The Digitalization of Intimate Market-Mediated Performances:

How Tinder Reshapes Dating and Hooking Up

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the digitalization of market-mediated performances. While previous research has shown that enactment of market-mediated performances can enable consumers to transform certain aspects of their lives; how performances themselves evolve and undergo transformations remains understudied. Focusing on the mobile dating app Tinder's mediation of dating and hooking up, I examine how a digital platform reshapes these longstanding intimate performances. My analysis of an extensive qualitative dataset demonstrates that, through its deployment of gamification principles, Tinder simultaneously gives structure to otherwise serendipitous and disorderly casual sexual encounters (i.e., formalization of hooking up) and inculcates an unceremonious, easy-going mood in more serious romantic encounters (i.e., casualization of dating)—which, combined together, give rise to hybridized intimate performances. It also showcases that consumers advance and resort to a new set of competencies—that are, Tinderized displays of economic, cultural, and sexual capital; mobile social media savviness; and code-switching between dating and hookup scripts—for navigating Tinder-mediated hybrid intimate performances. In light of these findings, this dissertation highlights the dynamicity of market-mediated performances by explaining how they evolve and take different forms over time and theorizes the organic and malleable nature of performative scripts. It further contributes to research streams on the countervailing effects of digitalization, macro-scale implications of gamification, and the rise and fall of dating and hookup cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

Market settings abound with performative interactions. Whether they take place between consumers and service providers or between different consumers, consumer culture theory (CCT) researchers have taken a keen interest in studying these market-mediated performances as integral parts of retail and service experiences, leisure activities, and festivals and other special events (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; Chaney 2020; Chronis, Arnould and Hampton 2009; Deighton and Grayson 1995; Diamond et al. 2009; Goulding and Saren 2009; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004; Kozinets 2002; Maclaran and Brown 2005; Penaloza 1998, 2001; Price and Arnould 1999; Sherry at al. 2004; Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Tumbat and Belk 2011; Ustuner and Thompson 2012; van Marrewijk and Broos 2012). While a recent set of studies in this research stream puts forward that enactment of market-mediated performances may be effective in modestly reshaping hierarchical social relations and concomitant power dynamics that structure consumers' everyday lives (Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Ustuner and Thompson 2012); how these performances themselves evolve and undergo transformations remains an underexplored question.

Owing to the unprecedented speed and ubiquity of the digital transformation in virtually all spheres of consumers' lives (Cochoy et al. 2020; Lehdonvirta 2012), advancement and popularization of newly developed mediating technologies have been a game-changing factor that reshapes how market-mediated performances transpire in manifold settings. In this dissertation, I focus on one such mediating technology—namely, the contemporary mobile dating app Tinder—to elucidate the ways in which digitalization transforms intimate market-

mediated performances of dating and hooking up. This specific context provides valuable insights regarding the evolution and transformation of market-mediated performances since dating and hooking up have social histories that are well-documented in both academic literature and journalistic accounts (e.g., Bailey 1988; Bogle 2008; Illouz 1997, 2007, 2012; Wade 2017; Weigel 2017). These resources provide the necessary starting point for making comparisons between pre- versus post-Tinder enactments of these intimate performances. To elucidate contemporary Tinder-mediated romantic-sexual experiences, I further assembled a qualitative dataset consisting of in-depth interviews (and photo elicitation) with Tinder users, a netnography of Tinder subreddit, a digital walkthrough of Tinder's user interface, and archival data including mobile dating app-related news articles and press interviews from various media outlets. This comprehensive dataset enables a detailed analysis of how Tinder reshapes different cultural dimensions of these long-established intimate performances and how consumers develop new navigational strategies within the emergent intersections between romance, sexuality, and digital platforms.

The dissertation is structured as follows: First, I will lay out the key research goals through a focused review of the market-mediated performances literature, and a discussion of the transformative effects of digital revolution and Tinder's role in this revolution. Second, I will present a detailed sociohistorical overview of the emergence, ascendancy, and current states of dating and hookup performances, paying special attention to their performative scripts. After explaining the context of Tinder and my methodological choices, I will present the findings of my data analysis in two sections. While the first findings section will focus on Tinder's transformation of dating and hookup performances by virtue of certain unique elements of its user interface, the second one will tackle the question of what resources consumers utilize as

they navigate Tinder-mediated intimate performances. Lastly, I will highlight the dissertation's contributions to the extant literature on market-mediated performances in the discussion section. This section will further involve dialogues with extant literatures on digitalization, gamification, and dating and hookup cultures, and conclude with some thoughts on limitations and future research avenues.

DIGITALIZATION OF MARKET-MEDIATED PERFORMANCES

Market-Mediated Performances

Starting with John Deighton's influential article (1992) which instituted the consumption as performance motif, CCT researchers documented the performative aspects of social interactions that unfold in different marketplace settings. Drawing from Erving Goffman (1956, 1982) and Victor Turner's (1969, 1974) dramaturgical frameworks, Deighton (1992, 362) suggests that marketing is "an intrinsically dramatistic discipline" inasmuch as it "scripts, produces, and directs performances" for consumers to attend as audiences and, at the same time, instigates them to actively participate in a variety of performances. Utilizing the performance frame, researchers have illuminated performative interchanges between service providers and consumers as well as between different consumers during the course of retail and service encounters (Deighton and Grayson 1995; Diamond et al. 2009; Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004; Maclaran and Brown 2005; Penaloza 1998, 2001; Price and Arnould 1999; Sherry at al. 2004; Ustuner and Thompson 2012; van Marrewijk and Broos 2012), sports and leisure activities (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Tumbat and Belk 2011), historical site visits and religious pilgrimages (Chronis et al. 2009; Higgins and Hamilton 2019), and festivals, concerts, and similar special events (Belk and Costa 1998; Chaney 2020; Goulding and Saren 2009; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 2002). This research stream collectively reveals that, consumers (and service providers) enact particular roles, use various products as props, and more importantly follow relevant performative scripts—i.e., standardized cultural templates that prescribe the appropriate sequence of events in well-defined situations (Schank and Abelson 1977; Shore 1996)—as part of these market-mediated performances.

Keeping with the dramaturgical framework, a common orientation in this research stream has been theorizing market-mediated performances as taking place in liminal enclaves that are set apart from consumers' quotidian lives. According to this theorization, these performances—such as a skydiving or river-rafting trip (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993), a mountain man rendezvous (Belk and Costa 1998), the Burning Man Festival (Kozinets 2002), an outing to the former ESPN Zone entertainment center (Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004; Sherry et al. 2004), or a heavy metal concert (Chaney 2020; Henry and Caldwell 2007)—yield extraordinary consumption experiences during which roles, social hierarchies, rules, and boundaries that govern everyday social life become obsolete, and participants experience a state of complete immersion and develop feelings of camaraderie (with other consumers as well as service providers) as an outcome of their shared purpose, struggle, and extended contact (Price and Arnould 1999). As per their emphasis on liminal boundaries, these studies do not delve deeply into how the enactment of the pertaining scripts might be influential in shaping social life beyond the performative fields. They rather briefly point out that consumers-as-performers emerge from these experiences with individual-level identity benefits of emotional cleansing and therapeutic renewal, personal growth, and (intended) lifestyle modifications that might carry out to their everyday lives (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi et al. 1993; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Higgins and Hamilton 2019). To illustrate, Higgins and Hamilton (2019) reveal that the Lourdes pilgrimage site provides religious consumers with "restorative benefits and improved emotional well-being" that "can placate the emotional challenges [one] faces in daily life" (17). Similarly, Belk and Costa (1998) explain that for participants of present-day mountain man reenactments "rendezvousing has an effect not entirely confined to the rendezvous itself" since they carry over their mountain man "appearance, manner, and grooming from the

rendezvous to everyday contexts" and develop "a desire for natural spaces in the mountains, as well as freedom from government, bureaucracy, rushed schedules, and imposed obligations" (235).

A recent set of studies on market-mediated performances challenged this overemphasis on liminal boundaries and the quixotic, sanguine interpretations of these enclaved performances (Tumbat and Belk 2011) and focused on their embeddedness within broader societal hierarchies and power relations that pattern consumers' everyday lives (Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Ustuner and Thompson 2012). Consequently, this line of work also illuminated the ways in which the enactment of these performances may, in turn, be influential in modestly reshaping these structural dynamics. For instance, Ustuner and Thompson's account (2012) of the extended service encounters between underclass hairstylists and their affluent, urban clientele demonstrates that the performative scripts guiding service provider-consumer interactions are hardly separated from the normative rules and social hierarchies that govern everyday life (c.f., Price and Arnould 1999). On the contrary, they are deeply informed by these individuals' respective positions within the social strata and the levels of symbolic capital they possess in the generalized social status game. This is exemplified by hairdressers' acknowledgement of the superiority of middle-class standards of beauty and etiquette and their consequent reverence for elite clients, and these clients' disparaging comments about hairdressers' claims to have developed artistic authority through mastering middle-class tastes. However, the authors also note that these interactions might in fact enable the service workers to attain new forms of middle-class cultural capital (in terms of personal style and attire, bodily comportment, and decorum), and thus help them in their quest for upward socioeconomic mobility.

In a similar manner, Thompson and Ustuner's analysis (2015) of women's local league roller derby bouts further evinces these performances' modest role in challenging longstanding societal hierarchies—in this instance, traditional gender norms—beyond the immediate performative fields. Once more, the authors maintain that the rebellious gender performances of derby grrrls—in which elements of erotic femininity are combined with physical aggression—do not take place in autonomous enclaves that are entirely separated from performers' everyday identities and the gendered roles they occupy within their local communities. These performances are rather interlinked with socially sanctioned gender norms, which they reproduce as much as they challenge. This is best illustrated by derby grrrls' avoidance of using foul language, especially during home games which are spectated by their fellow community members. The authors further suggest that, by instigating the performers and fans to reflect on the arbitrariness and inequity of orthodox gender norms, "roller derby's market-mediated resignifications allow derby grrrls to challenge and even lessen the constraints imposed by their gender socialization and reiterative practices" (258) pertaining to social recognition, body positivity, and division of household chores. In sum, this latter set of studies complement the former line of work on market-mediated performances by going beyond individual-level lifestyle adjustments and more fully theorizing how performances might play a role in modifying hierarchical social relations and power dynamics pertaining to social class and gender.

However, as per the predominantly synchronic focus of this research stream, the question of how market-mediated performances themselves might be reshaped over time has not received due attention. Relatedly, how performative scripts evolve remains an understudied question. In the next subsection, I will focus on the role of digital revolution in creating such an influence over market-mediated performances and their performative scripts.

The Digital Revolution, Smartphones, and the Reconfiguration of Market-Mediated Performances

While a gamut of economic, sociocultural, institutional, and technological factors has had shaping effects, the digital revolution has been the most prevalent force in reconfiguring market-mediated performances in recent years. Some discernible examples are the changing dynamics of service interactions thanks to the emergence of peer-to-peer platforms such as Uber, TaskRabbit, and Yelp which make online ratings and reviews an indispensable part of the exchange (Perren and Kozinets 2018) as well as eBay and Vinted which prompt an increased number of transactions, amplify competition, and accelerate bargaining processes in already existing secondhand markets (Juge, Collin-Lachaud and Pomies 2019). A more timely example—the downstream consequences of which remain to be seen—is the massive switch to online learning management systems during the COVID-19 pandemic which, to a certain extent, disrupts the performative student-professor interactions.

While early CCT research on digitalization treated online consumption practices as extensions of consumers' offline behavior (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schau and Gilly 2003), direct attention has been paid to the different ways in which digitalization transforms how consumers consume over the last decade (Cochoy et al. 2020; Lehdonvirta 2012; Thompson 2019). Digital CCT researchers have found that consumers' online personas reshape their real-life self-conceptions (Belk 2013; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010a); different digital platforms curtail, amplify, and rechannel consumer desires (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010b; Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman 2017) and give rise to novel modes of engagement with others (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016; McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips 2013); and agency is

redistributed among animate and inanimate entities in emerging consumer-digital device assemblages (Hoffman and Novak 2018; Jenkins and Denegri-Knott 2017).

