” he says. In spite of this acknowledgement, he maintains that preferences are ok and offers only that we be more aware of this socialization. What this looks like in practice remains unclear.

He goes on to say: “It is racist. It is body shaming.” He further states that he is glad that these statements are on Grindr because they,

are sort of revealing gay men as racist and misogynist and body shaming, that it’s being discussed, because it contradicts the idea that gay men are so progressive, just because they’re gay. ... I have my preference too. You know. It’s really complicated because sexual preferences and desire are always kind of embedded in our notions of race, of hot, of body. Even as much as we want to say that we’re not influenced, we are.

Here he condemns gay male culture as racist and acknowledges that desire, including his own, is a product of larger cultural forces. Still, he concedes, preferences exist. And like many other gay men who find racial preferences problematic, offers a resignation to the raw power of sexual desire, however problematic its source.

Some participants who found racially exclusionary profile statements offensive used an “exception to the rule” argument to explain why such statements were racist. Xavier, a 25-year-old black gay man quoted earlier about his troll account says,

I hear, “No, it's just sexual preference. I can't help that I'm not attracted to black guys. Oh, if I'm gay, so I don't like women, does that make me a misogynist?” Blah, blah, blah, blah. And it's like, no, but if you're, if you—if I didn't have anything on my profile, if you didn't have a picture of me, and I wrote everything down that I would say as me, and if you messaged me and we got along really well and you found out I was black and that was a turn off, that's the problem. That's the problem!

Xavier recounts hearing a common justification of racial preferences as biologically wired through the comparison of racial preferences to sexual orientation toward a gender. This logic is meant to serve as the ultimate irrefutable justification because it equates questioning racialized desire to a homophobic refusal of gay identity. In recounting this to me during the interview and explaining how he felt about it, Xavier became quite agitated and struggled to find the words to condemn this statement may have been related to the raw emotional reaction incited by these types of justifications, connected to his everyday experience in the world as a black gay man, but it also reflects a pattern in my data of participants struggling to land on an adequate cultural frame to explain their position that racial preferences are racist.

Zach, a 27-year-old white gay man says,

My type is always evolving. Which I guess is a good thing, I don't know. It's making me more well rounded, I don't know. Because I used to only be attracted to black guys. Now it's kind of opened itself up to most races. ... So, you know, I don't like people who put on their profile “no blacks,” “no Asians,” no whatever. I think that's a little too close-minded. We all have in our mind this ideal person or this type that we're most attracted to, but that's not to say that somebody that doesn't fit that exact type is not going to wow you. So, you know, to say right off the bat, “No”, to a certain group of people, and put it out there on your profile—I think that's close-minded. I think we all to some extent do it in our mind anyway. That's just how we work as humans. We're attracted to certain types of people more than others. But I like to be as open minded as possible.

Zach simultaneously invokes an essentialist, implicitly biological frame about “how we work as humans” to explain why people would put racial preferences on their profile, and an abstract liberal stance that draws on multiculturalism and a sense that flexibility in racial preferences is more cosmopolitan or progressive to explain why people should not put racial preferences on their profile.

Later, Zach says matter-of-factly,

I'm not attracted to Asian, at all. Again, I would not want to put that on my profile as a deal breaker, because there's always exceptions, and there's a few guys that I've met that are Asian that I think are incredibly hot. But in general, those aren't the pictures that grab me. So you know personal preference always plays into it. But with geo-location the demographics of that area probably play a bigger part into those percentages than anything.

Zach does not explicitly frame racially exclusionary profiles as racist, though he marks them as “close-minded,” and uses an exception-to-the-rule logic for why they are problematic. He also presents a contradictory description of his desires, relying on the invocation of the “exception to the rule” frame to justify his categorically exclusionary statement about Asians. Ultimately, he points to the racial segregation of Chicago for his low rate of messaging Asian and Latino men. This move is uncharacteristically structural, but not backed up by his descriptions of intentionally opening Grindr while out in Boystown, the primary gay commercial area of Chicago with several blocks of continuous gay bars, in order to maximize the volume and variety of options. Zach switches between essentialist explanations of sexual desire and the frame of abstract liberalism as he attempts to understand and defend his own desires.

Other participants were unequivocal that exclusionary statements are racist. Jaime, a 30-year-old gay Latino, put it this way,

I do believe that everyone has a preference. I also think that it is racist. I think that you go ahead and put down anything to just like a person's race, it's who they are. Are you telling me that if the person had all the other qualifiers that makes that

person attractive to you, but the one thing that you're not interested in is because they're Black or they're Latino or whatever, that's the only one thing? Give that person a chance. You know?

Jaime expresses a view common among those who find racial preferences racist. He believes that it is the categorical nature of the statements, not the racial patterns of someone's sexual desires, that is racist. We can see here an example of the logical incoherence created by the use of competing frames. Even when racial preferences are criticized as racist, the idea of sexual preferences was often presented as unquestionable. This creates the situation in which people are left grasping for explanations, for paths of interpretation for what seems both obviously racist and apparently unquestionable. The competing frames produce the question, Why are racial preferences any different? Ultimately, Jaime turns to abstract liberalism's discourse of equality and the idea that everyone deserves a fair shake. "Give that person a chance. You know?"

Josh, the 20-year-old gay Asian man quoted earlier, also brings up the exception to the rule,

I mean I guess having your own preference is a very valid thing, but also saying, "I will never date or meet up with this person because of their race," I think you could go about it like, "I'm open to it if I ever encounter someone of that race that I do find myself attracted to." I think that has a lot to do with what you're wording things. Yeah, for me I have my own preferences, but I'm not going to be like, "I will never date or meet with this person." If I do encounter someone that I am attracted to, I will consider meeting up with them.

Within this logic, having preferences is fine, as long as you are open to the possibility of men outside of your preferences. This view is actually similar to the logic behind statements such as "whites to the front of the line." Everyone can be in line, but it is acceptable to rank some people higher—including by race. Josh's statement also has echoes of Zach's call for "open-mindedness," though with without the trappings of multiculturalism. Despite his critical stance on racial preferences, Josh had difficulty explaining his stance to me, at one point stopping

himself to say, “I guess that’s contradicting myself.” Josh was not alone. Overall, participants tended to draw on multiple cultural logics when talking about the issue of racially exclusionary Grindr profiles and racial preferences more broadly.

C. Sexual Preferences on Tinder

If, as I am arguing, there is something about the contemporary moment in gay male communities that produces Grindr as a space which supports racially exclusionary statements—something we would not necessarily predict given the hegemony of colorblind ideology—and if, as I am arguing, racial preferences themselves become justifiable under these same prevailing frames, we should not see the same cultural logics being used among other groups of app users on a similar app. In other words, frequent racially exclusionary statements by heterosexuals on a similar app would suggest that it is not the privileging of essentialist cultural logics in gay male communities that produces a semi-acceptability of racially exclusionary statements and an inability to form coherent critiques of these statements.

Racially exclusionary statements are quite rare on Tinder. Racism, of course, is not. Typically, this happens at the messaging stage, via fetishizing comments. Despite Tinder users’ vetting processes meant to eliminate a variety of unwanted messages, including fetishizing or otherwise racially-based comments, in a variety of articles and blogs some Tinder users have discussed offensive messages they have receive on Tinder. These include, “You’re pretty for a mixed girl,” “You’re so light-skinned for a black girl, I love it,” and “I’ve never got with a brown girl before,” (Smith, 2017).

Heather, when explaining why she didn’t use a particular dating website anymore offered,

So with me, I'm Asian. So there's a lot of Asian fetishes out there. So [on that website], you have—I mean, Tinder is so grimy, but whatever. There’s a mutual

attraction [double opt-in] versus [that website] is a free for all. So, then I have like, 70-year-old men, white men, that are like "Hey" and I'm just like, "Oh my god this is so gross." At least with like Tinder, you know there's a mutual attraction.

Heather's comment suggests that affordances matter. The opening message structure of that online dating platform had, in her experience, created the conditions for receiving unwanted messages that made her feel sexually fetishized. The double opt-in feature of Tinder minimized these types of unwanted messages, and it also allowed her to do her own racial filtering. Tinder allowed her to filter potential dates based on visual racial cues.

Like a number of other Tinder user participants Heather reported having "a type" that was racially or ethnically specific. She preferred non-white or non-American men, except for Asian men. Regarding white men she said, "I've dated white guys before in undergrad, like a long time ago, but I just have found that they're not—they're basic. They're basic. I have found that they're basic [laughs]." Heather attributed her lack of attraction to white American men not only to their "basicness," but also her experience as a transracial adoptee. She had found that she could relate better to people who had similar experiences with otherness and non-belonging. Regarding her lack of attraction to Asian men, she explained to me that, "Yeah, so if you're Americanized, I'll tell you, if you're Americanized you don't really date other Asians, typically." When I pushed her for further elaboration on this second point, she did not offer more of an explanation, though she implied that Asian men are traditional, but also just not attractive. Karen Pyke (2010) found similar opinions among heterosexual Asian women she interviewed.

LBQWT participants in my study tended not to have a stated racial preference, or to use that language, though it came up in two interviews. Most commonly, their discussions of desire were about social or relational justifications, more closely aligned with the heterosexual cultural logics, and not relying on logics of innate sexual desires. Opal (Black, 27, lesbian) was an

exception, in that she attributed her sole attraction to white women to a childhood spent with and around white people,

So, because of that experience [attending a de facto all-white elite boarding school], I feel like I'm used to seeing a certain people and thinking those people are attractive. So in my everyday life now that's just what I see attractive. And I've been talking to friends about this actually for years and it's like...what I want people to look like is honestly really based on my upbringing going to that school. So it's like skinny or like average sized white people.

Like Heather and Paul, the 52-year-old gay man quoted above, Opal points to childhood as a site for the solidification of erotic desires, and questions why her preference for white women is any different than anyone's preference for any characteristics in a partner.

Um, I wouldn't, I'd never put it on my profile but I mean if you just don't want to communicate with people who are like that, just don't communicate with them, there's no reason to put it out there like if they message you, and you're not interested in that just let it go... I mean I have my preference, I like white girls who are like 5'6 and under, that's just my thing. But I don't like to broadcast it, but we all think it though.

Why the LBQWT participants in my study were less likely to have racial preferences, why statements of racial preference are less hotly debated in online community spaces for LBQWT individuals than in gay male spaces remains to be explained. I do not have sufficient interview data from LBQWT users at this point to answer this question convincingly. Nor do I have space here to go into a history of print media personal ads, in which heterosexuals sometimes state a racial preference. What I can say is that the language of “preferences” and the invocation of essentialist logics was pervasive in my data on Grindr and gay men, and rare in my data on Tinder, and app users who were not gay-identified men.

The exclusionary statements on Tinder involved body type—with a clear hierarchy privileging skinnier women, and height. For example, profiles that say “I'm 5'10” Swipe left if you aren't taller than me.” Justifications heterosexual participants offered for this included

statements such as “It’s just weird to date a girl who’s taller than me,” “People would look at us weird,” or “I don’t want to tower over my boyfriend.” The justifications for height preferences, or even “requirements” as they were often called, were social and relational. Wanting to date someone of a particular height was not discussed as part of unchangeable, innate desires or even necessarily as an aesthetic preference. Rather, it was acknowledged that this was driven by how others would perceive them or general preferences for relationship dynamics.