A most notable milestone of the digitalization of consumer culture—which has also had a significant influence on market-mediated performances—has been the advancement of smartphones and mobile internet technologies (Dholakia, Reyes and Bonoff 2015; Cochoy et al. 2020; Miller 2014). Communication scholars note the affordances of mobile media—including portability, availability, locatability, multimediality, and intermediality—as what sets smartphones apart from other devices also used for internet connection (Helles 2013; Schrock 2015). Portability denotes the ease of carrying smartphones on one's body, which allows consumers to use their devices in manifold places and contexts. Relatedly, availability stands for the enablement of perpetual contact and increased frequency of communication with one's social networks. Locatability concerns the use of GPS technologies by an increasing number of location-based applications for purposes of coordination, surveillance, and entertainment. Whereas multimediality indicates the integration of high quality digital cameras in smartphones which make these devices a one-stop-shop for multiple communicative practices; intermediality refers to the overlapping characteristics of different mobile mediums (texting, calling, WhatsApp, Facebook, and etc.) which makes consumers choose, switch between, and intermix them on a daily basis.
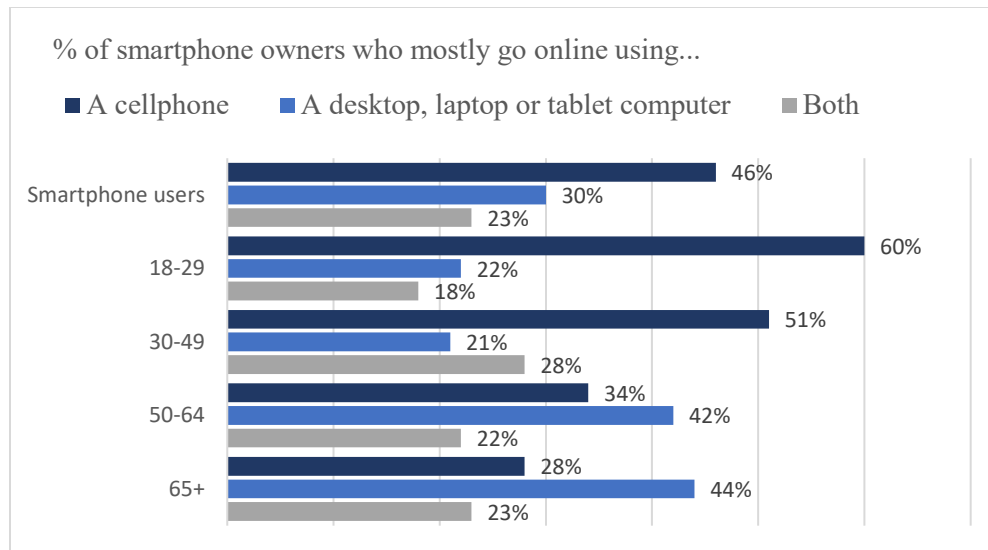
Figure 1: US-based smartphone owners' device preferences for internet access
NOTE— Reproduced from Pew Research Center Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2019
Report (Anderson 2019)

The combination of these affordances not only made consumers prefer accessing the

internet through their smartphones (as shown in Figure 1), but also paved the way for the

ubiquity of social media platforms. The social media phenomenon—defined by user-generated

content and the sharing of this content with one's online social networks—has been around since

at least the early 2000s, and was given different monikers including Web 2.0, prosumption, and

culture of connectivity among others (boyd and Ellison 2008; Humphreys 2016; Papacharissi

2011; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Van Dijck 2013). In the present day, the affordances of mobile

media amplified the potentialities of social media platforms, mainly through the emergence of

what might be called app-centric mobile social media (Daubs and Manzerolle 2016; Humphreys

2013). While existing social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube rolled out mobile

applications compatible with iOS and Android operating system, the last decade also witnessed

the proliferation of social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Tinder that became

popular mainly as mobile applications. It is also telling that these three mobile platforms are most widely used by 18- to 29-year-olds (Perrin and Anderson 2019; Statista 2020), which is also the age group that exhibits a strong preference for going online via their smartphones (as shown in Figure 1).

Given the significance of mobile media technologies in the digital revolution, it is no surprise that the primary account of the digitalization of market-mediated performances was an article focusing on a smartphone-mediated context (Fuentes, Backstrom and Svingstedt 2017). Fuentes and colleagues investigate how consumers' increasing smartphone usage refashions retail store environments. While they zero in on the reconfiguration of space by approaching retailscapes as socio-material assemblages, they also garner insights regarding the social exchanges between consumers and sales assistants. They demonstrate that consumers' continuous engagement with their smartphones—for searching information about products, checking their social media accounts, listening to music, or playing mobile games—becomes detrimental to in-store service activities by making it harder for sales assistants to approach them and follow the regular retail script. In line with their actor-network theory-informed framework, the authors conceptualize such service disruptions as part of the digital reconfiguration of retail stores by attending to the interrelationships between human (e.g., consumers, their shopping companions, and retail workers) and nonhuman actors (e.g., store layout, signage, atmospherics, and cell phones).

By contrast, the goal of this dissertation is to develop a full-fledged sociocultural account by scrutinizing how digitalization alters the composition of the performative social interactions taking place in market-mediated settings. This entails a direct focus on the performative scripts of market-mediated performances and the ways in which digitalization reshapes different cultural

dimensions of these scripts. For this purpose, I direct my attention to the mobile dating app

Tinder's transformational influence on dating and hookup performances. These intimate

performances are market-mediated insofar as they commence (or entirely take place) in

marketplace settings such as restaurants, movie theaters, bars, or night clubs (Bailey 1988; Bogle

2008; Ellingson et al. 2004; Illouz 1997; Wade 2017). They are imbued with performative

interactions as partners flirt and try to convince each other of their attractiveness (Tavory 2009).

The partners also engage in grooming rituals where they perform with various products including

clothes, accessories, and cosmetics (McCracken 1986; Rook 1985) and conspicuously display

symbols of wealth and sophistication (Sundie et al. 2011). As such, dating and hooking up

constitute quintessential examples of market-mediated performances. Moreover, they readily

lend themselves to a sociocultural theorization by virtue of the well-established interdisciplinary

literature delineating their performative scripts and the sociohistorical settings in which they

were configured in the first place. This literature, which I will discuss in detail in the next

section, provides a point of comparison against which the digitalization of these performances

can be understood.

Tinder, Gamification, and the Digitalization of Intimate Market-Mediated Performances

It is important to note that the digitalization of dating is not an entirely new phenomenon.

Long before the emergence of mobile dating apps, this intimate performance was mediated by

pre-internet computer dating services in the 1960s and online dating websites starting from 1995

(Illouz 2007; Slater 2013; Weigel 2017). However, none of these previous commercial

matchmaking services enjoyed the same level of popularity as their mobile counterparts. Figure 2

displays the rise in the percentage of US population that have used an online dating website or a

mobile dating app. Only eleven percent of the population reported having used a digital dating

platform in 2013, which is 18 years after the launch of the well-known online dating site

Match.com. In comparison, digital dating platform usage almost tripled from 2013 to 2019. I

infer that this rise is mainly attributable to the emergence of mobile dating apps, since Tinder

was launched in late 2012 and followed by a flurry of similar applications.
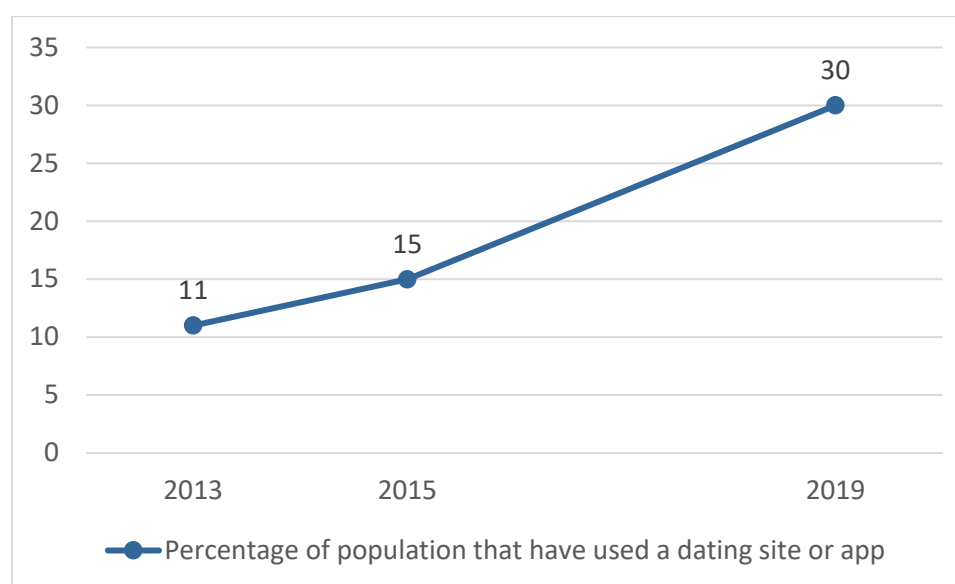
Figure 2: The rise of digital dating platform usage in the US

NOTE— Plotted with statistical information from three different Pew Research Center digital
dating reports (Anderson, Vogels and Turner 2020; Smith 2016; Smith and Duggan 2013). The years
noted in the chart denote the actual times data were collected.

Providing further support for this inference, Figure 3 demonstrates the competition in the

US digital dating platforms market as of September 2019. When compared by audience size,

Tinder clearly dominates the market only to be followed by another mobile dating app, namely

Bumble. This situation begs the question of what specific characteristics make mobile dating

apps—and particularly Tinder—so popular among a growing proportion of the population.
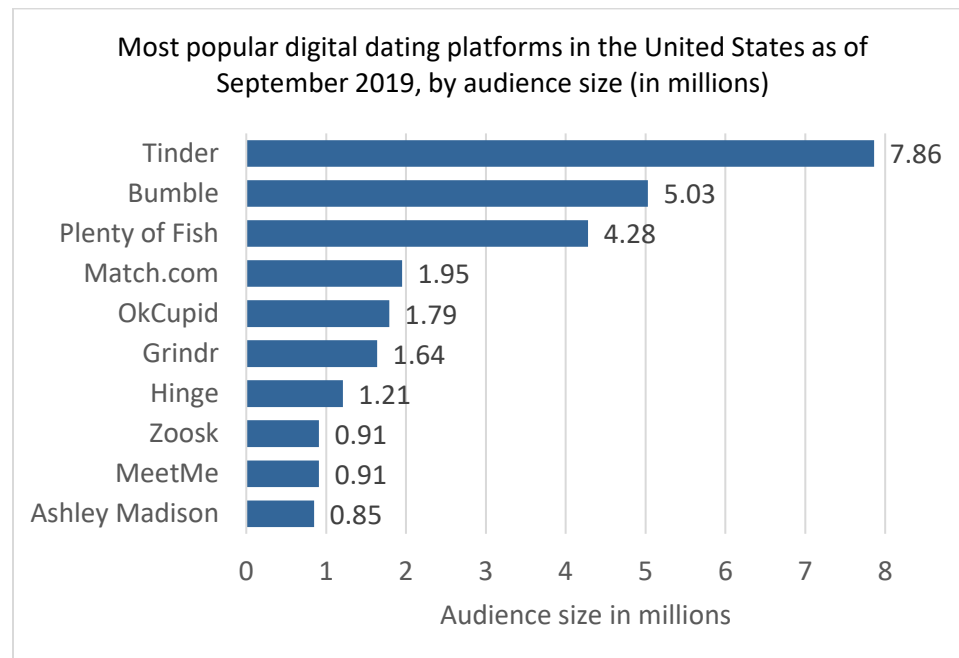
Figure 3: A comparison of most popular online and mobile dating platforms by audience size

NOTE— Reproduced from Statista Mobile Internet & Apps Dossier (Statista 2020).

Tinder's popularity, in the first instance, can be linked to the rise of app-centric mobile

social media (Daubs and Manzerolle 2016; Humphreys 2013; Madigan 2020). The app has an

easily recognized family resemblance with other mobile-first social media applications—such as

Instagram and Snapchat— which also hinge on the affordances of mobile media. All three

applications are frequently used on the go (i.e., portability and availability) and entail highly

visualized communicative practices (i.e., multimediality) (Bayer et al. 2016; Illouz 2019;

Marwick 2015). As a result, there is a great degree of intermediality among the three, as

consumers frequently switch from one app to another in their mobile-mediated interactions (which I will further explain in the findings section).

Another, interlinked, factor that contributes to the popularization of Tinder is its user interface's organization around the principles of gamification—which is especially manifest in the (in)famous swiping feature (David and Cambre 2016; Madigan 2020; see Sales 2015 and Stampler 2014 for journalistic accounts). In its most common definition, gamification refers to "the use of game design elements in non-game contexts" (Deterding et al. 2011, 9). To elaborate, gamification does not create full-fledged games. It rather integrates game design elements such as points, badges, scorecards, leaderboards, goals, incentives, rewards, and competition into non-game contexts including journalism, education, health and fitness, and dating (Deterding et al. 2011; Dymek 2018). While it first emerged as a business buzzword owing to the professed success of early gamified applications such as Foursquare/Swarm and Nike+ (Walz and Deterding 2014), it is currently used in manifold popular apps including Duolingo (language learning platform), Google News, Fooducate (weight losing app), Glucosio (diabetes management app), and several human resources management and marketing loyalty programs (Dymek 2018). The main purposes for its use are encouraging consumer engagement, enhancing employee motivation, and obtaining data (Robson et al. 2015; Seaborn and Fels 2015). As such, it hinges on co-creation and necessitates the active involvement and contribution of the user (whether it is a consumer or employee) in the game designed by the app developers (Huotari and Hamari 2012).