Blake, a 37-year-old straight white man exemplifies this,

Jody: So have you come across [racially exclusionary profiles statements] on Tinder?

Blake: Not racial. There’s always—I’m 6’1”—you got to be over a certain height. So short guys, god bless them.

Jody: What’s that about do you think?

Blake: I just don’t think that’s something most women get over, dating a man who’s shorter than you. You just always feel like people are looking at you. I think. It’s a shame because one of my friends is one of the funniest dudes in the world, but [he’s] five foot three. Bitter man syndrome comes out—“If I was only your height dude, if I was only your height.” I just think it’s a thing.

Jody: Ok, would you date a woman who was taller than you?

Blake: Uh, [sighs] I hung out with a girl and it was—she was a volleyball player and it was really weird just walking down the street holding her hand. She was a pretty girl, but I felt uncomfortable. It was like, can you walk on the street and I’ll be on the curb [laughs], so I’ll be a little bit taller than you. It was just strange, a strange feeling you know.

Blake acknowledges that it is harder for shorter men who date women. He first suggests that it is because of women’s issues with height, but later also explains that dating a woman taller than him makes him uncomfortable. All Tinder user participants had seen profiles with height mentioned, and most had seen exclusionary statements about height.

The other common exclusionary statements on Tinder are related to body weight and body type. These vary across a spectrum from overt-misogyny (“no fat chicks”) to statements about lifestyle as a code for body type. Many of my participants expressed annoyance or even disgust at profiles they perceived to be body shaming. Unlike the cultural logics invoked by gay

male Grindr users in my study, users would attribute this to bad behavior, not innate sexual desires. When I asked Kelly, a 25-year-old white heterosexual woman if she had encountered anything similar to the racially exclusionary profiles on Grindr, she said,

On Tinder, I don't really see as [explicitly] exclusionary stuff like that, but again, occasionally you'll see like, if you're not—you'll see coded words, when people say stuff like "oh have to take care of yourself," that's code for you have to work out and be a Victoria's Secret model, so you kind of learn. I also—there was one guy, the biggest asshole that I've ever encountered, was this guy that had in his profile, it was like, you must have a BMI [body mass index] of less than fifteen, or something.

Like my other Tinder user participants, Kelly had not seen racially exclusionary profiles on Tinder. She attributed the body exclusionary statements to being an "asshole."

While swiping through her account with me during our interview, Karen, a 30-year-old straight white woman, explained to me that she typically swipes left on Indian men. I asked her why,

Karen: Um, I don't know it depends too, I don't like to generalize. There are some Indian guys that get my attention more or I'm attracted to more. I don't know. I don't think I have a type. There are just general [pauses] I don't know how to explain it. [pauses] Like, there's people you see pictures and you're instantly attracted, and then [others], no not really, I don't find this attractive, I don't think I'll find this attractive. Generally that tends to be a certain type. Sometimes Indian, sometimes Asian. There are people within those categories I find attractive.

Jody: Ok. Would you say you're more likely, just using Indian guys as an example, to talk to someone like that at a bar than you would be to swipe right on them on Tinder?

Karen: Yeah, to see their personality or to experience how interaction face-to-face would probably be more conducive. Like taking two people who are similar and one I would say Oh I'm going to swipe left on that person, but meet them in person and you click, that's subjective in that way. Yeah, I'd probably respond more [inaudible] in person.

Karen's stance of not generalizing fits the exception-to-the-rule logic of racial exclusion, and her "that's just the way it is" explanation for attraction uses the naturalization frame of colorblind racism. Karen's comment about being more open in face-to-face situations

was echoed by several other Tinder participants. Carol, a 36-year-old straight white woman, similarly felt that men with characteristics that were dealbreakers for her on Tinder had a better chance if she met them in person. She rarely swiped right on men with children, for example, unless they were “really cute,” but said that it was possible for her to get to know a man she knew off the app and like him well enough that him already having children would not matter to her.

Again, this suggests that the double opt-in structure of Tinder increases exclusion, including racial exclusion. Carol, “was not into black guys,” and preferred foreign men because, according to her, her father was a Sicilian immigrant. She swiped based on these racial and ethnic features, often judging how “boring” white men were by how generic their name seemed to her. While racially exclusionary statements and the debate around them is largely absent from heterosexual hookup apps, dating websites generally allow filtering by race—suggesting that this matters to users—and there is a well documented heterosexual racial-gender hierarchy in online dating that finds that white men and Asian and white women are ranked higher and receive the most messages, with black women lowest in the hierarchy (Bany et al., 2014).

As with the prior two chapters, about sexual scripts and about intimacy, it is necessary to contextualize claims about how technology design facilitates or exacerbates racial or other inequalities. Across sexual identities, individualism and an underlying consumer logic supports statements about desirable characteristics in another. However, the racially exclusionary statements on Grindr, and the rhetoric of these as preferences, is a product of combining the affordance of open messaging on the app, which leads some users to pre-emptively filter out unwanted messages through exclusionary profile statements, and the essentialist logic of innate

desire that is used to justify these statements. It is the right to choose, combined with a go-to moral defense of whatever choice you make. In the next chapter, I look at LBQWT Tinder users, extending my argument in this chapter about the relative power of affordances.

VI

Binary Code: Queer and Trans App Users

A. Zeros and Ones

Digital, by definition, means something involving digits, the numbers 0-9. One of the remarkable things about our digital society is that it is constructed through combinations of just two numbers, 0 and 1. The series of electrical pulses that run through impossibly small circuits inside our electronic devices trace their history back to the 1600s when mathematician Gottfried Leibniz devised a system of solving mathematical equations through a process of inserting and removing marbles from their positions in a device. Early computers ran on the same concept, but using punch cards. A specific spot on the card either had a hole punched, or not. The pattern of holes allowed the computer to execute a series of electronic pulses, the switching on and off of various circuits, to complete a mathematical equation. Later, programmer Ada Lovelace theorized that this system could be used to do much more than math (Lindgren, 2017).

Today, software engineers use text-based coding languages, input directly into a computer, to communicate what series of electronic pulses to execute on the microscopic circuits in our electronic devices. Much as complex chemical processes required to manufacture many of the parts in our phones are ultimately a result of combinations of a handful of basic elements, themselves made up of the positive and negative charges that hold atoms and molecules together, re-posting a video of a cat riding on the back of a tortoise to your social media account is ultimately a result of a complex series of the numbers 0 and 1.

In this chapter, I argue that normative gender and sexuality binaries are coded into the structure of Tinder and Grindr. I discuss the changes both apps have made to be more inclusive of transgender and non-binary users, and argue that changes to Tinder's gender identification

options have not changed the “matrix of intelligibility” (Butler, 2006 [1990]) of gender and sexuality on the app. I adapt Stuart Hall’s (1991 [1973]) theory of encoding and decoding to explore how users who do not fit the matrix of intelligibility of Tinder attempt to meet their goals while using the app. I use the example of Tinder’s recent change in affordances of identification to argue that we must consider the role of platforms as content consumers. I end by comparing Tinder to the Instagram account @herstorypersonals, where LBQWT people post and respond to personal ads, showing how the account affords an alternative matrix of legibility and, at least in its current form, acts as a queer archive of desire, and a counter-public.

Contemporary social formations of gender and sexuality are constructed of binary relationships. Male-female, man-woman, straight-gay, normal-perverse. Scholars have debated for years the exact relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. Judith Butler (2006 [1990]), argues that compulsory heterosexuality and the incest taboo creates the gender binary, and that sex is an effect of gender. These building blocks of normative sex, gender and sexuality are then assumed to be in linear relationships, creating a “matrix of intelligibility” (24). The binaries of gender and desire remain held together in a specific normative matrix despite the expansion of this matrix to include “same-sex” desire. The persistence of stereotypes of bisexual-identified men as “actually” gay, or bisexual-identified women as “just” experimenting point to the resistance to non-binary constructions of desire. Even the term “queer,” often explained as a sexual-identity label that embraces multiplicity, is typically used as a synonym of “not heterosexual.” This constructs a new binary of sexual desire.

Errors in gender/sexuality coding, such as transgender identification or sexual behavior that is incongruent with sexual identity, are tolerated largely to the extent that they can be re-coded without changing the structure of the matrix. For example, some openly transgender men

are accepted in their workplace, through co-workers' attempts to mitigate their own cognitive dissonance by initiating gendered interactions that reify the gender binary (Schilt, 2011). White men who engage in sexual behavior with other men rely on socially sanctioned "alibis," and the normalizing force of whiteness to define their homosexual behavior as within the bounds of heterosexuality, reifying the hetero/homo binary while engaging in practices that seem to challenge the binary (Ward, 2015). The matrix of intelligibility, made up of the sex, gender, and desire binaries, is entrenched in institutions, and through interactional norms.

It is not surprising then, that these binaries show up in social media platforms. Social media platforms are not just about cultural norms of cognitive dissonance, they are about money—advertising money. Rena Bivens' (2017) analysis of Facebook's changing gender options, between 2004 and 2014, shows how algorithms for creating targeted ads (including the kind used for recruitment of interview participants for this study) reinforce the gender binary. Despite changes that allowed for more gender options, including custom gender identification,

...we see that conditions for gendered existence beyond the binary are activated on the software's surface. Yet, underneath the surface, these conditions are severed in favor of the binary. The design strategy that generates these conditions simultaneously reconfigures gender into data that conforms to the hegemonic regime embraced by marketing and advertising institutions. (885)

Facebook created more gender options, but made gender mandatory, and recoded users' answers to gender and pronoun options back into codes that advertisers can use to target ads by gender. Essentially, the company improved its ability to categorize users in monetizable ways, while purporting to afford users greater authenticity on the platform.

As with Facebook, gender and sexuality binaries are coded into Tinder and Grindr. On Tinder, the gender binary is built into the options for identifying and sorting. For most of the time I was collecting interview data, the options for gender identification were "man" and

“woman.” The app drew directly from the user’s Facebook profile, so the gender indicated on the profile was used as the gender identification of the user on Tinder. If a user did not have a gender chosen on Facebook, or had a non-binary gender, which was possible by then, the Tinder profile setup process required the prospective user to go into their Facebook account and choose a gender. Originally, in order to change Tinder gender identification, which was allowed only two times, the user had to change their Facebook gender identification.⁴⁴ The options for viewing other users’ profiles are “men only,” “women only,” or “both men and women.” This means a user without a gender identification was unsortable. In other words, only “man” and “woman” are intelligible to Tinder’s algorithm. Because of this, desire (sexuality) only exists on Tinder as an effect of gender. The matrix of intelligibility of the app consists of two mutually exclusive and exhaustive gender categories, and a structure of desire oriented around those categories.

Grindr, as an app that for years described itself as “the largest all-male mobile social network in the world,” is coded with a somewhat different sex-gender-desire matrix of intelligibility. As explained in Chapter 3, there are a number of pre-determined categories that Grindr users can fill in by choosing from a pre-determined set of options. Gender has only recently become one of these categories. For most of the app’s history, the message “Loading more guys” has served as a filler while the app processes data to display profiles of nearby users. Grindr users were not allowed to choose a gender because the explicit presumption was that all

⁴⁴ The limit on changing profile gender may have been to limit workarounds that had been identified on other sites/apps. For example, users on OkCupid had previously reported that some heterosexual men were changing their profile gender or sexual identity in order to view and message people who use the feature of not being visible to users who identify as heterosexual men. This feature existed because of the frequency of unwanted messages non-heterosexual women were receiving from heterosexual men who were convinced that they were so irresistible as to be the exception to women’s stated non-heterosexual orientation and/or preference to not be messaged by straight-identified men.

users were men. Whether this only referred to cisgender men was left implicit, but the frequent conflation of male and men/guys presumes a linear relationship between sex and gender. In early marketing material, the term “gay” or “gay male” appears, though sometimes identity-neutral language was used that seemed to include MSM who did not identify as gay. Gender was intelligible as male-man or not male-man (a trespasser), and desire was only intelligible as homosexual. Unlike Tinder’s calculated public (Gillespie, 2014), however, the app’s functioning does not require all users be intelligible. Grindr presents user profiles in order of their proximity and all at once, not based on an algorithm designed to maximize matches.

Both Tinder and Grindr have since made changes to their app features to accommodate gender variation. First, after Grindr introduced a new profile information category called “Tribe” in 2013, they included “trans” as an option. Other options include geek, bear, jock and leather. Including trans as a subcultural “tribe” created confusion for users. If someone put their tribe as trans, did that mean they were looking for a trans person, or that they were themselves trans? Did it mean transgender/transsexual or transvestite (typically meaning male-identified but enjoy wearing women’s clothes)? If the user’s gender was unclear from their picture, but they listed their tribe as trans, were they a transman or a transwoman? Furthermore, including a gender identity in a category whose other options were subcultural identities also minimized gender identity by equating it with aesthetics or lifestyle choices.

Today, Grindr no longer says “loading more guys,” and offers an array of gender options, plus an option to indicate preferred gender pronouns. The app now has a “Gender Identity – Help Center,” accessible via an icon next to the gender listed on other users’ profiles as well as when

creating or adjusting your own profile.⁴⁵ This educational feature includes answers to questions such as “What is gender identity?” “What does it mean to be non-binary?” “Can a trans person be gay?” “How can I respectfully ask a trans person what they like sexually?” “Is it ok to ask a trans person about surgeries?” “Is it offensive to tell a trans person they don’t look trans?” and “If I’m trans and I’m in trouble, who should I call?” The hope is that if a user sees a gender identity on another user’s profile that they do not understand, they will tap the icon next to the term and become educated before interacting with that user in ways that would hurt or alienate that user.

Grindr has built-in a similar educational feature regarding HIV status. HIV prevention has long been incorporated into Grindr via announcements for free testing and allowing public health providers to operate educational chat profiles on the app. It is not uncommon for companies who cater their products to gay men to have a visible concern for HIV prevention. The early HIV prevention initiatives also seemed aimed to combat early critiques of Grindr as an app that essentially encourages risky sexual practices. The newer educational feature includes information about the stigmatization of people who are HIV positive and answers questions about respectfully interacting with someone who is HIV positive, on or off the app. Grindr frames their in-app educational features as part of a larger mission to foster inclusivity in LGBTQ communities.

⁴⁵ Writing in transgender inclusion into the app itself makes the lack of addressing racial exclusion on the app all the more apparent. As discussed in chapter V, Grindr has put out statements about racism in response to criticism that the company is complicit in racial exclusion on the app. However, the company has put much more direct effort into educating its users about HIV stigma and gender identity in explicit campaigns to make the app more inclusive of HIV positive users and transgender and non-binary users by educating other users.

Tinder has recently taken a similar approach to promoting gender inclusivity by offering more options for gender identification and creating educational features for users to learn about transgender identities. In 2016, Tinder released a video *#AllTypesAllSwipes*, to kick off a marketing campaign of their new gender features. In this approximately four and a half minutes video, individuals of varying levels of fame share their testimonies of what it feels like to be excluded because of their gender identity. Each speaker states their occupation and then gender while their name and occupation captions the frame. This way of introducing the speaker implies that the persons gender is not the only or even most important thing about that individual. This idea has been central to trans activists' calls for greater sensitivity and inclusivity.

An issue directly addressed in the video is that many transgender users have had other users report their profiles as inappropriate content. This results in the trans user being blocked from the app for up to several days, while the report is under review by Tinder employees. Sean Rad, Tinder co-founder, tells us earnestly in the video that,

Tinder has created over 20 billion matches in 196 countries. That's billions of matches that could never have existed before. Countless friendships, marriages, relationships. We want to make sure everybody has the ability to meet someone new that can have a profound impact on their lives.

The tautological claim that Tinder has created matches that could never have happened before is used to create a sense of importance of the app. Rad presents the promise of Tinder use as something transformative and worth making accessible. The language of personal freedom and rights-based equality movements is used by speakers throughout the video. Towards the end, Rad says "Everyone has the right to be who they are, and meet someone great who loves them for who they are."

The video's emphasis on love, especially when contrasted to other parts of Tinder's public persona, such as the Instagram account where they post tongue-in-check content

(generally implicitly heterosexual) that does not shy away from their reputation as a hookup app, is part of a larger pattern of what Ward (2015) identifies as a heterosexual demand for “sincere queers.” The new sexual politics is inclusive of loving (and marrying) whoever you want, not necessarily having sex however and with whomever you want. The “charmed circle” (Rubin, 1984), those sex practices that are considered normal and are not stigmatized or criminalized, has been expanding for heterosexuals—particularly white heterosexuals, whose race tends to provide protection from being labeled deviant, even as respectability politics constrains queer sex. Campus hookup culture offers an example. Casual (heterosexual) sex among young adults has been normalized, even if it remains fretted over. Casual homosexual sex has been downplayed in LGBTQ rights discourse and discussions of sexual practices have been divorced from discussions of (non-heterosexual) sexual identity (Warner, 2000).

The Tinder video was part of the publicity for a roll out of the new gender feature. No longer were users’ Tinder gender identifications limited to man or woman. Instead, users could choose from dozens of options, including transman, transwoman, genderqueer, non-binary, agender, male-to-female, butch, gender non-conforming, pangender, two-spirit,⁴⁶ or simply type in their own self-identification. The self-congratulatory publicity for this new feature is a sign of Tinder both expanding its market audience and appealing to cisgender users who feel good about using an app they see as aligned with progressive politics. Including a long list of options for gender identification, and including esoteric terms largely unknown outside of queer spaces, read

⁴⁶ Two-spirit references non-binary Native American gender traditions and is typically, though not exclusively, used by Native Americans. However, other terms used primarily LBQWT people of color are conspicuously missing from their options, given their laundry list approach, including boi, stud, and macha. This suggests a lack of concern for being racially inclusive.

as an attempt at queer street cred. They were showing that they know how to “speak the language” of queerness. In the video, Drew Glicker, product manager at Tinder, says:

This update allows users to add their gender outside the binary. And also we’ve added language in the app and we’ve added information and education to inform users about how this feature’s used and about how they can add their gender to their profile.

However, the “information and education” is directed at users interested in changing their gender label. It is unlike the changes made by Grindr, which has included well-placed links to their educational material directed toward cisgender users who may be confused about how to interact with someone with a non-binary gender identity on their profile. Later in the video, we are told, “You can really tailor Tinder to your specific needs.” Jess Carbino, Tinder’s resident sociologist, tells us, “We are solving the problem of allowing our users to become their authentic selves.” And, indeed, the new app design allows for gender self-definition.

Despite this change in identification options, the gender-derived binary structure of desire on the app did not change. The options for viewing *other* users’ profiles remained the same: “Men only,” “Women only,” and “Both men and women.” When a user chooses a gender, they are then prompted to choose whether they want to be included in “men” or “women” as a sorting category. Gender identification becomes limitless, but desire remains oriented around two gender categories. Gender is now an effect of sexuality, but the two remain linked in the same normative matrix of legibility. In the next section I discuss the way LBQWT users create their own language to adapt the matrix to their own (queer) desires.

B. Encoding/Decoding on Tinder

Stuart Hall, a foundational scholar of British cultural studies, was influential in the turn to “audience studies” in communication and cultural studies. In his work on broadcast media, he

developed a theory of “encoding” and “decoding” as a way of challenging the existing perception of media production and consumption as a linear and transparent process. Viewers do not simply receive messages from media producers. Social reproduction via media, as part of cultural hegemony, He theorized a process of media production and consumption.

Hall (1991) argued that encoding and decoding were “relatively autonomous, but determinate” processes, meaning the viewer may read the text in a way unintended by the producer, but there are not infinite readings available. Hall identified three audience “reading positions,” 1. Dominant-hegemonic 2. Negotiated and 3. Oppositional. The first is when the viewer takes from a program the messages intended. A negotiated reading is when a viewer agrees to the legitimacy of the dominant meanings in the text, at least on an abstract or “global” level, “while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to ‘local conditions’” (102). An oppositional reading, on the other hand, interprets the text through an “alternative framework of reference.”

Hall was of course writing in a very different media culture. TV stations still exist today and still produce content, however the very notion of a study of “mass-communication” has been destabilized by changes in media production, distribution and consumption in the internet age. A major shift in media production in the last twenty years is the development of what has been dubbed Web 2.0. Unlike the earlier internet, which consisted of static webpages, Web 2.0 is characterized by interactive platforms that allow people to engage with and even create content. Quintessential examples of this type of Web 2.0 interactivity include YouTube, Wikipedia, Facebook and other social media platforms. Scholars have identified a change in media production and consumption with the development of the interactive web. Instead of “one-to-many” media production, such as a television program or commercial radio broadcast, Web 2.0

facilitates broader, lateral networks such as “many-to-many” media production and “peer production” (Castells, 2010 [1996]; Gauntlett, 2011; Rainie and Wellman, 2012).

Many-to-many media production is not the only way the boundary between producer and consumer has broken down. The term “produsage” refers to the role users/consumers play in production (Bruns, 2009). We often think of and experience our use of digital devices as leisure,⁴⁷ but in many ways we are doing unpaid labor for the company that owns the platform. When a user uploads a YouTube video, for example, they create content that draws an audience, who also become an audience for YouTube’s advertisers. We may use a platform to increase productivity and collaborate with co-workers, but we are also being productive for the company that owns that platform, for example by creating endless data about how people work. Dating app users produce their own profiles. Tinder and Grindr do not have to produce content. Users also produce huge amounts of data, owned by the app, as they construct their profile, view and sort others, and send messages.