Most importantly, echoing the pivotal distinction in play theory literature, gamification consists of two interrelated parts—namely, play and game (Deterding et al. 2011). In an effort to create a typology of different forms of play, Roger Caillois (1961/2001) contends that game and

play constitute the two ends of a continuum (see also Malaby 2007). Whereas play—denoted by the Greek notion of *paidia*—designates an improvisational, joyful, turbulent, and free form of fun; game—denoted by the Greek notion of *ludus*—refers to a structured, rule-driven, and competitive set of behaviors with particular end goals. Carrying both playful and gameful characteristics, gamification is far from being a form of free play; it also prescribes new sets of rules, objectives, and boundaries in the settings it is applied. Even though they might be experienced as play proper by users, gamified applications are structured to modify users' behaviors in ways that align with designers' objectives (Deterding et al. 2011).

Rather than a standalone phenomenon, gamification is better conceived as interlinked with the other apparatuses of digitalization such as self-quantification and microcelebrity. Self-quantification denotes the usage of mobile applications and wearable self-tracking devices to collect and analyze data about different aspects of one's life and body including physical activity, caloric intake, and sleep quality (Etkin 2016; Lupton 2016; Ruckenstein and Pantzar 2017). While running apps such as Nike+ and Runkeeper are recognized as typical self-quantification tools, they also integrate principles of gamification in their interfaces (Charitsis, Yngfalk and Skalen 2019; Whitson 2013). They not only allow consumers to track their average speed, distance run, and calories burnt; but also encourage them to earn badges (e.g., longest run, 5K personal record), set goals, and share their results and compete with their social network. Furthermore, microcelebrity practices—defined as social media users' efforts to maintain and enhance their popularity by carefully curating their profiles, addressing their audience, and investing in self-branding techniques (Marwick 2013; Senft 2013; see also McQuarrie et al. 2013)—also exhibit similarities with gamification. Instagram is a case in point lying at the intersection of microcelebrity and gamification. While Instagrammers—influencers and ordinary

users alike—blatantly perform microcelebrity; their practices are also gamified inasmuch as they treat comments, likes, and shares as points earned, which incentivizes them to invest in their self-brand and locks them into the goal of enhancing their online status even further (Marwick 2015). In a similar fashion, Tinder has been closely aligned with gamification as per the playfulness of the swiping function and the instant gratification of matching with someone (which will be detailed in the findings section). Nonetheless, it is also permeated with microcelebrity practices as per the users' deployment of self-branding techniques and efforts to elevate their popularity through carefully curating their profiles. All in all, gamification is part and parcel of the broader digitalization movement and can be hardly separated from similar digital apparatuses.

Focusing on Tinder's gamified interface and the reshaping of dating and hookup performances, this dissertation addresses the following research questions: (1) How does gamification—as part and parcel of digitalization—reshape intimate market-mediated performances and their performative scripts? (2) How do consumers navigate the emergent intersections between these performances and digital technologies? Before tackling these questions through my data analysis, I will first provide a detailed account of the sociohistorical conditions that structured (and restructured) these intimate performances and their performative scripts to date. This genealogical review will set the stage for investigating the transformational effects of digitalization through comparisons with what these performances looked like before.

A SOCIOHISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DATING AND HOOKUP PERFORMANCES AND THEIR PERFORMATIVE SCRIPTS

Dating and hooking up are fundamentally two different types of intimate performances that are symbolically distinct from each other. This distinction primarily stems from the former's emphasis on emotional intimacy which is in contrast with the latter's emphasis on sexual intimacy without emotional attachment (Luff, Hoffman and Berntson 2016). Despite the high level of individual variation in how they are perceived and experienced, they revolve around particular cultural norms and courses of action that could be recognized as characteristic of either the former or the latter.

In an effort to unravel the sociocultural underpinnings of human sexuality, sociologists John Gagnon and William Simon (1973/2011; see also Simon and Gagnon 1986) advanced sexual scripting theory. Their conceptualization rejects the earlier conviction that sexual behavior has certain intrinsic characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of human behavior. Instead, they argue, it attains particular meanings only in interpersonal or societal relations. Thus, individuals follow prevalent sexual scripts which provide guidelines regarding the socially sanctioned ways for sexual interaction. Drawing on sexual scripting theory, contemporary sociologists researching romance and sexuality maintain that a practical way to make comparisons between dating and hooking up is to interrogate their scripts vis-a-vis each other (Bogle 2008; Garcia et al. 2012; Heldman and Wade 2010). This orientation is closely aligned with a dramaturgical understanding of how performative scripts give structure to and animate market-mediated performances.

As such, I devote this section to a detailed overview of the cultural dimensions of dating and hookup scripts. In order to account for the sociocultural roots of these constantly evolving scripts, I will first lay emphasis on the historical contexts in which they came to prominence (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). Then, I will highlight the key differences in their current forms.

The Emergence of Dating Amidst the Burgeoning Leisure Market

Dating emerged as the legitimate way to initiate romantic relationships at the turn of the twentieth century. While this period witnessed the origination of this modern form of courtship; the prevailing intimate performance in the nineteenth century was calling, which hailed from Victorian England tradition (Bailey 1988; Illouz 1997). In the calling era, especially in the middle (and upper) class circles, the principal context for courtship was the private sphere. Male suitors with an intention of marriage visited potential partners in their family house. The courting couple were allowed to spend time in the family parlor, usually in the presence of a chaperone. The assessment of compatibility was to a large extent made by the family and at times involved other members of the local community. Inasmuch as marriage was the most significant economic transaction in many people's lives, this assessment was based on the prospective partner's wealth and social status as recognized by his social milieu (Illouz 2012). Thereby, pre-modern courtship and marriage were in essence an exchange between two families. What came after in the form of dating individualized this process and moved it into the public sphere at the same time.

Dating initially arose as a working-class practice owing to the limitations as well as the possibilities of urban-industrial America in the early twentieth century (Bailey 1988; Weigel

2017). For immigrants and lower-class individuals living in urban areas, calling was not a viable option as they lived in apartments where the whole family was crammed into a few rooms. "Going out on a date" became the only practical way for young adults to socialize and seek intimacy, and thereby, movie theaters and dance halls came to be the primary venues for entertainment, privacy, and flirtation (Fass 1977; Illouz 1997). The middle-class initially considered going to movies and dances as a threat to morality because of the sexual permissiveness attached to these practices. However, the rise of commercial leisure activities amidst the economic boom facilitated the destigmatization of dating among this social stratum as it offered young couples ever-new forms of entertainment. By the 1920s, dating completely replaced calling as the legitimate and widespread intimate performance for initiating romantic relationships (Bailey 1988).

This modern form of courtship set intimate interactions free from the bounds of the private sphere of family and community and relocated them into the public realm constituted by the mass market of leisure goods and services. Its removal from the private sphere turned intimacy into a matter of individual choice and stripped it off of the moralistic mandates of traditional courtship (Illouz 2012). Anonymity and distance from chaperonage became defining factors for dating performances, as automobiles, restaurants, movie theaters, and dance halls stood out as "islands of privacy" within the public realm (Illouz 1997, 56; Fass 1977). As initiators of romantic relationships, men were responsible for asking women out, planning the dates, and paying for the expenses. With the increasing centrality of commercial establishments, men's popularity in the dating scene came to be based on the amount of money they could spend and the quality of dates they could provide. In return, women were expected to pay in the currency of small-scale sexual favors such as necking and petting (Bailey 1988; Fass 1977).

Thus, dating was considered an exchange relation where men "demand sex and beauty in exchange for money, prestige, and power" (Belk and Coon 1993, 398).

Over the course of twentieth century, dating performances took different forms in line with the shifts in sociocultural conditions. From the mid-1920s to World War II, an earlier form entitled the "rating and dating complex" emerged in fraternities and sororities on college campuses as a result of the rise of coed college education (Bailey 1988; Mead 1949/1975; Waller 1937; Weigel 2017). The "rating and dating complex", as coined by sociologist Willard Waller (1937), refers to a popularity contest in which students compete in the currency of dates with the purpose of peer group validation. While the number of collegegoers was relatively small and so this type of intimate performance was not as widespread, it prevailed in public imaginary in interwar years (Bailey 1988). In the years to follow, it was scrutinized by sociologists who observed the advancement of yet another form of dating—namely, the going steady complex (Herman 1955; Lowrie 1951; Schnepp 1960).

The going steady complex came to prominence immediately after World War II. What initially gave rise to this performance were the "classic wartime desire for something stable in an unstable world" (Bailey 1988, 49) and the rise in disposable income which allowed an increasing number of young couples to afford the niceties of the leisure industry (Weigel 2017). Going steady is described as a continuous relationship between dating partners over an extended period of time to the exclusion of others, recognized by their peer group (Herman 1955). This dating style is defined by the convention that "[t]he boy can always be sure that if he calls, the girl will agree to 'go on a date'" (Schnepp 1960, 240). It involved going on several dates per week, exchange of tokens of exclusivity (e.g., silver or gold friendship rings), and greater sexual

intimacy compared to the earlier model since the dating couple was together for an extended period of time.

While it diverged from the rating and dating complex by its emphasis on "serial monogamy", it also stood out as a form of relationship in which the couple's primary intention was not necessarily a prospective marriage (Weigel 2017, 103). In this sense, steady dating was "play-marriage" where young adults imitated the real marriages of their older peers (Bailey 1988, 53). Rather than a popularity contest, this dating style hinged on the ideal of romantic growth. On the one hand, long-term relationships enabled partners to cultivate deeper romantic connections; on the other hand, the educational quality of these play-marriages prepared youngsters for their future marriages. As early as the 1950s, going steady became common among the youth, with participation in leisure activities that require a date being one of the main reasons for their adoption of this dating style (Herman 1955).

The Rise of Commercial Matchmaking Services

While dating was born against the backdrop of the flourishing leisure industry, it has been subject to yet another form of market mediation owing to the rise of commercial matchmaking platforms starting from the 1960s (Slater 2013; Weigel 2017). These introductory services—including pre-internet computer dating, video dating, personal ads, speed dating, and online dating websites—turned the act of finding a dating partner itself into a market-mediated procedure. Thus, the focus was shifted from the leisurely aspects of dating performances to a meticulous search process involving thoughtful compatibility assessments (Illouz 2007, 2012).

Computer-mediated dating systems, as the first-generation commercial matchmaking platforms, initially sprang up nowhere other than college campuses (Slater 2013; Hicks 2016). Founded in 1965 on Harvard campus, Operation Match aimed to match college students based on a questionnaire that included questions about the subscribers' personality and interests as well as the characteristics they desire in a prospective partner. When an early news article on *The Boston Globe* popularized this introductory service, it quickly spread in colleges across the country and competitors promising more sophisticated questionnaire designs arrived shortly after. However, these services did not really disseminate beyond college campuses, in no small part due to the stigma attached to resorting to a commercial matchmaking service for initiating romantic connections. Similarly, video-dating services—which involved subscribers reading through prospective matches' profiles and checking out their videotapes if a profile catches their eye—enjoyed a brief period of success from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s (Woll and Cozby 1987). Although these businesses multiplied rapidly and brought about some marriages, they remained a small industry just like computer-dating (Slater 2013; see also Ansari and Klinenberg 2016). Classified ads on newspapers—the origination of which dates back to late seventieth century Britain (Cocks 2010)—made a comeback in the US in the 1970s (Ansari and Klinenberg 2016; Coupland 1996; Lynn and Bolig 1985; Steinfirst and Moran 1989). Romance seekers that filled these columns were constrained by the brevity of the medium: The ads were generally under fifty words, consisting of a self-description, a listing of desired qualities, and contact information. With no photo and little information, attracting prospective matches was a real challenge. Unlike computer dating services frequented by college students, personal ads were the medium of choice for 30 to 40-year-old career-oriented individuals with busy schedules (Morrisroe 1984). Speed dating is another market-mediated medium to meet potential romantic-

sexual partners that first emerged within the Jewish community in Los Angeles in the late 1990s and turned into a popular and lucrative business in the subsequent years (Patterson and Hodgson 2006). Organized at stylish restaurants and bars, speed dating events give individuals the opportunity to meet in person and have three to five-minute-long introductory conversations with 20 to 60 prospective partners in one night. After the event, each participant visits the speed dating company's website to declare their interest in meeting again with any of the individuals they met and check back later to see if their interest was reciprocated. This introductory service's ongoing popularity is mainly attributed to the convenience it provides for career-oriented, "rush-rush, busy-busy, no-time-to-indulge-in-the-protracted-process-of-normal-dating era" individuals of different age groups (Patterson and Hodgson 2006, 457).

Last but not the least, after decades of "struggling to emerge from their analog chrysalis" (Weigel 2017, 173), online dating sites ultimately took the stage in the last decade of the century (Slater 2013). The first online dating website match.com was launched in 1995 with the idea of "put[ting] classified ads online" (Slater 2013, 37). While first-movers such as match.com and eHarmony remain to be major competitors, the actual boom in the online dating market transpired in the 2000s with the emergence of niche dating websites such as BlackSingles, ChristianMingle, and JDate and free-of-charge dating platforms such as OkCupid, Plenty of Fish, and Zoosk. A typical online dating profile consists of a mixture of personal photos, a relatively lengthy bio (usually consisting of several hundred words), information regarding one's background, lifestyle, and appearance, and her/his preferred characteristics in a prospective match. While the lengths of the questionnaires taken during initial subscription differ from site to site, subscribing to these platforms takes time and effort as one needs to ponder how to represent him/herself and set her/his preferences concerning a future partner. Even though newer sites

appeal to users that seek more casual dating, online dating in general appear to be a domain for initiating serious long-term relationships (Ansari and Klinenberg 2016; Slater 2013).