Hall’s theory of encoding and decoding is useful for thinking about production and consumption of many-to-many media content. This model can be used to analyze how users construct their profiles and interpret others’ profiles, especially users who are unintelligible in the gender-desire matrix of the app. Before the new gender options were introduced on Tinder and Grindr, in order to be legible to other users as anything other than a “man” or “woman” required visual and textual coding in the profile. The most direct method is stating a gender identity in the profile text. However, just as with the current gender options, the decoding

⁴⁷ However, see chapter 4 on Tinder user participants’ descriptions of app use, and dating more generally, in terms of labor.

process is not always predictable. Putting “non-binary” on a profile to signify gender identity only works if the decoder is also familiar with this term.

As I discussed in Chapter 3 on sexual scripts, users are savvy media producers/consumers. The choosing and vetting processes participants described often involved fine-tuned and instantaneous assessments of subtle cues in profile pictures and text. To varying degrees, participants were quite strategic in their profile construction. All users engage in some sort of encoding/decoding as they construct and manage their profiles and analyze other users’ profiles. The difference for LBQWT Tinder users is that their gender identities and desires are not legible within the app’s internal matrix of legibility. Val, a 23-year-old non-binary user of both Tinder and Grindr had developed a method for finding other queer and trans users on Tinder. They⁴⁸ periodically switched the settings for both the gender category their profile would be shown as, and the gender category they were viewing, doing “all combinations.” Val wanted to find other people who defined their gender outside of the binary, or who were queer and gender non-conforming (GNC). Doing so required moving between the two sortable categories, man and woman, in order to be visible to other GNC users, who make similar decisions about which category to use for themselves and for viewing profiles.

Val also puts “t4t” [trans for trans] on their profile, attempting to signal their gender as well as the types of users they were looking for. However, another user would not see this unless they went into the full profile, instead of swiping based on the top picture. Additionally, as a friend pointed out to Val, not all queer and trans users know what t4t means. The structure of the platform, in this case Tinder, circumscribes the possibilities for encoding. In the process of encoding and decoding, we can visualize this as an intervention between encoding and text. This

⁴⁸ Val’s preferred pronouns were the gender neutral options they/them.

intervention is itself situated in a broader economic (base), and cultural (superstructure) context, as Hall would surely point out. The company that owns the platform has its own agenda, the designers and engineers are agentic social actors, and the platform itself affects the process, beyond the intentions of the designers or the perceptions of the users.

For feminine non-heterosexual women who are interested in men, the encoding can be complicated. If they explicitly indicate a non-heterosexual identity on their profile, they risk unwanted comments or propositions for threesomes by men they message with. As discussed above, this type of messaging from men is common enough to have prompted OkCupid to add an option for (primarily women) users to make their profiles invisible to heterosexual men on the site/app.⁴⁹ Additionally, the prevalence of profiles in which women say things like “no couples” or “not here for your threesome fantasy,” indicates that these users have been messaged by couples. Heterosexual couples tend to include only a picture of the woman in the first picture, so another user may swipe right, assuming the profile is a woman, thus making themselves available for messaging, without realizing that the account is actually a couple.

On the other hand, we have also seen in previous chapters that Tinder users sometimes swipe left when they assume a low chance of reciprocation. In spite of the lower risks of rejection on Tinder due to the double opt-in feature, users sometimes act based on insecurity. If non-heterosexual users do not make themselves legible to their desired group, they may miss out on matches. Users may swipe left on someone they assume is straight, again despite there being no consequences for swiping right and not matching. Examples of queer encoding on Tinder include, pictures a LGBTQ event, including in pictures articles of clothing with queer slogans or

⁴⁹ OkCupid has since done away with this feature and moved to a double opt-in messaging structure that is similar to Tinder's.

subcultural references, the two-women-holding-hands emoji, two-men-holding-hands emoji or rainbow emoji, or just stating a gender or sexual identity in the profile.

Tinder's new gender feature was presented as a response to the frustrations of their transgender users. However, the strategic marketing behind Tinder's new gender labeling feature is likely not the only reason for this change to the app. The concept of affordances creates a user/designer binary in which designers build technology and users do things with technology. However, in a technological era marked in part by widespread user-tracking, we have to consider that new features also open up new affordances *for the producers*. The recent widely reported privacy breach of Facebook users' data by a third party to create predictive models of voter behavior, ultimately to inform Russian attempts to interfere in the 2016 US presidential election, offers an example (Rosenberg et al., 2018). Recall that the concept of affordances has its roots in cognitive psychology and its application to design, a user-oriented field. If we consider the changing relationship of producers and users/consumers, the blurring of this boundary, and especially the feedback loops between producers and software users, we cannot keep thinking of affordances as a uni-directional concept. Producers create affordances for themselves, often through creating affordances for users, but users also (unintentionally) create unexpected affordances for producers and others. This chain of design and use can extend beyond a single company and the people who use its product. The recent Facebook data breach offers an example. Facebook created affordances for third parties to use application programming interface (APIs) to link into the platform, for its own financial gain. A researcher then used an API to create a quiz that Facebook users could answer. Because of the affordances of Facebook's API, this gave Aleksaner Krogan, the researcher, access to millions of users' data. He later sold that data to a consulting firm, which then used the data to help Donald Trump's presidential

campaign profile voters, design campaign materials and target social media users most likely to be responsive. Facebook users produced the data that made this possible. As an API developer, Krogan played the role of a Facebook consumer, and product developer.

As discussed in chapter three, Tinder users do not see other user profiles at random. The app uses an algorithm to choose which profiles appear to the user and in what order. Algorithms are one of the major trade secrets of the internet age. While a company may offer some basic information about their algorithmic process, the details are closely guarded. It is in Tinder's interest to facilitate enough matches for each user so that they perceive the app to be useful and good at what it claims to do.⁵⁰ We also know that companies track everything their users do, and then use this data to predict future behavior. Machine learning, as it is called, is how Amazon suggests items you may be interested in purchasing, Netflix offers recommendations of shows you may like, and Tinder shows you profiles of users you find appealing.

We can deduce that giving users the option to choose non-binary gender labels also opens new possibilities for Tinder's data scientists and engineers. More obvious encoding, such as same-sex emojis, rainbow emojis, or clear textual statements such as "bisexual" are easily tracked. Algorithms can also "learn" that users who mention a particular singer or food, or who use specific phrases, are more likely to swipe on users with their same gender. Less accessible are more subtle and esoteric clues. For example, engineers at an app have to know, or figure out, that in some locations, tracking asymmetrical hair styles or septum rings would improve their ability to predict the sexual identity of their users. We do not know if Tinder has this type of

⁵⁰ According to OkCupid (Rudder, 2014), their algorithm factors in attractiveness, showing you profiles of users with similar levels of attractiveness, so that the most desirable users are not inundated with messages while the less desirable users get discouraged by a lack of messages.

technology yet, but face recognition technology—the kind available commercially, outside of the military—still has limited reliability.

Machine learning can be (creepily) accurate, but it is not flawless. You still hate some shows or musicians that are recommended to you by your streaming services and Amazon sometimes suggests items you already own—they may have accurately predicted you would buy that product, but they did not predict that you already bought it elsewhere. When Tinder users select a gender label, that information becomes part of the app’s algorithm. When many users choose from these labels and then start swiping, Tinder’s overall predictive capabilities improve. In other words, this new gender fluid feature may be driven as much by a desire to fine-tune their data and the app’s predictive algorithm as it is by managing their image as a progressive company. Regardless of the intention, this example shows how a new feature creates one affordance for users and another for the company. Users have non-binary gender labels to choose from. The company has additional data to work with. Anytime a technology company tells you that a new feature will allow you to “tailor your experience,” they are actually asking you to improve their ability to categorize you, ultimately to make money.

Returning to Hall’s theory, viewing affordances with this broader lens allows us to see more of the power dynamics in this process of media design and use. The matrix of intelligibility coded into Tinder constrains users as they encode their profiles and decode other users’ profiles. When users develop ways to subvert this matrix, to adapt a technology to purposes it was not intended for, they create data that companies find ways to profit off of.

C. Why Isn’t There an App for Lesbians?

A number of my participants asked, either rhetorically or directly of me—as someone who studies dating apps—if there was an app similar to Tinder that was for lesbians or queer

people. The answer during most of my fieldwork was, “There used to be, but like the others it failed.” A commonly given answer for why these apps failed is that queer women will not use an app. Robyn Exton founder of the app HER, which launched in 2015 and describes itself as “your lesbian, bisexual and queer community in one place,”⁵¹ has offered an alternative explanation. In an interview with Wired, she explained that creating and sustaining a successful app requires investors and her experience in fundraising capital for Datch, a previous attempt, and HER was that investors do not believe women will use an app to find other women, based on their beliefs in stereotypes about lesbians (Solon, 2015). So, one possible reason there is only one successful app specifically for women looking for other women is lack of investor interest.

Another answer to the question “Why isn’t there an app for lesbians?” is that, at least in some geographic areas, existing platforms not exclusively for LBQWT users work quite well for some of these users. In other words, the demand exists but is already being met. Tinder is one example of this, as is the website/app OkCupid. Queer and lesbian participants reported being successful finding people on Tinder, whether for dating or friends or casual sex. Val, quoted above, said they were not satisfied with Tinder when I asked. This is when they explained their process of switching between the available gender categories for both identifying and viewing. As with other users who stated they were dissatisfied, I followed up,

Jody: If you aren’t satisfied with the app, why do you keep using it?

Val: Well. Because it works.

Jody: Ok.

Val: I guess. Like, I’ve—I’ve definitely met two people who are going to be in my life forever, from Tinder.

Jody: Right.

⁵¹ HER uses the term LGBTQ+ in some of its marketing materials, but has recently made moves toward trans inclusivity, through new app features and marketing materials.

Val: So that's cool. Like, it has a better track record than college, you know. Which is supposed to be where you go to meet all the people that you're going to spend your life with, you know.

Tinder, for Val, was both a source of frustration and devaluation, and a means to finding long-term intimacy that they desired. Tinder “worked” for them, but this required a lot of extra labor on their part, to make themselves legible in ways that allowed them to find others they were looking for on the app.

One solution to this issue, of platforms that are structured around a normative matrix of legibility, is to create alternatives, with different affordances for gender identification and viewing. One recent grassroots alternative is an Instagram account @herstorypersonals, now @personals, that was started in 2016. People are invited to submit text-only personal ads, in the style of newspaper ads. This account, and the current fundraising effort to create an app based on this account, has been framed as an antidote to the focus on appearance inherent in dating apps like Tinder (O'Hara, 2018). However, I argue that the real novelty of @herstorypersonals is that it acts as a public archive of queer desire, and a sexualized (queer) public space. Like queer “pop-up” parties in Chicago and other cities, such as Vancouver (Ghaziani and Stillwagon, 2018), @herstorypersonals relies on existing infrastructure (Instagram) to create temporary or periodic queer space. With @herstorypersonals though, personal ads stay up on Instagram indefinitely. The policy of the account is specifically that once your ad is up, it won't be taken down.⁵²

More to the point of encoding and decoding, ads posted to @personals engage with an array of queer typologies and cultural references that, while they overlap with the profiles found

⁵² There have been a several issues of censorship by Instagram, including deactivating the use of geolocation hashtags that make it possible to sort by location, which merits future investigation of the role of platform in the case of @herstorypersonals.

on Tinder, are much more subculturally specific and regularly more sexually explicit. As an account specifically patterned off of the personal ads in *On Our Backs*, a lesbian erotica magazine started in 1984 by Susie Bright, the account invites a level of explicitness not common on Tinder. This is further facilitated because Instagram affords different levels of privacy that are not available on Tinder. Furthermore, Instagram's commenting feature affords not only responses to the ad, but also clarification questions about terms used in an ad, facilitating decoding. The popularity of this account may in fact be due to the flexibility of an alternative matrix of intelligibility within @herstorypersonals, not just the privileging of text over images. The founder of the account is currently fundraising to launch an app that will have the same format as the ads on the current Instagram account. If it follows the structure of other dating and hookup apps, where users can adjust their profiles/ads whenever they want, the current affordance of compiling a queer archive of desire will be lost. The ability to not only direct message an ad poster, but also converse with people in the comments of a post—the queer counter-public space—may or may not remain, depending on the design of the app. This account then, offers another example of how the affordances of the platform used matter for whether and how the normative matrix of legibility is enforced.

In this chapter, I have shown how this normative matrix is built in to Tinder and Grindr. Both apps have made changes to be more inclusive of users outside of the gender binary. However, because Tinder only changed gender identification options, not gender sorting options, their new feature affords more encoding/decoding possibilities, but does not actually change how the gender binary is structured into the app via algorithm. Grindr, which does not use an algorithm for showing users profiles, does have ads. Whether they, like Facebook (Bivens, 2017) re-code users behind-the-scene into limited gender categories for advertisers is unclear.

This chapter complicates my arguments in the previous chapters, where I showed that contextualizing determinist claims about new technology—what these apps are changing in society—reveals affordances (in its design-oriented definition) to be less important than supposed. As explained earlier, these apps were not designed with LBQWT users in mind. Focusing on this group of unintended users highlights the reciprocal relationship between designers and users in technological innovation. The recent moves toward greater gender inclusion by these apps also shows how financial incentives of categorizing users in ways that monetize user data may co-opt subversive uses of technology, even allowing companies to benefit from gestures of inclusion that do not fundamentally change how well their technology works for diverse user groups. This chapter in particular reveals the importance of understanding industry-side dynamics for fully contextualizing technology users in their social context.

VII. CONCLUSION

The popularization of dating apps, in the U.S. (and elsewhere), has drawn attention to changing patterns of relationship formation, and changing sexual norms. Particularly with the development of Tinder and similar apps as mainstays of heterosexual dating culture, so called hookup apps have emerged in mainstream discourse as a site for debating the role of mobile ICTs in social relations. These apps have been accused of ending heterosexual courtship practices, making users unhappy—by offering them too many choices, forcing them to objectify each other based on shallow profiles, and exacerbating racism and sexism. I have argued for a contextualization of these claims, showing how technology use is embedded in larger social processes. My findings show that hookup apps are not dramatically changing social norms around sex and dating.

In this dissertation, I contribute to sexualities studies by documenting emerging sexual practices, analyzing the constraints contemporary heterosexuality places on people's search for intimacy, and examining the relationship between sexual identity politics and racial hierarchies of desirability. I add to theories of contemporary forms of intimacy by showing how app users frame their sexual lives as the development of self-intimacy, for investment in future intimacy with a romantic partner. I fill a gap in sexualities literature by bringing in concepts from science and technology studies (STS) to account for the role of technology. By taking up, in each chapter, a claim about the social effects of hookup apps, I have shown how our understanding of technology requires a contextualization of technology use and users. Technology does not just constrain or facilitate action through what its design features allow. User perceptions and emotions contribute to the “imagined” affordances (Nagy and Neff, 2015) of a technology.

Comparing an app for gay men with an app designed to be its “straight version,” I detailed the differences in the design and use of Tinder and Grindr, accounting for the continuity of interactional norms with the concept of sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). Intrapsychic and interactional levels of scripts are intimately connected to the cultural level, and dependent on social structures. The technology of these apps does not intervene in the structural conditions supporting heterosexual and homosexual scripts, such as the ideology of gender difference, and homophobia. Therefore, it makes sense that the scripts app users deploy do not vary significantly from the normative scripts that existed before the proliferation of these apps, and which continue off the apps. Grindr’s minimal profile requirements, and open viewing and messaging design reflect the history of sexualized public spaces and anonymous sexual encounters between men. Tinder’s double opt-in messaging structure reflects the pervasive misogyny of normative heterosexual culture, and concomitant need for women to protect themselves, especially online. Tinder users’ practices largely reflect the dating and hookup scripts present off the apps, at all stages, including swiping, messaging, and meetup. Grindr user practices incorporate cruising and dating scripts, as well as queer kinship norms.

These scripts affect users’ ability to meet their goals on the apps. Participants often approached the app ambivalently, with mixed goals. Tinder offers the promise of fulfilling both the fun single life, and the long-term relationship search. If the discourse about hookup culture is to be believed, we might expect young adult Tinder users to be uninterested in intimacy. If we instead believe the claims about ICTs inhibiting connection, we might expect Tinder users to be already incapable of intimacy, given their level of technology use, and especially thwarted in finding intimacy through an app. Both Millennials and hookup apps are accused of lacking the desire or capacity for intimacy. However, regardless of current or future goals for their love life,

participants were most satisfied when finding intimacy with others. Honesty and emotional reciprocity, elements of the late modern “pure relationship” (Giddens, 1992), figure prominently in their hopes for intimacy. Their relative dissatisfaction with their app use stemmed from an imperative to use their single years for the accumulation of human capital in the form of self-intimacy, a deep knowledge and trust of oneself, while also being invested in the promise of happiness (Ahmed, 2010) offered by the couple form.

The understanding of an extended period of young adulthood as a time for this investment, and the desire for intimacy based on honesty and emotional reciprocity, in many ways transcends sexual identities. However, I have argued that heterosexuality limits the possibilities of inter-personal intimacy. Queer kinship scripts available to LGBTQ users make it easier to develop long-term intimate connections with others, even while pursuing self-intimacy. My findings suggest that hookup apps are not making users socially isolated and unhappy. To the extent that users feel this way, it is not the technology driving this. Users engage with the technology within a terrain of shifting, often conflicting expectations for dating and sex in young adulthood. Contextualizing hookup app users’ motivations and affective engagements with the app shows that these apps are not the source of unhappiness.

Similarly, I have argued that these apps are a manifestation, not a cause, of racial ideologies. Highly debated racially exclusionary profiles on Grindr are facilitated by the open messaging structure of the app, but represent broad patterns of racialized erotic capital (Green, 2008) in gay male communities. The affordances of Grindr do not actually necessitate racially exclusionary statements, and, in general, statements of exclusion and inclusion on dating profiles are as much about self-identity than strategic use, suggesting racially exclusionary profiles on Grindr are not merely efficiency boosters. Tinder’s double opt-in viewing and messaging

structure affords a more private expression of racialized desires, often manifesting as the fetishization of users of color. Tinder profiles do include exclusionary statements, most often about height, or coded language related to body size. A comparison of the cultural logics used to justify and condemn exclusionary statements reveals that gay men in the study relied on cultural logics of innate desire more than other participants, who often drew on social and relational logics.

Comparing across apps, I also analyzed the ways in which the gender binary, and normative matrix of intelligibility of sex, gender, and desire (Butler, 1990), are built into Tinder and Grindr. Both apps have recently made changes to their gender features, allowing users a wider array of gender identification options. Tinder's reliance on algorithms for showing users other profiles limits the changes possible to the app's matrix of legibility. Though more identification options now exist on the app, there continues to be only two sorting categories, men and women. Users who do not fit the apps' matrices must come up with ways to make themselves legible. I used the example of the Instagram queer personal ads account @herstorypersonals to show how a different set of affordances, via the platform affordances of Instagram, and the format of personal ads allowed by the account owner, makes room for alternative matrices of gender and desire.

The encoding and decoding (Hall, 1991) non-legible users engage in is an example of the role of users in determining the affordances of a technology, beyond that envisioned by designers. Because users are themselves innovators, the design process is reiterative. Designers imagine a user and create a product based on this imagined user, users adapt the product to their own purposes, designers collect data on users, designers respond by changing aspects of the design, users adapt the updated or new product to their own purposes, and the process repeats.

Internet technology companies rely on user data for a variety of financial endeavors, including advertising money, boosting user engagement, and internal improvements to company efficiency. User subversion and innovation are easily co-opted to further company goals.

Though I have analyzed hookup apps as a specific technology, my arguments in this dissertation are not limited to these apps. Tinder and Grindr will one day be obsolete, traded-in for something new. However, the debates about what technology makes possible, and makes happen, pre-date these apps by centuries, and are unlikely to disappear. Perhaps technology discourse is where we work through our great collective anxieties. Similar to Edward Said's (1978) argument that Western discourse about "The Orient" is in fact a discourse about the West, our hyperbolic debates about the perils and promise of new technology may have less to do with technology than it seems. Dr. Frankenstein and his monster keep reappearing in our cultural productions because they are a narrative device for working through all sorts of questions about subjecthood, belonging, and human agency.

As this dissertation suggests, taking seriously the mediating effects of technology in sexualities offers key insights to sexualities themselves. The enduring structures of gender and homophobia, changing forms of intimacy, and sexual racism, for example, are revealed in the ways users engage with new forms of mediated sexual and romantic sociality. Debates over the significance, and relative causal power, of this technological mediation are part of larger debates over shifting norms of gender, sexuality, relationship formation, and life course expectations, particularly for white, middle-class young adults. My findings raise further questions about sexuality. Are Millennials dramatically different than their parents in terms of gender and sexualities? How is increasing precarity under neoliberalism related to changing patterns of intimacy and relationship formation, particularly in their capacity as emotional and financial

support systems? Relatedly, how does technology mediate the development of the emotional and financial support networks necessary to cope with increasing unpredictability? Do we still need feminism? How do we address sexual harassment in the online world? Are sexual preferences based on race actually racism? Or are we entitled to our desires, whatever they may be? Are sexual identity politics based on the notion of innate desires providing a shield for racial exclusion?

These debates around sexualities reveal tensions in how we think about exclusion and inclusion in a diversifying U.S., where racial demographics are changing, and gender and sexual identities have emerged as a key political topic. My findings raise questions about the extent to which Americans are the liberal sexual subjects they consider themselves to be. And these debates are increasingly grappling with the vast power of technology companies in our daily lives, including the centrality of algorithms, still largely invisible and taken for granted, and the endless data we create for unaccountable corporations everyday.

This dissertation suggests a number of directions for future research. Regarding data and corporations, my analysis of the encoding and decoding process of users outside of Tinder's matrix of legibility could be developed by studying the companies themselves, and the decisions they make regarding design changes. This could further develop Bruns' (2009) concept "produsage," the breakdown of the boundary between producers and users. Likewise, trends toward inclusion in the tech industry, notably by the recent success of the organization Lesbians Who Tech, are an industry-side development that may (or may not, given financial incentives and organizational dynamics) have effects on how gender and sexuality are built into platforms.