As these introductory services inculcated the idea that finding the perfect partner is a matter of market-mediated, comparative decision making from an enlarged choice set (Finkel et al. 2012), interdisciplinary research demonstrated that consumers of these commercial mediums got accustomed to using marketplace metaphors when referring to their romantic lives (Ahuvia and Adelman 1993; Heino, Ellison and Gibbs 2010; Hirschman 1987). Accordingly, their accounts of market-mediated dating were filled with consumption ("people are products"), self-branding ("attracting potential buyers"), and market-level ("dating is shopping") metaphors (c.f., Maclaran et al. 2005). This ethos seems markedly different from the earlier leisurely understanding of dating performances. For one thing, the key promise of these commercial mediums has been helping workaholic, time-constrained young urban professionals (also known as "yuppies") find their soulmates in the most rationalistic and efficient way possible (Weigel 2017). However, even though there is a switch from the idea of romantic growth to locating "the perfect product", there is also the continuation of the core ideal of long-term, monogamous romantic relationship.

In public imaginary, dating still invokes the idea of a couple enjoying an evening out at a commercial establishment with the purpose of getting to know each other. On the other hand, it may as well refer to an exclusive relationship in which the partners regularly see each other and develop an emotional bond involving love and trust. In either case, the defining characteristic of dating performances is the emphasis on (the intention of developing or the actual presence of) emotional connection between the partners. Sociologists of romance and sexuality showcase that, after all changes it has underwent over the century, dating still persists (Luff, Hoffman and

Berntson 2016; Weigel 2017). Nonetheless, there is also evidence that it has been losing its hold most particularly on college campuses owing to the emergence and rising popularity of a different intimate performance—namely, hooking up (Bogle 2007, 2008; Wade 2017).

The Rise of (College) Hookup Culture

In the second half of the twentieth century, dating remained to be the dominant intimate performance. However, the sociocultural developments that took hold starting from the 1960s sowed the seeds of fundamental changes in how romance and sexuality are perceived. In the decades to come, hooking up emerged as an alternative intimate performance (Bogle 2008; England, Shafer and Fogarty 2007; Heldman and Wade 2010; Weigel 2017).

To begin with, the sexual revolution—the inflection points of which were the invention of the birth control pill in the 1960s and legalization of abortion in the 1970s—made sexual intercourse without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy possible (Heldman and Wade 2010; Weigel 2017). It transformed sex into a matter of physical intimacy and pleasure rather than solely a means for reproduction. Based on the ideals of free love, it induced a liberated outlook on sexuality by challenging the traditional understandings of heterosexual, monogamous relationships. Relatedly, owing to the political achievements of the feminist movement (including the increased participation of women in the labor market), women's freedom of choice started to be pronounced on an ever-increasing scale in matters of romance and sexuality as with any other domain. With increasing numbers of women choosing to attend college in preparation for future careers, the average age of marriage has risen, and premarital sex became more commonplace.

Another macro-level shift that took its roots in the 1960s was the youth movement (Arnett 2015; Bailey 1988; Bogle 2008; Weigel 2017). This movement marked the emergence of a youth culture that discursively set itself apart from the conventions of adult life. Young people started seeing the obligations of adulthood in a negative light and refraining from early entrance into the adult roles of employee, spouse, and parent. They also yearned for free expression of their personal choices and freedom from conformity to adult expectations. One of the significant achievements of the movement has been students' victory in their battle against the *in loco parentis* system on college campuses. As a result of the readjustments in student-conduct policies over privacy and sexual freedom, access to the opposite sex on college campuses came to be practically unrestricted.

Furthermore, the transition to a Post-Fordist mode of capitalism in the 1970s instigated a restructuring of the labor market around the ideals of flexibility and mobility (Arnett 2015; Harvey 1991; Weigel 2017). This transition has led to a lack of well-defined career paths and concomitant delays in attaining financial stability for young adults. As such, young urban professionals, for whom busyness became a marker of status, started spending their initial years after college graduation focusing solely on their careers. This became another reason for them to postpone marriage and engage in less committed forms of romantic-sexual relationships in their early adult years.

These macro-level shifts collectively contributed to the emanation of a distinct life stage between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood, labeled as emerging adulthood (Arnett 2015; Weinberger, Zavisca and Silva 2017). Emerging adulthood, which roughly lasts from age 18 to age 29, is predicated on longer and more democratized education, flexible work arrangements, and postponement of marriage, parenthood, and home ownership. This period is

illustrated as one filled with self-focus, identity explorations, and instability in terms of work and love. Accordingly, emerging adults engage in a broad range of exploratory experiences and constantly seek novelty in different domains of their lives. They strive to take on doable challenges to cultivate their soft skills before settling down with adult responsibilities. Researchers have linked the emergence of hooking up, which stands out as a much looser and more casualized form of intimacy compared to dating, to the prevalence of this exploratory life orientation among emerging adults (Arnett 2015; Claxton and van Dulmen 2013; Garcia et al. 2012; Shulman and Connoly 2013). As Arnett (2015, 11) explains, for individuals "who wish to have a variety of romantic and sexual experiences, emerging adulthood is the time for it, when parental surveillance has diminished and there is as yet little normative pressure to enter marriage."

All in all, the abovementioned sociocultural shifts and the concomitant romantic-sexual inclinations of emerging adults resulted in the rise of the hooking up phenomenon. While relationship and sexual behavior scholars refrain from giving an exact time as to when this phenomenon surfaced, Bogle (2007) contends that the term had been used on college campuses since at least the mid-1980s—long before it was recognized by academic and policy studies in the early 2000s (e.g., Glenn and Marquardt 2001). However, Heldman and Wade (2010) maintain that referrals to the term hooking up and the presumable existence of casual sexual relations is not enough evidence to assume that the "hook up culture" had been a defining feature of the overall college experience whereby students think that "they were supposed to be having casual sex" (Wade 2017, 49). Therefore, the ascendancy of a full-fledged hookup culture—to the extent of demolishing the dating culture—on college campuses seems to be a relatively new development.

In the basic sense, hooking up is a loose term which refers to a sexual encounter between two individuals without the intention of future romantic involvement (Bogle 2008; England et al. 2007; Garcia et al. 2012; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Wade 2017). There is an intentional ambiguity as to the sexual behavior(s) it entails, which might range from kissing to oral sex to intercourse. As per the prominence of alcohol-centered socialization on college campuses—and particularly in fraternities and sororities—it usually takes place at the culmination of a night of drinking at a student bar or campus party. Although it oftentimes occurs between individuals that do not know each other well, it is possible for friends or acquaintances to end up hooking up after a night out. "No strings attached" and "one-night stand" are other phrases used interchangeably with hooking up. Even though the ideal hookup scenario is one with no further intimate contact, serial hookups through friends with benefits arrangements or booty calls are part and parcel of the college hookup culture. Similarly, although rare, there are instances where hookup encounters result in romantic bonding and ultimately turn into committed relationships.

A Comparison of Dating and Hookup Scripts

There are many elements of hookup performances which pit them against traditional dating performances (Bogle 2008; Luff et al. 2016; Wade 2017). While dating foregrounds emotional intimacy, the defining feature of hooking up is its emphasis on sexual intimacy that lacks in emotionality (Luff et al. 2016). Accordingly, the hookup script hinges on the idea of holding romantic feelings off and distancing the experience from dating. Table 1 exhibits a summary of the key differences between these two scripts.

Cultural Dimensions	The Dating Script	The Hookup Script
Initiation Ritual	Men asking out on dates	Culminates at the end of a night of hanging out
Mode of Socialization	Pair socialization	Peer group socialization
Alcohol Usage	No significant role of alcohol	Alcohol as a social lubricant
Communication Style	Verbal communication	Nonverbal cues
Paying Party	Men pay for the expenses	Each party pays her/his own way
Emotional Expressions	Expressions of caring and tenderness	Carefreeness and avoiding affection
The Aftermath	Expectation of succeeding dates	Establishing "meaninglessness" after the encounter

Table 1: A Comparison of the Dating and Hookup Scripts

To begin with, campus parties and student bars are settings where college students socialize in large groups. Therefore, contrary to a dating scenario in which the partners spend private time without the presence of their peers, most hookups are initiated in crowded environments with loud music where the couple is surrounded by their friend groups. The dating ritual of the guy asking the gal out is dropped, and hookups transpire casually at the end of a night out. As a social lubricant, alcohol paves the way for increased sexual permissiveness and stands out as the main catalyzer of hookups. It allows students to blame it on being "under the influence" if their displays of sexual attraction are confused with romantic intentions. In the booze-ridden, noisy college parties, sexual interest is exhibited primarily by way of nonverbal cues such as erotic dancing and fondling, which stands in stark contrast to the dating script which underlines the paramountcy of verbal communication (Bogle 2008; Wade 2017). Whereas the men paying for the night's expenses is an integral part of dating performances, individuals pay their own way or take turns in buying rounds of drinks in the party scene. When it comes to the

actual sexual behavior, students go to great lengths to demarcate their experience from dating. The hookup culture's tenet of carefreeness necessitates them to steer clear from "[e]xpressions of tenderness—like gentle kisses, eye contact, holding hands, cuddling, and caresses" as these are associated with dating performances: "Hooking up is not making love" (Wade 2017, 136). The partners are supposed to swing into action and leave immediately afterwards in the ideal case. In a similar vein, it is important for partners to get rid of any expectations of commitment by taking painstaking measures to establish that "it meant nothing" in the aftermath of a hookup. For this purpose, they either pretend that last night did not happen at all or keep their partner at arm's length if it is someone they had known from before. Another widespread tactic is to make sure to limit the number of hookups with the same person. On the whole, the hookup script comprises manifold unwritten rules that symbolically demarcate it from the alternative script of dating.

Whether hooking up ruled out dating on college campuses remains to be a heated debate in sociological and psychological research on relationship formation and sexuality among college students (Bogle 2007, 2008; England et al. 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Heldman and Wade 2010). The consensus in this literature has been that since hooking up ascended as the dominant intimate performance at the turn of the twenty-first century, dating has lost its sway on college campuses. However, findings from recent large-scale survey studies demonstrate that the earlier model of leisurely dating remains to be a viable route for relationship formation among students, and thus, this intimate performance might not be passé as argued by previous literature (Luff et al. 2016; Wade 2017). The contradictory coexistence of these two intimate performances constitutes the backdrop against which Tinder—and other mobile dating apps—was born. In the next section, I will take a closer look at the emergence and takeoff of this contemporary dating platform.

TINDER AND "THE DATING APOCALYPSE"

As the new-gen digital matchmaking services, mobile dating apps emerged in the early 2010s. The launch of Grindr (the mobile networking app geared towards men who have sex with men) in 2009 and its steep rise in popularity among gay communities instigated the breakout of mobile dating apps (also known as "hookup apps" or "swiping apps") that operate exclusively on smartphones (Ross-Nadie and Duguay 2019). Majority-owned by match.com's parent company Match Group, Tinder—the most popular mobile dating app that serves a predominantly heterosexual clientele—was initially released in 2012. According to the statistics reported on the company website gotinder.com (Retrieved June 1, 2020), it is currently the highest grossing non-gaming app worldwide. As of the last quarter of 2019, it has had approximately 5.9 million subscribers around the globe, more than 50 percent of which are aged between 18 and 25. In 190 countries where it is used, it has produced more than 43 billion total matches to date, which culminates into approximately 1.5 million dates per week.

Along with other early movers such as Coffee Meets Bagel, Bumble, Happen and Hinge; Tinder constitutes the backbone of the thriving mobile dating business. Accounting for the 33.1% of the US dating services industry (including all the online and offline matchmaking businesses) in 2020, mobile dating apps remain to be behind online dating sites in terms of revenues generated (Madigan 2020). However, their contribution to the overall industry revenue has been on the rise each year from 2015 to 2020 and they are documented to have the fastest growing customer base. With the mushrooming of niche apps such as DilMil (that caters to the South Asian community), JSwipe (for Jewish singles), and The League (that offers an exclusive, high-brow dating service), the recent launch of Facebook's new dating platform, and traditional

dating websites' introduction of supplemental mobile versions; their audience size is projected to grow even further in the next five years (Madigan 2020). As such, it is likely that they will surpass online dating in terms of revenue as well in the near future.