Hookup app user practices are also a fruitful topic for understanding changing patterns of sexualities. App affordances, such as the privacy of personal phones and direct messaging, create

new possibilities for both expression of sexual identities, and pursuing sexual practices seemingly at odds with sexual identity. Additionally, as the #MeToo movement develops, and the more visible debate about sexual assault and sexual harassment it has sparked, the dynamics of online harassment, including its manifestation in internet-mediated sexual and romantic interactions, will be of interest inside and outside of the academy. Finally, given the open hostility towards immigrants in the U.S. today (and those Latinx, and other people of color, often profiled as non-American), how are discourses of racialized desire, discussed in this dissertation in relation to the debate over racially exclusionary Grindr profiles, being deployed in ways that support homonationalism (Puar, 2007), and/or subvert white nationalist regimes?

Sexualities are increasingly mediated by (mobile) ICTs, and technology companies play an ever more powerful role in the economy and politics. For future sexualities scholarship, this means that technology should show up more and more frequently in our work. Interdisciplinarity has long been a strength of the sociology of sexualities. My hope in this dissertation is that I have made a case for the productive inclusion of concepts from science and technology studies (STS) in the field of sexualities studies.

CITED LITERATURE

- “9 Amazing Otter Facts You Need to Know | Discover Wildlife.” Retrieved June 1, 2018 (<http://www.discoverwildlife.com/animals/mammals/facts-about-otters>).
- Ahlm, Jody. 2017. “Respectable Promiscuity: Digital Cruising in an Era of Queer Liberalism.” *Sexualities* 20(3):364–79.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Albury, Kath. 2017. “From Free Love to Tinder.” *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*. New York: Routledge.
- Albury, Kath. 2018. “Heterosexual Casual Sex: From Free Love to Tinder.” Pp. 81–90 in *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*.
- Alter, Adam L. 2017. *Irresistible : The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. New York : Penguin Press.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth A., Paula England, and Alison C. K. Fogarty. 2012. “Accounting for Women’s Orgasm and Sexual Enjoyment in College Hookups and Relationships.” *American Sociological Review* 77(3):435–62.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Laura T. Hamilton. 2013. *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bailey, Luke. 2014. “27 Times Tinder Proved 2014 Was The Year Love Died.” *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved March 23, 2015 (<http://www.buzzfeed.com/lukebailey/tinder-murdered-love-in-2014>).
- Bany, James A., Belinda Robnett, and Cynthia Feliciano. 2014. “Gendered Black Exclusion: The Persistence of Racial Stereotypes Among Daters.” *Race and Social Problems; New York* 6(3):201–13.
- Baxter, Holly and Pete Cashmore. 2013. “Tinder: The Shallowest Dating App Ever?” *The Guardian*, November 23.
- Beneito-Montagut, Roser. 2011. “Ethnography Goes Online: Towards a User-Centred Methodology to Research Interpersonal Communication on the Internet.” *Qualitative Research* 11(6):716–35.
- Bèrubè, Allan. 1996. “The History of Gay Bathhouses.” Pp. 187–220 in *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*, edited by Dangerous Bedfellows. Boston, MA: South End Press.

- Bérubé, Allan. 2003. "The History of Gay Bathhouses." *Journal of Homosexuality* 44(3-4):33–53.
- Bivens, Rena. 2017. "The Gender Binary Will Not Be Deprogrammed: Ten Years of Coding Gender on Facebook." *New Media & Society* 19(6):880–98.
- Bogle, Kathleen A. 2008. *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2014. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bosker, Bianca. 2013. "Here's One Of The College Kids Helping Tinder Take Over Campuses." *Huffington Post*, July 2. Retrieved May 25, 2018.
- Bruns, Axel. 2009. *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Prodisage*. Peter Lang.
- Butler, Judith. 2006. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge.
- Callander, Denton, Martin Holt, and Christy E. Newman. 2012. "Just a Preference: Racialised Language in the Sex-Seeking Profiles of Gay and Bisexual Men." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 14(9):1049–63.
- Callander, Denton, Christy E. Newman, and Martin Holt. 2015. "Is Sexual Racism Really Racism? Distinguishing Attitudes toward Sexual Racism and Generic Racism among Gay and Bisexual Men." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44(7):1991–2000.
- Campbell, John Edward. 2004. *Getting It On Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Carrillo, Héctor. 2001. *The Night Is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Carrillo, Héctor. 2018. *Pathways of Desire: The Sexual Migration of Mexican Gay Men*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Carr, Nicholas. 2010. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Castells, Manuel. 2010. *Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture Volume I*. Wiley.
- Chauncey, George. 1995. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- CIPIT. n.d. "Screenshot Copyright Infringement on Social Media | CIPIT Blog." Retrieved June 25, 2018 (<https://blog.cipit.org/2016/08/05/screenshot-copyright-infringement-on-social-media/>).
- Clarke, Adele, Carrie Friese, and Rachel Washburn. 2017. *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Interpretive Turn*. Sage Publications.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2008. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Colter, Ephen Glenn. 1996. "Discernibly Turgid: Safer Sex and Public Policy." Pp. 141–66 in *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*, edited by Dangerous Bedfellows. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 2016. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. Basic Books.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Identity Politics, Intersectionality, and Violence against Women." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6):1241–99.
- Dean, James. 2014. *Straights: Heterosexuality in Post-Closeted Culture*. New York: NYU Press.
- Delany, Samuel R. 1999. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: NYU Press.
- D'Emilio, John and Estelle B. Freedman. 2012. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America, Third Edition*. 3 edition. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Ditter, Christian. 2016. *How to Be Single*. New Line Cinema.
- Donovan, Catherine, Brian Heaphy, and Jeffrey Weeks. 2001. *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. New York: Routledge.
- Duberman, Martin Bauml, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, eds. 1990. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. New York: Plume.
- Duguay, Stefanie. 2017. "Dressing up Cinderella: Interrogating Authenticity Claims on the Mobile Dating App Tinder." *Information, Communication & Society* 20(3):351–67.
- Eaton, Asia Anna and Suzanna Rose. 2011. "Has Dating Become More Egalitarian? A 35 Year Review Using Sex Roles." *Sex Roles* 64(11-12):843–62.
- Le Espiritu, Yen. 2001. "'We Don't Sleep around like White Girls Do': Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26(2):415–40.

- Feliciano, Cynthia, Rennie Lee, and Belinda Robnett. 2011. "Racial Boundaries among Latinos: Evidence from Internet Daters' Racial Preferences." *Social Problems* 58(2):189–212.
- Ferguson, Roderick A. 2004. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Feuer, Alan. 2015. "On Tinder, Taking a Swipe at Love, or Sex, or Something, in New York." *The New York Times*, February 13.
- Fischer, Claude S. 1992. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fischer, Nancy L. 2013. "Seeing 'Straight,' Contemporary Critical Heterosexuality Studies and Sociology: An Introduction." *The Sociological Quarterly* 54(4):501–10.
- Foucault, Michel. 2010. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978--1979*. Reprint edition. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Gagnon, John H. and William Simon. 1973. *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Garcia, Angela Cora, Alecea I. Standlee, Jennifer Bechkoff, and Yan Cui. 2009. "Ethnographic Approaches to the Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38(1):52–84.
- Garcia, Lorena. 2012. *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself: Latina Girls and Sexual Identity*. New York: NYU Press.
- Gatson, Sarah N. 2011. "The Methods, Politics, and Ethics of Representation in Online Ethnography." *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 4:513–27.
- Gauntlett, David. 2011. *Making Is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Polity.
- Ghaziani, Amin and Ryan Stillwagon. 2018. "Queer Pop-Ups." *Contexts* 17(1):78–80.
- Gibson, J. J. 1979. *The Theory of Affordances The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (pp. 127-143)*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press.

- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Intimacy in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gillespie, Tarleton. 2014. "The Relevance of Algorithms." *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* 167.
- Gray, Mary L. 2009. "Out in the Country: Youth." *Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*.
- Grazian, David. 2007. "The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity." *Symbolic Interaction* 30(2):221–43.
- Green, Adam Isaiah. 2007. "On the Horns of a Dilemma: Institutional Dimensions of the Sexual Career in a Sample of Middle-Class, Urban, Black, Gay Men." *Journal of Black Studies* 37(5):753–74.
- Green, Adam Isaiah. 2008. "The Social Organization of Desire: The Sexual Fields Approach." *Sociological Theory* 26(1):25–50.
- Griffith, Carson. 2013. "On a Phone App Called Tinder, Looks Are Everything." *The New York Times*, April 24. Retrieved September 30, 2016.
- "Grindr, Tinder, Scruff: A Recipe for Loneliness." 2016. Retrieved September 25, 2016 (<http://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2016/5/05/grindr-tinder-scruff-recipe-loneliness>).
- Grov, Christian, Aaron S. Breslow, Michael E. Newcomb, Joshua G. Rosenberger, and Jose A. Bauermeister. 2014. "Gay and Bisexual Men's Use of the Internet: Research from the 1990s through 2013." *The Journal of Sex Research* 51(4):390–409.
- Halliday, Josh. 2013. "How Twitter Became a Beating Pulse of Global News." *The Guardian*, September 13. Retrieved September 30, 2016.
- Hall, Stuart. 1991. "Encoding, Decoding." Pp. 90–103 in *The Cultural Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Han, Chong-suk. 2007. "They Don't Want To Cruise Your Type: Gay Men of Color and the Racial Politics of Exclusion." *Social Identities* 13(1):51–67.
- Hermanowicz, Joseph C. 2002. "The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed." *Qualitative Sociology* 25(4):479–99.
- Hine, Christine. 2015. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hine, Christine M. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Humphreys, Laud. 1975. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. Chicago: Aldine Transaction.
- Hutchby, Ian. 2001. "Technologies, Texts and Affordances." *Sociology* 35(2):441–56.
- Illouz, Eva. 2007. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Polity.
- Illouz, Eva. 1997. *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ingraham, Chrys. 1994. "The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender." *Sociological Theory* 12(2):203.
- Ingraham, Chrys, ed. 2004. *Thinking Straight: The Power, Promise and Paradox of Heterosexuality*. New York: Routledge.
- "It's Official: Grindr Is Making Us Miserable | NewNowNext." 2018. Retrieved May 25, 2018 (<http://www.newnownext.com/grindr-gay-unhappy/01/2018/>).
- Jiang, Jingjing. 2018. "Millennials Stand out for Their Technology Use, but Older Generations Also Embrace Digital Life." *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved May 24, 2018 (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/02/millennials-stand-out-for-their-technology-use-but-older-generations-also-embrace-digital-life/>).
- Katz, Jonathan Ned. 2007. *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kinsey, Alfred Charles, Wardell Baxter Pomeroy, Clyde Eugene Martin, and Sam Sloan. 1948. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Vol. 1. Saunders Philadelphia.
- Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, and Paul H. Gebhard. 1998. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Indiana University Press.
- Klinkenberg, Dean and Suzanna Rose PhD. 1994. "Dating Scripts of Gay Men and Lesbians." *Journal of Homosexuality* 26(4):23–35.
- Lamont, Ellen. 2014. "Negotiating Courtship: Reconciling Egalitarian Ideals with Traditional Gender Norms." *Gender & Society* 28(2):189–211.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford university press.
- Leap, William. 1999. *Public Sex/gay Space*. Columbia University Press.