The growing popularity of these new-gen platforms (and especially Tinder) has also sparked a flurry of reactions in popular media. Concerns were raised about Tinder's aggravation of the hookup culture that is replete with unemotional, no-strings-attached sexual encounters to the detriment of committed romantic relationships (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber 2017; Sumter, Vandenbosch, and Ligtenberg 2017). The following excerpt from the (in)famous *Vanity Fair* article about Tinder's instigation of "the dating apocalypse" aptly summarizes the key criticisms directed at the app (Sales 2015):

> Mobile dating went mainstream about five years ago; by 2012 it was overtaking online dating. In February, one study reported there were nearly 100 million people—perhaps 50 million on Tinder alone—using their phones as a sort of all-day, every-day, handheld singles club, where they might find a sex partner as easily as they'd find a cheap flight to Florida. "It's like ordering Seamless," says Dan, the investment banker, referring to the online food-delivery service. "But you're ordering a person."....The innovation of Tinder was the swipe—the flick of a finger on a picture, no more elaborate profiles necessary and no more fear of rejection; users only know whether they've been approved, never when they've been discarded.

In this article (and similar others), finding a casual sexual partner through Tinder is likened to finding "a cheap flight to Florida" and ordering food from an online delivery system to illustrate how effortless it has become. And interestingly, the app's gamified interface (with references to the swiping function and the visualized profiles with little information) is pinpointed as the culprit for its exacerbation of noncommitted sexual relations and consequently the end of dating as we know it. Tinder responded defensively to these assertions claiming that their internal

research shows that 80% of their users are actually looking for long-term relationships (Edwardes 2015). Some popular media outlets backed up Tinder contending that the claims about the demise of romance are ill-founded and that hookup culture was prevalent long before dating apps (Marcotte 2015; Russell 2015).

Emergent academic studies on mobile dating apps also challenge the claim that app users are only looking for casual sex. Researchers demonstrate that user motivations might vary from simple entertainment and confidence boost to casual sex and committed relationship seeking (Sumter et al. 2017; Ward 2017). Survey studies report that finding monogamous romantic partners is as common of a motivation for app usage as initiating no strings attached sexual experiences (Gatter and Hodkinson 2016; Lefebvre 2018; Hobbs et al. 2017; Sumter et al. 2017). Contrary to the overly pessimistic views on platform mediation of romantic-sexual encounters, dating apps are shown to create new opportunities for intimacy by allowing users to broaden their romantic networks beyond their immediate friendship circles (Hobbs et al. 2017). Nevertheless, researchers also report a diminished relationship quality among partners that match via mobile dating apps compared to those that meet through online dating (Hobbs et al. 2017) or real-life connections (Newett, Churchill and Robards 2018). In sum, this nascent literature maintains that the dating apocalypse depictions are overblown, and mobile dating apps expand opportunities not only for hookup but also for dating performances. Yet, it leaves open the possibility that these apps might have transformative effects on these intimate performances.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to investigate how Tinder reshapes market-mediated performances of dating and hooking up, I assembled a comprehensive qualitative dataset. In an attempt to mimic the demographic makeup of Tinder users, I focused my analysis primarily on the experiences of heterosexual emerging adults. Accordingly, the bulk of collected data consists of the accounts of college students and graduates who are less than 10 years into their careers. Additionally, given that dating and hooking up as reported in extant literature and popular press are predominantly middle-class practices, the emphasis of the current analysis is placed on the experiences of individuals that hail from lower- to upper-middle class backgrounds. With these considerations in mind, my dataset consists of interviews with app users; a netnography of online forums and blogs; a walkthrough analysis of Tinder's user interface; news articles, reports, and videos gathered from traditional and online media; and branded content from Tinder and other major mobile dating apps.

To elucidate users' experiences within and beyond the apps, I conducted 24 semi-structured, in-depth interviews from March 2017 to May 2018 (see Table 2 for detailed participant profiles). 13 female and 11 male participants whose ages range between 18 to 42 were recruited via mass emails, flyers, and snowballing through acquaintances and participants. To ensure participant confidentiality, pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation. It is common for participants to use multiple apps, and some use the apps in tandem with online sites. Tinder, used by 22 participants, is by far the most popular mobile-only app followed by Bumble (10) and Coffee Meets Bagel (5). A number of participants who have used these platforms as well as online dating sites such as OkCupid (7), and Match.com (5) allowed for a distinctive

point of comparison. Two participants who exclusively used online dating sites—though preferred using the new mobile app versions of these platforms— were included for comparison purposes. While the number of people each participant met in person ranged from 2 to 65, the purposes for frequenting the apps were an ambiguous combination of relationship seeking, hooking up, ego boost, and finding friends, consistent with prior studies (Sumter et al. 2017; Ward 2017).

The interviews lasted for 1 to 2 hours and were conducted at library rooms, coffee shops, participants' offices or homes. The majority of the interviews (21) were conducted by the author, except for the ones with female college students. Considering the delicacy of the research topic and the gendered age dynamics, I hired a female research assistant trained in qualitative methodology to conduct this set of interviews. The interviews started with life history questions concerning our participants' upbringing and family history, educational and work experiences, life goals, and general interests. They continued with grand-tour questions about the initial decisions to subscribe to the apps, remarkable experiences, likes/and dislikes about the overall experience, and the ways in which app usage changed their attitudes and behavior toward dating and hooking up. These questions were followed by further probing based on participant responses. In the spirit of autodriving (Heisley and Levy 1991), I devoted a portion of the interviews for going over the participants' profiles and asking them about the choices they made when putting their profiles together. Similarly, I went over the profiles of potential matches with the participants to see the evaluation criteria they employ in choosing or refusing to initiate contact.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	The apps used	# of people met
Jim	18	M	College student	Tinder, Bumble	5
Kelly	19	F	College student	Tinder, DilMil	10+
Cathy	19	F	College student	Tinder, OkCupid	5
Ryan	20	M	College student	Tinder, Bumble, JSwipe	6
Carol	20	F	College student	Tinder	10
Andy	21	M	College student	Tinder, Bumble, Hinge	20+
Hang	22	F	College student	Tinder, Coffee Meets Bagel	2
Meredith	22	F	College student	Tinder, Bumble	20+
Roy	22	M	MS Student	Tinder, Coffee Meets Bagel, Bumble, JSwipe	30+
Valerie	22	F	MS student	Tinder, Bumble	5+
Darryl	24	M	Financial analyst	Tinder, OkCupid	5
Toby	24	M	PhD student in Biomedical Engineering	Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, Happn	20+
Pete	26	M	Manager at a tech startup	Tinder, Bumble, Hinge	25+
Karen	26	F	JD candidate	Tinder	10+
Jan	28	F	Restaurant manager	Tinder, Bumble, Her	15+
Michael	28	M	Data analyst	Tinder, match.com, Plenty of Fish	20+
David	28	M	Director of online marketing at a small company	Tinder, Bumble	65
Erin	29	F	DVM candidate	OkCupid, Tinder, Coffee Meets Bagel, Bumble, Plenty of Fish, Happn	15+
Holly	35	F	Assistant manager at a bakery	Tinder, Bumble	7
Kevin	35	M	Technology specialist	Tinder, Bumble, Happn, OkCupid, match.com, Coffee Meets Bagel, Plenty of Fish	25+
Phyllis	35	F	Psychotherapist	Tinder, Bumble, eHarmony, match.com	10+
Pam	36	F	Jewelry designer	match.com, OkCupid	20+
Stanley	39	M	Capital project manager	Plenty of Fish, OKCupid, match.com	20+
Angela	42	F	Office manager	Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid, Zoosk	32

Table 2: Interview Participant Profiles

To support the insights gathered via interviews, I conducted a netnography of Tinder Subreddit (i.e., the popular online forum Reddit's discussion board devoted to conversations about Tinder) and personal blogs featuring posts about dating app experiences (Arsel and Zhao 2015; Kozinets 2010, 2015). This set of data involves entries about advice on how to navigate app-initiated intimate performances, lived experiences of Redditers and bloggers, and deliberations about the current state of the app-mediated dating and hookup scenes. The conversational format and anonymity of the Reddit forums allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how collective opinions were formed about Tinder-mediated dating and hookup performances.

Participants' emic accounts gathered via interviews and netnography were complemented with an analysis of Tinder's user interface utilizing the walkthrough method. Digital media scholars Light, Burgess and Duguay (2018) propose the walkthrough method as "a way of engaging directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences" (2). Accordingly, the researcher conducts a walkthrough analysis by examining the app's user interface arrangement, functions and features, and the flow of activity throughout the stages of registration and entry, everyday use, and leaving. To situate the generated information, the app's target user base and scenarios of use, its business model, and implicated rules and modes of regulation—all gathered via company-generated material including the app website, official blog, advertisements and press releases—are examined. I utilized this methodological approach specifically to identify the ways in which gamification is harnessed in Tinder's user interface. I also noted the ways in which the interfaces of other popular apps—Bumble, Coffee Meets Bagel, and Hinge—deviate from that of Tinder.

Finally, to contextualize the noted micro-level accounts within macro-level discourses about the apps, I put together an archival dataset consisting of theoretically sampled exemplars of news articles, op-eds, and press interviews with app executives that abound in traditional and popular media outlets. First, making use of the Factiva database, I collected all articles involving the keywords "Tinder" and/or "dating app" that were published in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* from September 2012 (when Tinder was launched) to July 2019. Reading through this material, I sampled 116 articles that are relevant to my research topic and traced the mentions to articles that appeared in popular media outlets such as Guardian, GQ, Huffington Post, Slate, Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, TechCrunch and MarketWatch. Reiterating this process yielded 49 more articles that were included in the dataset. At the end of the day, the archival dataset consists of 165 articles that amount to 547 pages.

The analysis of this dataset was carried out via a hermeneutic approach that entails a series of part to whole iterations (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997). In the first step, each transcript—interview, news article, discussion thread, videoclip, etc.—was subjected to close readings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the text at hand. The second step involved an intertextual analysis where patterns and inconsistencies are sought across different texts. A holistic understanding of the phenomenon was developed by tacking back and forth between these two levels of analysis. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently; thereby, insights garnered via initial analysis informed further data collection (Spiggle 1994). Similarly, as close readings of the data revealed new insights regarding the focal phenomenon, the theoretical framing was refined in each step of the analysis. This entailed going back to the extant literature and rethinking the theory-data link multiple times during the analysis. As the overarching themes started to emerge roughly after the first half of the interviews, member

checks were made with remainder of the participants (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). After each interview, the principal themes that emerged in prior analysis were shared with these interviewees and their comments were taken into consideration.

In the next two sections, I will present the findings of this exhaustive analysis. First, I will explicate how Tinder reshapes intimate market-mediated performances through gamification. Afterwards, I will elucidate how consumers navigate the altered, app-mediated intimate performances.

HOW TINDER TRANSFORMS DATING AND HOOKUP PERFORMANCES

This section addresses the question of how gamification—as an integral part of the digitalization movement—transforms the intimate market-mediated performances of dating and hooking up and their performative scripts in the context of Tinder. Figure 4 provides an orienting outline of how this transformation unfolds.

Tinder's gamified interface
PLAY VERSUS GAME DIALECTIC

Formalization of hooking up
INTEREST PROFILING
SAFEGUARDING

Casualization of dating
DETACHMENT
TOXIC DISINHIBITION

Hybridization of dating and hookup scripts
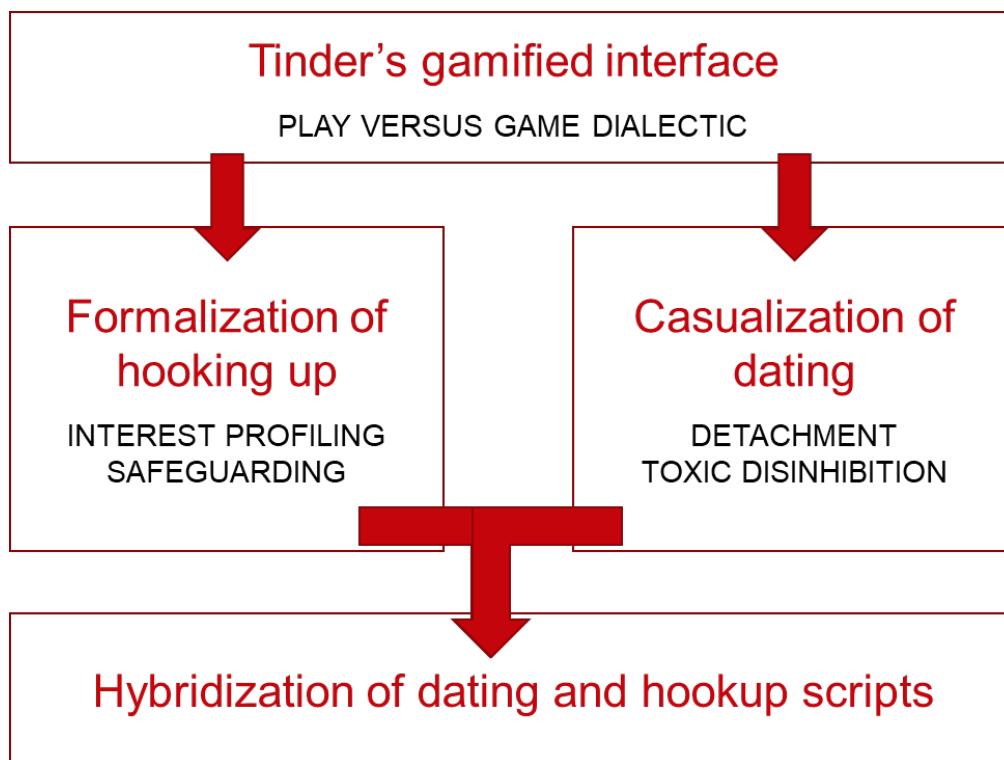
Figure 4: Tinder's transformation of dating and hookup performances

To begin with, Tinder's gamified user interface hinges on the proverbial play-game dialectic documented in play theory literature (Caillois 1961/2001; Malaby 2007). As such, the app's functions and features not only pave the way for playful, enjoyable, and carefree intimate

performances, but also establish a new set of rules, objectives, and boundaries for app-mediated performances. Through a walkthrough analysis (and interview excerpts), I will shed light on the ways in which these gameful and playful characteristics are manifest in Tinder's interface in the first subsection.