- Lee, Jasmine C. and Kevin Quealy. 2016. "The 459 People, Places and Things Donald Trump Has Insulted on Twitter: A Complete List." *The New York Times*, January 28.
- Licoppe, Christian, Carole Anne Rivière, and Julien Morel. 2015. "Grindr Casual Hook-Ups as Interactional Achievements." *New Media & Society* 18(11):2540–58.
- Lindgren, Simon. 2017. *Digital Media and Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lindgren, Simon. 2013. *New Noise: A Cultural Sociology of Digital Disruption*. Peter Lang.
- Lin, Ken-Hou and Jennifer Lundquist. 2013. "Mate Selection in Cyberspace: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Education." *American Journal of Sociology* 119(1):183–215.
- Lotan, Gilad et al. 2011. "The Arab Spring| The Revolutions Were Tweeted: Information Flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions." *International Journal of Communication* 5(0):31.
- Loving v. Virginia*. 388 U.S. ____ 1967
- Lundquist, Jennifer H. and Ken-Hou Lin. 2015. "Is Love (Color) Blind? The Economy of Race among Gay and Straight Daters." *Social Forces* 93(4):1423–49.
- Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- MacKenzie, Donald and Judy Wajcman. 1999. *The Social Shaping of Technology*. Open university press.
- Mason, Corinne Lysandra. 2016. "Tinder and Humanitarian Hook-Ups: The Erotics of Social Media Racism." *Feminist Media Studies* 16(5):822–37.
- Masters, N. Tatiana, Erin Casey, Elizabeth A. Wells, and Diane M. Morrison. 2013. "Sexual Scripts among Young Heterosexually Active Men and Women: Continuity and Change." *The Journal of Sex Research* 50(5):409–20.
- Masters, William H., Virginia E. Johnson, and Masters. 1966. "Human Sexual Response." Oxford: Little Brown.
- McGlotten, Shaka. 2013. *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- McIntosh, Mary. 1968. "The Homosexual Role." *Social Problems* 16(2):182–92.
- McNamara, Brittney. 2016. "Proof That We're Living in a 'Dating Apocalypse.'" *Teen Vogue*. Retrieved October 4, 2016 (<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/dating-apocalypse-hinge-app-facts>).

- Miller, Claire Cain. 2018. "It's Not Just Mike Pence. Americans Are Wary of Being Alone With the Opposite Sex." *The New York Times*, January 20.
- Mogul, Joey L., Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock. 2011. *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. Beacon Press.
- Moore, Mignon. 2011. *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood among Black Women*. University of California Press.
- "More Information on Fair Use | U.S. Copyright Office." Retrieved June 25, 2018b (<https://www.copyright.gov/fair-use/more-info.html>).
- Morozov, Evgeny. 2012. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. PublicAffairs.
- Mowlabocus, Sharif. 2010. *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology, and Embodiment in the Digital Age*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Murthy, Dhiraj. 2008. "Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research." *Sociology* 42(5):837–55.
- Nagy, Peter and Gina Neff. 2015. "Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory." *Social Media + Society* 1(2):1–9.
- Nast, Condé. n.d. "This New Queer Dating App Is About More Than What You Look Like." *TheM*. Retrieved June 1, 2018 (<https://www.them.us/story/personals-queer-dating-app>).
- Norman, Don. 2013. *The Design of Everyday Things: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Basic Books.
- Obergefell v Hodges*. 576 U.S. ____ 2015
- Pascoe, CJ and Tristan Bridges. 2016. *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perrin, rew and Jingjing Jiang. 2018. "About a Quarter of U.S. Adults Say They Are 'Almost Constantly' Online." *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved May 24, 2018 (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/14/about-a-quarter-of-americans-report-going-online-almost-constantly/>).
- PM, Stav Ziv On 9/30/15 at 2:42. 2015. "Tinder Clashes With AIDS Healthcare Foundation Over STD Billboard." *Newsweek*. Retrieved September 30, 2015 (<http://www.newsweek.com/tinder-clashes-aids-healthcare-foundation-over-std-billboard-378384>).

- Powell, Brian, Catherine Blozendahl, Claudia Geist, and Lala Carr Steelman. 2010. *Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and Americans' Definitions of Family*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- “Public Personals: A Peek Inside the Queer Instagram Dating Experiment.” 2016. *Autostraddle*. Retrieved December 6, 2017 (<https://www.autostraddle.com/public-personals-a-peek-inside-the-queer-instagram-dating-experiment-355627/>).
- Pyke, Karen. 2010. “An Intersectional Approach to Resistance and Complicity: The Case of Racialised Desire among Asian American Women.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31(1):81–94.
- Rafalow, Matthew H., Cynthia Feliciano, and Belinda Robnett. 2017. “Racialized Femininity and Masculinity in the Preferences of Online Same-Sex Daters.” *Social Currents* 4(4):306-21.
- Rainie, Lee and Barry Wellman. 2012. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. MIT Press.
- Reay, Barry. 2014. “Promiscuous Intimacies: Rethinking the History of American Casual Sex.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 27(1):1–24.
- Reid, Julie A., Sinikka Elliott, and Gretchen R. Webber. 2011. “Casual Hookups to Formal Dates: Refining the Boundaries of the Sexual Double Standard.” *Gender & Society* 25(5):545–68.
- Reiss, Albert J. 1961. “The Social Integration of Queers and Peers.” *Social Problems* 9(2):102–20.
- Robinson, Brandon Andrew. 2015. “‘Personal Preference’ as the New Racism: Gay Desire and Racial Cleansing in Cyberspace.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1(2):317–30.
- Robnett, Belinda and Cynthia Feliciano. 2011. “Patterns of Racial-Ethnic Exclusion by Internet Daters.” *Social Forces* 89(3):807–28.
- Rodriguez, Mathew. 2014. “Is Discrimination on Grindr Killing Gay Sex?” *Huffington Post*. Retrieved (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/mathew-rodriguez/is-discrimination-on-grindr-killing-gay-sex_b_4558989.html).
- Rosenberg, Matthew, Nicholas Confessore, and Carole Cadwalladr. 2018. “How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions.” *The New York Times*, April 2.
- Rosenfeld, Michael and Reuben Thomas. 2012. “Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary.” *American Sociological Review* 77(4):523–47.

- Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1984 "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Racial Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Pp 100-133 in *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader*.
- Rudder, Christian. 2014. *Dataclysm: Who We Are (When No One Is Watching)*. New York: Crown.
- Rutter, Virginia and Pepper Dr Schwartz. 2011. *The Gender of Sexuality: Exploring Sexual Possibilities*. 2nd edition. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Salecl, Renata. 2011. *The Tyranny of Choice*. London: Profile Books.
- Schilt, Kristen. 2011. *Just One of the Guys?: Transgender Men and the Persistence of Gender Inequality*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Schwartz, Barry. 2016. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. Revised edition. New York: Ecco.
- "Science Shows the Unexpected Effect That Too Much Choice Has on Modern Dating."
Retrieved May 25, 2018c (<https://mic.com/articles/107210/is-too-much-choice-ruining-dating-science-might-have-the-answer>).
- Smith, Aaron. 2011. "Smartphone Adoption and Usage." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. Retrieved May 24, 2018 (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/07/11/smartphone-adoption-and-usage/>).
- Smith, Aaron. 2015. "U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. Retrieved May 24, 2018 (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/>).
- Smith, Aaron and Maeve Duggan. 2013. "Online Dating & Relationships." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. Retrieved May 25, 2018 (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/10/21/online-dating-relationships/>).
- Solon, Olivia. n.d. "Dattch Founder Robyn Exton on the Challenges of Pitching a Lesbian Dating App (Wired UK)." *Wired UK*. Retrieved November 16, 2015 (<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-12/09/dattch>).
- Somerville, Siobhan B. 2000. *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Stahler, Kelsea. n.d. "I Deleted Tinder, Even Though I Used To Love It." *Bustle*. Retrieved June 23, 2018 (<https://www.bustle.com/articles/30917-is-tinder-sexist-why-i-deleted-tinder-on-principle-even-though-i-used-to-love-it>).

- Stivers, Richard. 2004. *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Strudwick, Patrick. 2014. "Yes, Dating Apps Can Be Bad for Gay Men – but Not in the Way You Might Think | Patrick Strudwick." *The Guardian*, October 24.
- Swidler, Ann. 2003. *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Tewksbury, Richard. 2002. "Bathroom Intercourse: Structural and Behavioral Aspects of an Erotic Oasis." *Deviant Behavior* 23(1):75–112.
- Tewksbury, Richard. 2008. "Finding Erotic Oases: Locating the Sites of Men's Same-Sex Anonymous Sexual Encounters." *Journal of Homosexuality* 55(1):1–19.
- "The Hidden World of Racism on Tinder." *The Tab UK*. 2017. Retrieved February 26, 2017 (<http://thetab.com/uk/2017/02/03/racist-dating-app-tinder-bumble-30975>).
- Tsotsis and Eldon. 2014. "Announcing The 2013 Crunchies Finalists, Vote Now." *TechCrunch*. Retrieved June 24, 2018 (<http://social.techcrunch.com/2014/01/06/announcing-the-2013-crunchies-finalists-vote-now/>).
- Tsunokai, Glenn T., Allison R. McGrath, and Jillian K. Kavanagh. 2014. "Online Dating Preferences of Asian Americans." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 31(6):796–814.
- Turkle, Sherry. 2012. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books.
- Turkle, Sherry. 2015. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. Penguin.
- Wade, Lisa. 2017. *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*. New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ward, Jane. 2015. *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men*. New York: NYU Press.
- Warner, Michael. 2000. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New edition. New York: Harvard University Press.
- Warren, William H. 1984. "Perceiving Affordances: Visual Guidance of Stair Climbing." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 10(5):683.
- Weston, Kath. 1991. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wortham, Jenna. 2014. "Tinder Is Target of Sexual Harassment Lawsuit." *The New York Times*, July 1. Retrieved September 30, 2016.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/02/business/media/tinder-is-target-of-sexual-harassment-lawsuit.html>)

Yancey, George. 2009. "Crossracial Differences in the Racial Preferences of Potential Dating Partners: A Test of the Alienation of African Americans and Social Dominance Orientation." *The Sociological Quarterly* 50(1):121–43.