As per its reliance on the play-game duality, Tinder subsequently has formalizing and casualizing effects on intimate performances. Since hooking up is relatively more casual, it is more susceptible to Tinder's formalizing effects compared to dating. Tinder reshapes hookup performances by structuring these casual sexual encounters via two mechanisms that I label as interest profiling and safeguarding. Whereas interest profiling stands for Tinder's provision of a point of departure for individuals seeking opportunities with the opposite sex, safeguarding denotes the app's instillation of a sense of control over the conditions of an intimate encounter. Dating, on the other hand, is historically more formal than hooking up; thus, Tinder's casualizing effects are more pronounced for dating performances. Tinder transforms this latter form of intimate performances by ridding them off their procedural and ceremonious qualities through the operation of two mechanisms that I label as detachment and toxic disinhibition. While detachment refers to the dilapidation of long-established rituals that accompany real-life dating performances, toxic disinhibition designates the exacerbation of sexually suggestive and objectifying behavior on and beyond Tinder's gamified platform. In the subsequent subsections, I will explicate how these four mechanisms—interest profiling, safeguarding, detachment and toxic disinhibition—operate and provide illustrative data excerpts for each.

Ultimately, Tinder's gamified interface engenders a more formalized form of hooking up and a more casualized form of dating to the extent that these performances start resembling each other. Combined together, formalization of hookup performances and casualization of dating

performances give rise to the hybridization of dating and hookup scripts. As Tinder users adroitly switch between these two scripts in their Tinder-mediated interactions, it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish between dating and hookup performances. I will devote the final part of this section to an explanation of how this hybridization transpires.

The Game-Play Dialectic in Tinder's Gamified User Interface

> "The old dating websites operated on the belief that you had to fill in criteria to find a perfect match. They were too time-consuming," said Marie Cosnard, head of communications for Paris-based dating app Happn, which has 3.5 million users. "Tinder was a revolution. It showed us that swiping quickly could be a success." (Wells 2015, *The Wall Street Journal*)

While Tinder, as with other mobile dating apps, is technically a descendant of online dating websites, its deployment of mobile media affordances sets it apart from these earlier platforms (Madigan 2020). For one thing, hinging on the affordances of portability and availability (Schrock 2015), the app makes on-the-go access and uninterrupted communication with potential partners possible for its users. On the one hand, this brings to mind the trope of Tinder subscribers "using their phones as a sort of all-day, every-day, handheld singles club" which was noted earlier in the Tinder-mediated dating apocalypse depictions (Sales 2015). Nonetheless, virtually all my study participants declare their satisfaction with the app's convenience and ease of use. Michael remarks: "I like that it is integrated into my phone. It's easy to fit with my life. Like meeting a random person without a ton of effort."

The walkthrough analysis of the user interface reveals Tinder's undemanding initial sign-up process. After downloading the app on an iOS or Android device, setting up a profile takes

only a few minutes. In contrast to questionnaire-based online dating profiles, Tinder profiles display little information and rely primarily on images: They consist of information regarding age, gender, occupation, a 500-character bio which many users leave empty, a mix of 6 images, and the option to integrate the user's Instagram account in order to feature more images. As such, leaning on the multimediality of smartphones (thanks to the increased quality of integrated cameras) (Schrock 2015) and its intermediality with Instagram as another image-based medium (Helles 2013; Marwick 2015), Tinder stands out as a predominantly visualized platform. In Erin's words, "obviously on Tinder and I think in most [mobile dating apps], it's pretty much based on photos. Sometimes you can pull up a separate screen with some basic information, but ultimately, I think, it's based on photos." In Figure 5 below, the image on the left is a Tinder profile as it is initially presented to the user. If the user chooses to tap on the image to further engage with the profile, the short bio and the remaining images in the profile become accessible as shown on the right-hand side. This is what Erin refers to as "you can pull up a separate screen with some basic information". However, as she also acknowledges, most of the users do not bother to look at this verbal information and make their decisions based on the initial image.
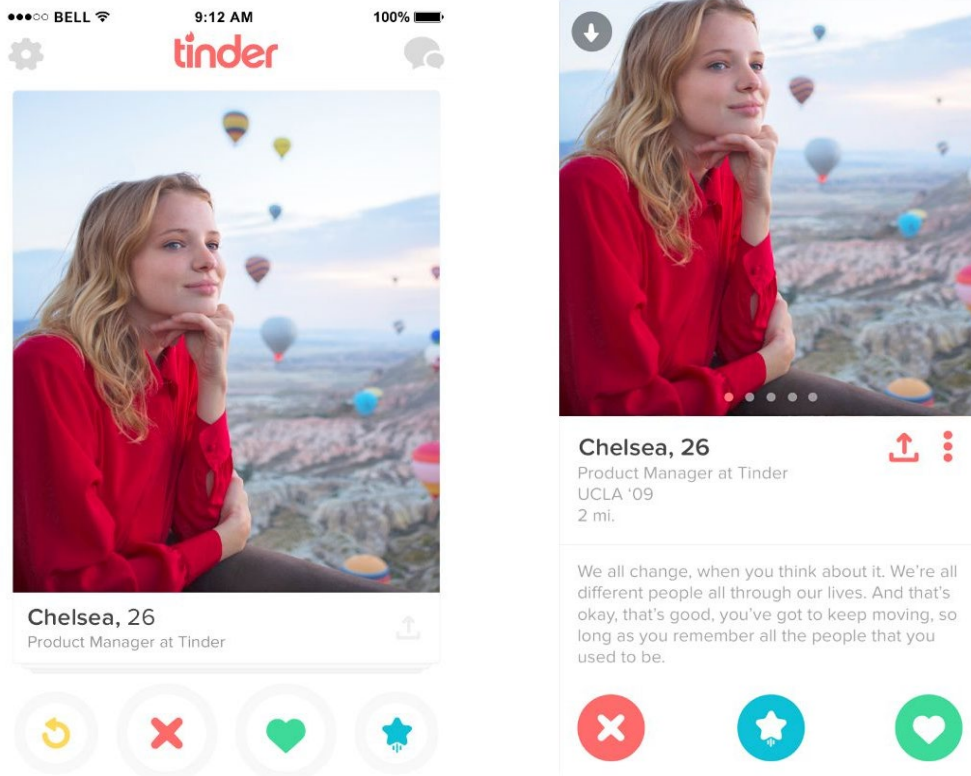
Figure 5: Illustrative Tinder Profile

NOTE— The images are part of Tinder's promotional material and taken from the company website.

With their profiles set, users can start flipping through the catalogue of profiles for potential matches. Harnessing the location-based GPS capabilities of smartphones (i.e., locatability) (Schrock 2015), the app recognizes users' coordinates in real time and presents them with profiles that meet their age range and geographical distance criteria (David and Cambre 2016). As many of my study participants report selecting one to five-mile radiuses, the app is particularly useful in arranging low-key, impromptu meetups with potential partners living and working in proximate urban areas.

These noted mobile media affordances provide the basis for Tinder's utilization of principles of gamification, which further differentiates the app from earlier dating intermediaries (David and Cambre 2016; Lefebvre 2018). While game studies scholars are divided into two camps regarding whether gamification should place an emphasis on app designers' intentions (Deterding et al. 2011) or consumers' lived experiences (Huotari and Hamari 2012), the case of Tinder showcase an alignment between the two. The following excerpt from a press interview with Tinder co-founders Sean Rad and Justin Badeen demonstrates their thinking as they were designing the app (Stampler 2014):

> "We always saw Tinder, the interface, as a game," Rad said. "What you're doing, the motion, the reaction." So Rad and Badeen modeled the original stack of potential matches' faces after a deck of cards. When playing with physical cards for inspiration, their natural urge was to interact with the top card by throwing it to the side. Thus, the iconic Tinder swipe was born. "Nobody joins Tinder because they're looking for something," Rad said. "They join because they want to have fun. It doesn't even matter if you match because swiping is so fun."

Underlining the playful aspects of Tinder's user interface, Rad explains their intentions in developing the deck of cards display and the swiping function. In line with their expectations, these game design elements have been successful in enlisting consumers to co-create Tinder-mediated intimate performances (Huotari and Hamari 2012). Since they have been integral to the app's rapid popularization, consumers' accounts abound with references to Tinder as a game.
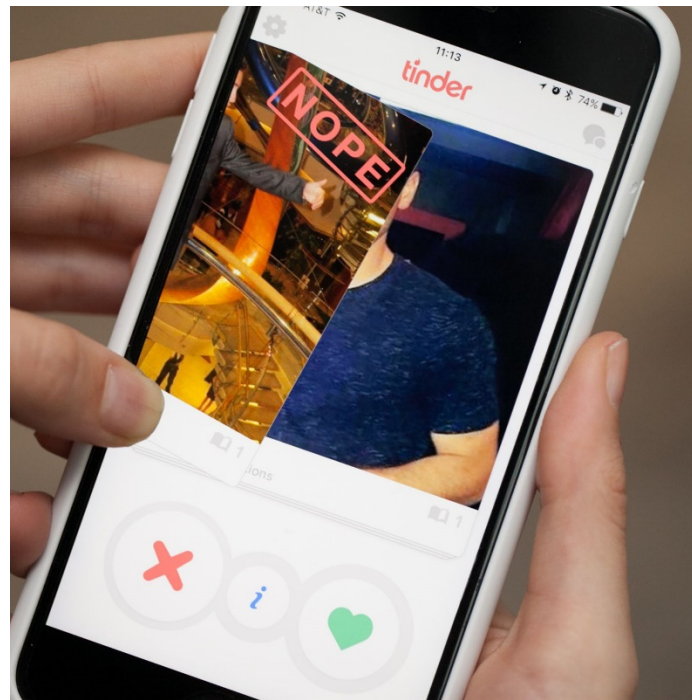
Figure 6: The Deck of Cards Display and the Swiping Function

To elaborate further, as shown in Figure 6, each user views Tinder's catalogue of profiles as a deck of cards, whereby the first image of each profile becomes a card in the deck. If the user does not choose to engage with the profile, s/he can directly make a decision by swiping. Swiping is the function that constitutes the backbone of Tinder's gamified interface, as it is perceived an incentive in itself and thus plays a key role in inducing a playful sentiment. Presented with compatible profiles the app provides, the user chooses to either swipe right ("Like") with the intention to match or swipe left ("Nope") to dismiss the presented profile and continue browsing through the deck. Combined with the deck of cards display, swiping requires the user to evaluate each profile in its own right, without making elaborate comparisons as in online dating (Illouz 2007). It also affords the user to make momentary decisions about initial

attraction by attending solely to visual cues in the very first images (Lefebvre 2018). Echoing the

app co-founder Sean Rad's words that users "join [Tinder] because they want to have fun. It

doesn't even matter if [they] match because swiping is so fun," Angela reflects on her on-app

experience:

> You wake up in the morning, you're eating your cereal, and you might swipe a little bit.
> It's fun. And that's the thing, it gets a little addictive, because it's just kind of fun to do
> and be like, "Oh, look at this person, that person!"
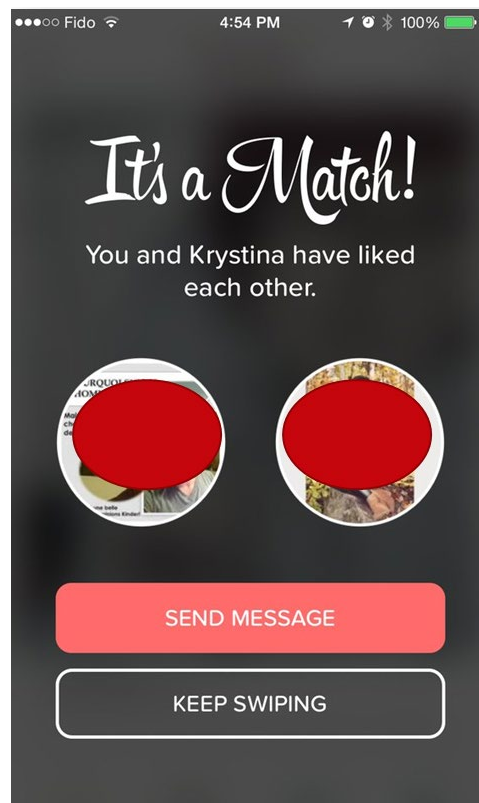
Figure 7: "It's a Match" Animation

Whenever two users match, an "It's a Match!" animation with the images of both users

pops up on the screen and gives them two options: "Send Message" or "Keep Swiping" (see

Figure 7). In this regard, getting a match becomes a mini reward on Tinder's gamified platform.