Zelizer, Viviana A. 2009. *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Princeton University Press.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	App	Gender	Sexual Identity	Age	Race/ Ethnicity
Eric	T	Man	Straight	27	Multiracial
Blake	T	Man	Straight	37	White
Nadim	T	Man	Straight	26	Asian
William	T	Man	Straight	28	White
Kyle	T	Man	Straight	28	White
David	T	Man	Straight	31	White
Ricky	T	Man	Straight	28	Latino
Richard	T	Man	Straight	25	Latino
Nikolas	T	Man	Bisexual ⁵³	26	White
Karen	T	Woman	Straight	30	White
Heather	T	Woman	Straight	32	Asian
Jill	T	Woman	Straight	31	White
Tiffany	T	Woman	Straight	27	White
Carol	T	Woman	Straight	36	White
Kelly	T	Woman	Straight	25	White
Lisa	T	Woman	Straight	27	Asian
Veronica	T	Woman	Straight	26	Latino
Michelle	T	Woman	Straight	35	White
Chelsea	T	Woman	Queer	25	White
Jennifer	T	Woman	Bisexual	30	Latino
Adanna	T	Woman	Lesbian	28	Black
Opal	T	Woman	Queer	25	Black
Diedre	T	Woman	Queer	26	White
Trevor	T	Man/Transman	Queer	38	White
Manual	T	Genderqueer	Queer	26	Latino
Winter	T	Transwoman	Queer	21	White
Val	T & G	Non-binary	Queer	21	White

⁵³ Nikolas only used Tinder for heterosexual dating

Pseudonym	App	Gender	Sexual Identity	Age	Race/ Ethnicity
James	G	Man	Gay	29	Black
Enrique	G	Man	Gay	33	Latino
Tyrese	G	Man	Gay	27	Black
Malcolm	G	Man	Gay	25	Black
Tommy	G	Man	Gay	26	Black
Juan	G	Man	Gay	26	Latino
Trent	G	Man	Gay	23	White
Jaime	G	Man	Gay	30	Latino
Derrick	G	Man	Gay	33	Black
Josh	G & T	Man	Gay	20	Asian
César	G & T	Man	Gay	26	Latino
Pablo	G & T	Man	Gay/Queer	28	Latino
Reggie	G & T	Man	Gay	42	Black
Chrisitan	G & T	Man	Gay	31	Latino
<u>2013-2014</u>					
Chris	G	Man	Gay	24	White
Michael	G	Man	Gay	37	White
Craig	G	Man	Gay	22	Asian
Elliott	G	Man	Gay	26	White
Patrick	G	Man	Gay	22	White
Xavier	G	Man	Gay	25	Black
Carlos	G	Man	Gay	30	Latino
David	G	Man	Gay	35	Asian
Zach	G	Man	Gay	27	White
Peter	G	Man	Gay	27	White
Paul	G	Man	Gay	52	White
Jim	G	Man	Gay	55	White
Dalton	G	Man	Gay	28	Multiracial
Jason	G	Man	Gay	29	White
Victor	G	Man	Gay	26	Latino
Kevin	G	Man	Gay	30	White
Brad	G	Man	Gay	26	White
Greg	G	Man	Gay	29	White
Bailey	G	Transman	Gay	18	White
Neil	G	Transman	Gay	27	White

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

How did you hear about the study?

I. BASIC INFORMATION AND APP USE

How old are you?

What neighborhood do you live in?

What is your living arrangement? (roommate, family, alone)

What do you do for work?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your race or ethnicity?

What is your gender?

Which apps do you use?

How long have you been using the app(s)?

Why did you start using the app—what was your goal?

Was the app what you expected?

Are you satisfied with the app?

If yes: Why?

If no: Why are you still using it?

What features do you like best? Least?

I'm interested in the decisions people make about their profiles. Would you mind **showing me your profile and answering some questions about it?**

Why did you choose this picture(s)?

Why did you include this text?

II. SORTING AND EVALUATION

I'm interested in how people sort and choose each other on these apps. Would you mind going through some profiles while we sit here together, and talk me through your process? [about 20 mins]

How would you describe this person?

[Probe:] Do you find anything attractive about them? Are you put off by something about them?

Do you see many profiles like this? In what ways is this profile similar to others you see?

Would you look at this person's profile, or just swipe right or left? Why?

If you matched with this person would you message them?

[if yes:] Why? What would you write?

[if no:] Why not? Would you respond to a message from them?

Would you consider meeting this user in person?

[if yes] Why? Where would you meet? What would you do? Would you have sex with them? Explain.

If you met this person for the first time at a party, bar, or similar venue, would you talk to them? Go home with them?

What are your **dealbreakers?**

III. INTERACTIONS

Now I'm going to ask you about the times you've met up with people from the app. Tell me about your most recent **POSITIVE/NEGATIVE/BEST SEX** in-person experience with someone from the app.

What did you do? Where did you meet? What were they like? Were they what you expected? Why do you think it went so well? Will you see them again?

What **ADVICE** would you give someone thinking about using this app for the first time?

Would you **lie** about meeting your partner on Tinder?

Where do you see yourself, with regard to your dating life, **in a year? 5 years?**

As far as you know, what is the **sexual orientation** of people you meet on the apps?

Do you think sexual orientation/identity is something you are born with, something you choose, or a mix of these?

What is your sexual orientation/identity?

IV. APP REPUTATION, USER PERCEPTIONS

Now I want to show you a couple videos. The first one is about the app you use. [if they use both, start with the app they use the most]

SHOW VIDEO

What did you think of the video?

[if they laughed] What was funny about it?

Does any part of it remind you of your own experiences? *probe*

Have you heard people talk about the app in this way? Who/where?

Racial preferences

Some people of color have had experiences of racial discrimination on Tinder/Grindr.

[if non-white] Have you ever felt that your race or ethnicity affected how other users treated you? Probe

[if white] Have you ever heard of this happening?

Some people disagree on whether it is ok to have racial preferences on your profile. What is your opinion? *Probe for... logic behind the opinion*

Thank you so much. Is there anything I have missed that you feel is important?

VITA

EDUCATION

- 2018 Ph.D. in Sociology, University of Illinois – Chicago
 Certificate in Gender and Women’s Studies
 *Dissertation: Mediated Sexualities and the “Dating Apocalypse”:
 Gender, Race and Sexual Identity on Hookup Apps*
- 2014 M.A. in Sociology, University of Illinois – Chicago
 *M.A. Paper: Respectable Promiscuity: Digital Cruising in an Era
 of Queer Liberalism*
- 2011 B.A. in Sociology, Northeastern Illinois University

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Sexualities; Science and Technology Studies (STS); LGBTQ studies; Race, Class, and Gender; Race and Ethnicity; Feminist and Queer Theory; Body and Embodiment; Media Studies

PUBLICATIONS

Peer Reviewed Articles

- 2017 Ahlm, Jody. 2017. “Respectable Promiscuity: Digital Cruising in an Era of Queer Liberalism.” *Sexualities* 20(3):364–79.
 *2017 Best Graduate Student Paper Award, Sexualities Section of the
 American Sociological Association*

Book Chapters

- 2016 Ahlm, Jody. 2016. “Transgender Biopolitics in the U.S.: Regulating Gender Through a Heteronormative Lens.” In *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies 3rd edition*, edited by Steven Seidman and Nancy Fischer. Routledge.

Book Reviews

- 2017 Ahlm, Jody. 2017. “Book Review: Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men.” *Cultural Sociology* 11(1):136–37.

AWARDS AND GRANTS

External

2015 Student Research Grant, Fall 2015, Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality

Internal

2015 Provost's Award for Graduate Research, Fall 2015, University of Illinois – Chicago

2014 David P. Street Masters Paper Award, Spring 2014, University of Illinois – Chicago

CONFERENCE PAPERS

November 2017 Organizer and discussant: Contextualizing Pedagogies of Dissent: Experiences Across Institutional Settings. American Studies Association. Chicago.

August 2017 Ahlm, Jody. "Hookup Apps and the 'Dating Apocalypse': Sexual Scripts and the Social Shaping of Technology." Media Sociology Preconference. American Sociological Association. Montreal.

August 2017 Ahlm, Jody. "Justifying Explicit Racism with Cultural Logics of Sexual Orientation: Racial Exclusion on a Gay Hookup App." Regular Session. American Sociological Association. Montreal.

November 2016 Ahlm, Jody. "'I'm Gay': Collective Reiteration and the Performative Queer Liberal Subject." American Studies Association. Denver.

October 2016 Ahlm, Jody. "Whites to the Front of the Line: Born-this-way Gays and Racialized Desire." After Marriage: The Future of LGBTQ Politics and Scholarship Conference. Organized by CLAGS: The Center for LGBTQ Studies. New York City.

August 2015 Ahlm, Jody. "Respectable Promiscuity and Cybercarnality; Or, 'Never show your face on pictures with your naughty bits.'" Science, Knowledge & Technology Section and Body & Embodiment Section joint session. American Sociological Association. Chicago.

April 2014 Ahlm, Jody. "Biomedicine, Law, and Inclusionary Exclusion: The Creation of a Transgender Borderlands." Gender Matters Conference. Governors State University.

April 2014 Ahlm, Jody. "Respectable Promiscuity: Digital Cruising and Queer Liberalism." Engendering Change Graduate Student Conference. Northwestern University.

March 2012 Ahlm, Jody. "Race, Gender, and Symbolic Capital: An Intersectional Analysis of Black Transgender Masculinities." Midwest Sociological Society. Minneapolis.

INVITED TALKS

June 2, 2016 Visiting Scholar Talk: "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places?"
Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, University of Chicago

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS

Summer 2012 Research Assistant for Dr. Maria Krysan, University of Illinois – Chicago
Conducted in-depth interviews about neighborhood perceptions

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Courses Designed and Taught

Social Problems, University of Illinois – Chicago
Fall 2016, Spring 2017, Fall 2017, Spring 2018

Sociological Theory, Northeastern Illinois University
Spring 2018

Sociological Analysis: Sociology of the Cellphone, Northeastern Illinois University
Fall 2017

Social Inequalities (Writing Intensive Program Course), Northeastern Illinois University
Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Summer 2016, Fall 2016, Summer 2017

Sociological Research Methods, Northeastern Illinois University
Spring 2016, Spring 2017

Human Sexuality, University of Illinois – Chicago
Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Summer 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016

Urban Sociology, Northeastern Illinois University
Summer 2015

Women, Men, and Social Change, Northeastern Illinois University
Spring 2015

Teaching Assistantships: Introduction to Sociology, Race and Ethnicity, Social Theory, Human
Sexuality

Pedagogical Training

September 25, 2015 Undocumented Student Ally Training, Northeastern Illinois University

Spring 2014 Graduate Teaching Seminar, University of Illinois – Chicago

ACADEMIC SERVICE

2017-2018 Steering committee for 2018 Sexualities preconference “Sexualities, Race and Empire” to be held before 2018 American Sociological Association annual meeting

2016-2017 Graduate Student Representative, Sexualities Section of the American Sociological Society

2016 Co-organizer, Engendering Change Graduate Student Conference

2014-2015 Student Advisory Board for *Social Problems*

2013 Abstracts Committee, Engendering Change Graduate Student Conference

2012-2013 Colloquium Committee, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois – Chicago

2011-2012 Treasurer, Sociology Graduate Student Organization, University of Illinois – Chicago

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP

May 19, 2016 Invited panelist: “Looking? The History of Hooking Up.” Chicago History Museum’s OUT at CHM series

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Sociological Association

American Studies Association