Jim explains:

> It's kind of like a game in which if you match with someone, that's kind of like a win. And if you talk to them and you go on a date, that's even more of a win. But when it comes to like a game, say like a mobile game, say like "Angry Birds", you swipe and then you fly away. I mean, the bird flies away and you get the points. And the same thing with Tinder. You swipe and see if you match. So, in that aspect, it's kind of like a game.

As shown in Figure 8, The total number of matches a user gets along with small images of all the users s/he has matched that far are displayed in one screen analogous to a scorecard. This screen further shows the number of likes that the user received but not returned (by liking back or declining) as s/he has not come across these profiles yet. Each user has a limited number of likes (i.e., right swipes) per day and a waiting period is enforced before s/he can restart swiping right. The incorporation of such game design elements inspires a (not-so-assertive) competitive spirit for Tinder users:

> Karen: It's like you're not taking yourself too seriously. You're not taking other people too seriously. I take it like a game like "how many matches can I get?" How many people can I get to, you know, swipe right on me? Because, sometimes, they'll tell you, like, "Oh, you have so many swipe right." Like now, it currently says I have, you know, 99-plus people who swiped right on me and I'm like, "Okay, that's cool." So, it's kind of is like a game, like, how many matches can you get? I'll get into competitive matches with some of my guy friends. I feel like I've done that before. Just look and see who can get more matches, and then I usually win. It's fun.

Karen's passage illustrates that, by allowing users to compare their numbers of matches and engage in a game of "competitive matches", Tinder's gamified interface adds another layer of playfulness to the user experience. In doing so, it also gives precedence to a particular form of engagement with the platform and by extension with other users. It encourages interacting with

an increased quantity of potential partners—that is unparalleled in real-life and online dating—

in a "not taking yourself too seriously" and "not taking other people too seriously" manner.
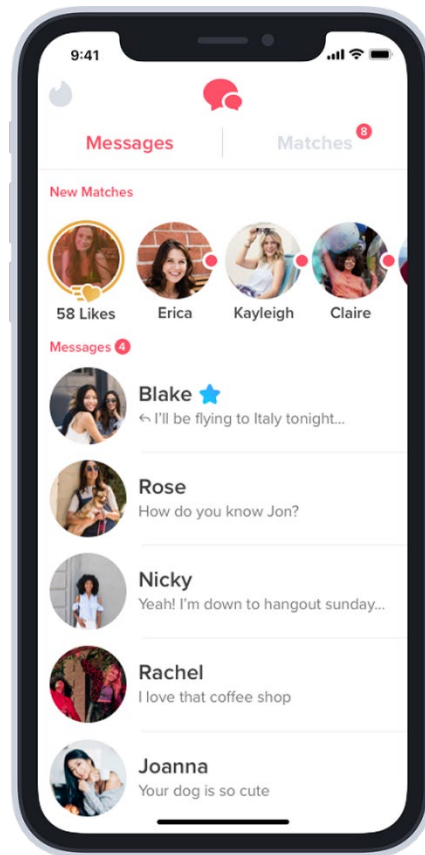
Figure 8: The Scorecard of Matches and Likes

In addition to the playful aspects presented so far, Tinder's gamified interface exhibits

gameful characteristics as well (Caillois 1961/2001; Deterding et al. 2011). That is, beyond

merely creating enjoyable consumer experiences, Tinder also effectuates a set of rules,

objectives, and boundaries with respect to app-mediated intimate performances. These gameful

elements, in the first place, are necessary to keep the platform's playfulness intact. A similar

account of how gamefulness supports playfulness was given in Seregina and Weijo's

investigation (2017) of how Cosplayers create playful con performances. While these performances were animated primarily by consumers' relentless navigation of several material, temporal, and emotional burdens in the proverbial backstage; Tinder-mediated intimate performances are different insofar as they are facilitated by the gameful framework that is set into motion by the app's user interface. For instance, it is the app that prescribes ground rules for how interactions between users should unfold, which in turn helps sustain the "not taking yourself too seriously" and "not taking other people too seriously" attitude which Karen mentions.

A close scrutiny of the app's mutual like and direct messaging functions reveals how its gamefulness balances its playfulness. The mutual like function in particular is key to the smooth operation of the Tinder game. By virtue of this function, the platform enables two users to interact only when they mutually like each other (i.e., swipe right on each other's profiles). As such, the mutual like prevents unsolicited messages which remain to be a problem in online dating, predominantly for women. Erin, along with other female participants, expresses her content with this function: "I like it. I don't think it's perfect for all situations, but, in general, especially from the females' perspective it really weeds out the randos and the bad messages. So yeah. For the most part, I like it." This function further warrants that the user is only notified when s/he matches with someone and never when s/he gets rejected by someone s/he swiped right on. Thus, it mitigates the anxiety to initiate a conversation, since the only other users s/he can directly message are the ones that consent to converse over text messages in the first place. In Toby's opinion, "it makes perfect sense. From my perspective, I'm not wasting my time trying to approach people who aren't interested."

The direct messaging function stands out as another gameful element that establishes rules and restrictions in Tinder's user interface. Mimicking standard mobile messenger designs (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger), it allows for short, instant messaging and affords a dynamic conversation between matched users (see Figure 9). In this regard, correspondence through Tinder is different from the lengthier, email style messaging—that stylistically evokes the old love letter format—endorsed by most online dating websites. More importantly, while potential partners that meet at a bar or through online dating exchange contact information to expedite a potential meetup, Tinder users don't usually share their phone numbers or social media accounts thanks to the direct messaging function's facilitation of a rapid, back-and-forth conversation without leaving the app. Karen explains, "instead of giving a guy your number at a club or something, in which case he might keep messaging you even though you want to ignore him; you can unmatch people on Tinder and then they're not gonna message you anymore." Thus, Tinder resolves this prevalent problem of the dating and hookup scenes by providing an integrated, anonymous medium through which mobile daters can communicate, until after they get to know each other during the initial face-to-face meeting. This gameful element is particularly essential for cultivating the playful spirit of Tinder-initiated intimate performances, as it makes it possible for matched users to anonymously flirt with each other without the anxiety of giving away too much personal information at face value. Combined with the ability to unmatch a user (before or after an in-person meeting) who didn't turn out to be a compatible partner, it gives the users the headspace to be meeting others in a controlled manner.
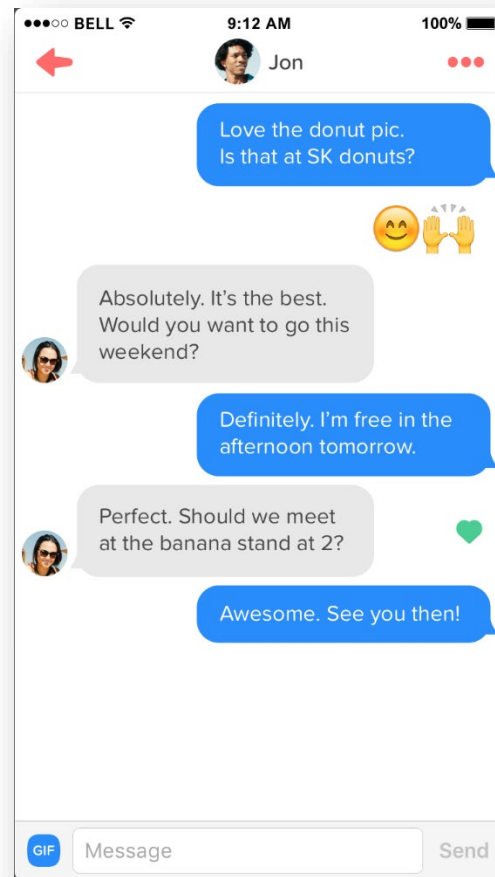
Figure 9: Tinder's Direct Messaging Feature

In sum, through the game design elements implanted in its interface, Tinder affords a

playful yet gameful mode of engagement for its users. On the one hand, it orchestrates a

pleasurable user experience mainly through its swiping function, deck of cards display, "It's a

Match" animation, and scorecard of matches. On the other hand, it lays down ground rules and

boundaries pertaining to the ways in which individuals meet and interact via the operation of the

mutual like, direct messaging, and "unmatch" functions in unison. As I will illustrate in detail

below, this play-game dialectic enables Tinder to casualize certain aspects of intimate

performances while formalizing yet others. In this respect, the app paves the way for hookup

performances that are more formal than what the conventional hookup script allows and dating performances that are more casual than what the standard dating script allows.

Tinder's Formalization of Hookup Performances

Based on the gameful characteristics of its user interface, Tinder puts into effect new norms and restrictions regarding the ways in which app users embark on intimate performances. In certain respects, this normative framework diverges from both conventional dating and hookup scripts; however, as per their formalizing quality, their effects on hookup performances are more pronounced. As such, formalization of hooking up denotes the process through which Tinder gives structure to otherwise serendipitous and disorderly casual sexual encounters. Interest profiling and safeguarding are the two mechanisms through which hookups are formalized. While interest profiling denotes Tinder's provision of a point of departure for individuals seeking opportunities with the opposite sex by bringing them together (digitally) and providing basic information about each other, safeguarding refers to the app's instillation of a sense of control over the conditions of the encounter which enables users to pursue sexual intimacy without the social anxieties of meeting new people in real life.

Interest profiling. In the regular hookup scenario, the performative interactions between partners begin with one party initiating contact in a way that communicates his/her sexual interest (Bogle 2008; Wade 2017). However, in the boisterous, alcohol-ridden party scene, it is quite difficult to gauge one's intentions—i.e., whether s/he is looking for a casual sexual encounter to begin with—and there is always the risk of unmatched expectations. Even when the

initiation ritual successfully plays out, there remains the possibility of miscommunication as hookup performances rely heavily on nonverbal cues. It is quite common for hookup partners to avoid having small talk and thereby not even having basic information about each other. Tinder-mediated hookup performances are different in this sense. Through its schematic profiles and direct messaging and mutual like functions, the app (1) presents basic information about users and (2) enables online conversations. Thus, it helps individuals make an initial decision and reveal their interest in engaging in a romantic-sexual interaction in advance of physical meetups, which is lacking in the night life scene.

To begin with, the fact that someone has signed up on Tinder, at the very least, indicates that s/he is entertaining the possibility of a romantic-sexual interaction. Additionally, a standard Tinder profile features basic information regarding one's name, age, and occupation, plus the short bio and pictures. Since Tinder permits viewing the profiles without notifying the profile owners, this minimal information gives a head start for users to decide if they want to initiate contact or not. Knowing the basics about a person beforehand becomes a key attribute that puts Tinder at an advantage compared to a bar or night club for meeting a potential partner:

> Meredith: You can see a guy sitting at the bar and you wanna go talk to them, but you are like "what if he has a girlfriend." That's not how it works on Tinder. Well, he might have a girlfriend.
>
> Interviewer: So, in that sense Tinder works better than a bar?
>
> Meredith: Yeah, in that instance it does. Because at a bar you never know if he's dating someone. You don't know if they are interested in you or not, which is what Tinder does. He is single, he is interested in you, talk to him. Whereas at a bar you are like "what's his name? How old is he? Where does he work? Is he single? Does he have a girlfriend?" All that. Because Tinder can give you all that. Whereas at a bar, you see a person and that's it. Whereas on Tinder you see a lot of background on them.

Meredith is a newly minted college graduate who has been an active—and relatively popular—participant of the college party scene over the last four years. Since she was also introduced to Tinder as a senior high schooler by her friend group, she is in a distinctive position to make comparisons regarding how hookup performances transpire in night life versus app-mediated encounters. The above quote demonstrates her preference for having the bare minimum background information about a potential partner—particularly whether he is single or not. As she explains, the simplistic Tinder profiles enable users to find out the basics about others at no cost. This strategic information presentation—the key to which is revealing not too much but just enough detail— also gives users a starting point in the ensuing conversations.

On top of presenting strategic information about one's Tinder matches, the interest profiling mechanism is also instrumental in enabling an online conversation ahead of an in-person rendezvous. Since the app activates the direct messaging function only when both of the users swipe right on each other (by virtue of the mutual like function), it guarantees initial mutual attraction and rules out the risk of rejection to a certain extent. If the users have already moved on to the direct messaging phase, it is established that there is at least some level of common interest in talking to each other. Many of my participants express their preference for having at least some conversation through Tinder to get to know their matches before deciding to meet them (or not) in real life (see also Licoppe 2020). Consider the case of Andy who, as a junior year fraternity brother, is well-versed in the Greek party culture as well as the Tinder-mediated college hookup scene. Making a comparison with finding a hookup partner at a bar or a party, he regards the opportunity to have an online conversation in advance as one of the advantages of connecting via Tinder:

So I think [Tinder] is more efficient in the fact that like you don't have to waste your time crap shooting. And hitting on someone and getting denied or like it's gonna be a complete weirdo. Because I think you can gauge someone's personality from conversating [sic] with them on apps or texting. You know what I mean? Because I usually just get some Snapchat or number off of Tinder or something like that. And then I think after you kind of get a chance to see, like, gauge their personality and kind of understand their interest. And I think that makes it a little bit better than if you do hook up with them because you actually are kind of getting to know them before you hook up with them whereas if you meet someone at a bar or meet someone at a party or something like that and have a one-night stand. I don't know, sometimes my friends and I argue, "is hooking up with a girl on Tinder a one-night stand or not?" Because you know their name, you know who they are kind of in general.

His willingness to avoid "hitting on someone and getting denied" in a party environment along with his desire to "gauge someone's personality from conversating with them" makes Tinder the perfect outlet for Andy as per the app's role as an interest profiler. As with several other college-student participants, he prefers becoming acquainted with a Tinder match before getting sexually intimate. However, this constitutes a violation of the hookup script (Wade 2017). Whereas the ideal type college hookup accentuates sexual intimacy without the partners taking the time to get to know one another, the Tinder interface encourages verbal communication which might give rise to a certain level of emotional bonding. It is for this reason that whether hooking up with a Tinder match counts as a one-night stand or not becomes suspect in Andy and his friends' eyes.

On the whole, thanks to its strategic information presentation and facilitation of advance online conversations, Tinder operates as an interest profiler in hookup performances. As interest profiling breaches the hookup script and curbs the casualness of hooking up, it induces a more formalized spirit in app-mediated intimate performances.

Safeguarding. On top of interest profiling, Tinder's gameful elements also render the platform a more secure medium for initiating casual sexual encounters. According to the conventional hookup script, these encounters usually commence at the end of a night out with both parties intoxicated (Bogle 2008; Wade 2017). Excessive alcohol usage along with the lack of an interest profiling mechanism, at times, leads to unwelcome contacts where one party is not interested in hooking up. Furthermore, the spontaneity of hookups coupled with the parties' being under the influence does not leave much room for thinking the situation through and oftentimes results in one (or both) side feeling out of control (Wade 2017). Thus, even among its avid participants (and especially women), it is common to consider the hookup scene as an unsecure social setting. In Tinder-mediated intimate performances, these types of anxieties are mitigated to a certain extent through the safeguarding mechanism. Although it is not equivalent to developing a feeling of trust with one's partner over time as in the dating script (Bailey 1988), safeguarding allows for the advancement of a derivative sense of control. Operating through Tinder's large catalogue of profiles and mutual like and direct messaging functions, it (1) eliminates unsolicited contacts and (2) inculcates a sense of control over the conditions of an in-person meeting. Thus, it enables users to engage in sexually intimate relations with people they have recently met and have no common friends or acquaintances.

To start with, beyond playing a role in interest profiling by mitigating the risk of rejection, the mutual like function also eliminates the possibility of unsolicited contacts, which particularly looms large for women in the night life scene. Combined with Tinder's large catalogue of potential intimate partners, it facilitates users' exercise of choice over who they get to experience sexual intimacy with. This exercise of choice is of significance to Karen, who cannot spend as much time looking for intimate connections as per her law school commitments.

She expresses her dislike of being spontaneously hit on in a bar setting: "I get super annoyed with that, especially because the guy is usually just kind of drunk and annoying and it's also just loud and not a good environment." She goes on to explain why Tinder is a better medium to meet people:

> Tinder is different because you, kind of, again, control who you meet. So, who you meet is not restricted to who happens to be in [a popular local bar] at 11 p.m. on a Friday night. It's, you have a lot more...it's a lot more open, I guess. So, you're not sort of, like, to the luck of just happening to meet someone. You can make the meeting happen. So I would say mostly like that.

Karen's comparison between meeting a potential partner over Tinder versus a bar touches upon the ways in which app-mediated intimate performances diverge from the standard hookup script. She emphasizes that on Tinder she can select from a pool larger than "who happens to be" at the bar she is frequenting and have a sober conversation unhindered by loud music. This prevents unsought sexual advances by "drunk and annoying" men which remains a negative but ineluctable aspect of the conventional hookup culture.

While the app's exhibition of a large number of profiles to select from and its mutual like function are effective in getting rid of unsolicited contacts, the direct messaging function further enhances Tinder users' perception that they can actively exercise control over their hookup encounters. This exercise of control, in the first instance, stems from the fact that an online conversation is one step removed from a face-to-face rendezvous. What is more, Tinder's direct messaging function prevents spontaneous sexual intimacy and gives users the opportunity to take their time to decide if and under what conditions they would like the casual sexual encounter to take place. As a recent divorcee who considers casual sex as distraction from her post-divorce

grief, Jan appreciates this relatively controlled means for initiating casual sexual encounters

compared to bars or parties:

> I can't really imagine going home from a bar or a party with someone that I didn't know. I
> feel like I'd really hate that…. I just can, kind of, only imagine it happening if I was really
> drunk or really self-destructive. And with the Tinder thing, I guess there's at least the
> illusion of having more control. So, like, I typically…when I had casual sex with Tinder,
> I didn't get drunk. Or often, sometimes, even [didn't] drink at all. And it was, like, I got
> to kind of control the where and the when, and there was a little bit of a clinical removal
> feeling where it's like I'm on my phone selecting this sexual partner, like, I get to choose.
> And so, it didn't have that feeling of out of control that I feel like it might have in real
> life.

Similar to Karen, Jan differentiates a Tinder-meditated hookup from a bar hookup as per the

opportunity for deliberately selecting her sexual partners through her smartphone. She also

emphasizes that she does not drink to the extent of intoxication before a Tinder hookup and can

negotiate "the where and the when" of the encounter through Tinder messages. As a result, she

experiences what she calls a "clinical removal feeling" that she might not have "in real life." As

with many other participants, Jan prefers initiating hookups through Tinder rather than relying on

random encounters at bars. Her and Karen's cases are illustrations that, by enabling older

emerging adults—who have been relatively distant from the peer group mode of socialization

observed on college campuses—to have casual sexual encounters in their own terms, Tinder

facilitates the emergence of a derivative hookup culture for this age group.

Whereas participants of both genders appreciate Tinder's help with interest profiling

when initiating sexual intimacy, female participants more readily pronounce the significance of

safeguarding for their overall user experience. Working in tandem, these mechanisms pave the

way for a more structured, formalized, and regulated path for hookup performances. While

formalization of hookups is cherished by the majority of my study participants, a few of them

complain that it kills the casualness of hooking up as we know it. For them, the nightlife remains

to be the primary setting for finding casual sexual partners:

> Jim: It's a lot more easier to hook up with someone at a party than at [Tinder].
>
> Interviewer: Why is that?
>
> Jim: I would say, because it's already the weekend. Like one would usually party, say like a Thursday night. I mean, that's not really the weekend but that's a thing Friday or Saturday night. And one would assume like they don't really have anything going on the next morning. So, a possible hookup is a lot more possible. Let's say, on a dating app, you probably like start talking to someone on a weekday. So, you have to plan that out. And when it comes to hooking up with someone, I would say it works out better if it's unplanned, if it's like more like, right there and then. So that's why it's a lot more probably happens a lot more often at parties than Tinder for me.

As a sophomore, Jim has been excited for having the full college experience which

includes an active involvement in the college party scene. Therefore, it is unsurprising that he

greatly enjoys the "right there and then" nature of hookups commencing at a college party. He

points out that Tinder-mediated hookups, whereby the matched users have to exchange messages

for multiple days as they plan a meetup, cannot match the spontaneity of the real-life hookup

encounters. For this reason, he regards party hookups as much more probable. In a different part

of his interview, he further mentions that he uses Tinder mostly for dating. However, these

Tinder-mediated dating performances also diverge from the conventional dating script in many

ways, as I will explicate below.

Tinder's gameful characteristics killing the casualness of hookup performances is one

exemplar of how digitalization suppresses the inherent entertaining qualities of different

consumer experiences (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013; Etkin 2016; McQuarrie et al.

2013). Much like Tinder, self-quantification devices impede consumers' intrinsic motivation to

exercise and diminish the amount of enjoyment they get from this activity (Etkin 2016). Similarly, the microcelebrity trajectory entails bloggers to structure their social media presence in ways that align with the requests of their audiences, which at times might diverge from their personal preferences (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Thus, Tinder's formalization of hookup performances, which significantly contradicts the journalistic assertions regarding the dating apocalypse (Sales 2015), is but one manifestation of the regulatory influences of the digital revolution.

Tinder's Casualization of Dating Performances

Per the play-game dialectic around which Tinder's user interface revolves, the platform's formalization of hookup performances is accompanied by its casualization of dating performances. In fact, the very same gamification principles that play a role in formalization provide a basis for casualization. Given that dating is traditionally a more courteous and ceremonial form of intimate performance (Bogle 2008), the influence of casualization becomes more pronounced for Tinder-initiated dating compared to hookup performances. Overall, casualization of dating denotes the process by which Tinder inculcates an unceremonious, easy-going mood in app-mediated intimate encounters. Detachment and toxic disinhibition are the two mechanisms through which Tinder makes dating performances more casual. Whereas detachment designates the renunciation of refined romantic dating rituals owing to the effortlessness and plenitude of Tinder-mediated intimate interactions, toxic disinhibition refers to the aggravation of discourteous and sexually suggestive behavior due to the relaxation of social norms in platform-mediated dating performances.

Detachment. Tinder's interface helps create an emotionally disengaged mode of interaction with potential partners. This mode of engagement is coherent with the hookup script which urges individuals to steer clear of emotional intimacy (Wade 2017). In contrast, the way the detachment mechanism operates is antithetical to the dating script which foregrounds expressions of tenderness and care for one's partner. Through its gamified functions and features such as the deck of cards display, swiping, scorecard of matches, and direct messaging, Tinder paves the way for emotionally detached dating performances by (1) making finding partners effortless and (2) providing an exceptionally large set of profiles for its users.

To begin with, as the standard heterosexual initiation ritual goes, men make moves on women with the goal of asking them out (Bailey 1988). As many of my male participants mention, this initial performative dialogue is an effortful and stress-ridden one since they need to actively seek for the right opportunity and be on top of their game when making romantic advances. Tinder affords a much effortless initiation ritual compared to what the dating script accommodates, since its interface design makes it easier to connect and interact with potential romantic interests. For one thing, it is a digital platform and thus the users are one step removed from the possible negative consequences of the interaction compared to a real-life situation. Additionally, the app's game design elements—including visualized profiles, deck-of-cards style catalogue, and swiping—inculcate a playful spirit to app-mediated exchanges by diminishing their formality. The mutual like and direct messaging functions—which were also instrumental in formalizing hookups—further enhance this playfulness by getting rid of the fear of rejection and unsolicited contacts. As such, finding a dating partner becomes an effortless activity that one can undertake without even leaving their apartment. David—who is by far the most experienced Tinder user in my sample with about 65 in-person Tinder dates as far as he can remember—is a

case in point. He was initially drawn to Tinder as meeting potential partners required a ton of

physical and monetary effort due to his lodging arrangements:

> Like I said, when I started [using Tinder] back in when I was in the middle of nowhere in
> the suburbs and it's hard for me to get out to bars, whereas I could just sit on my couch
> watching Netflix and be like "oh cool I just set up two dates for this week." You know,
> like, in an hour! At that point in time I was like "this is the best! This is awesome!" I was
> able to meet a lot of people really quickly.

As with David, the majority of my study participants appreciate Tinder's facilitation of meeting

potential romantic interests at an unprecedented speed from the comfort of their couches. At the

same time, several of them acknowledge that this sort of a playful approach to dating is

detrimental to cultivation of emotional bonding, given that it also makes it easy to let go of one

partner and rapidly find a replacement. Consider the case of Kevin, who started using Tinder and

other dating platforms with the objective of finding a committed, romantic relationship. More

than twenty-five attempts later, he concluded that the unparalleled convenience and accessibility

of these platforms are in fact working against his objective:

> The accessibility that these apps provide towards novelty and meeting new people shifts
> the focus away from getting to know someone long-term and putting the time and energy
> to developing an understanding of why a person is the way they are or who they really
> are or it enables you to jump from person to person. And I have been the victim of that. I
> have been in relationships enabled by dating apps that have also been destroyed by the
> person finding another person.

In sum, David and Kevin's quotes demonstrate how the ease of access Tinder's interface

provides simplifies meeting romantic partners and makes it possible to "meet a lot of people

really quickly" and "jump from person to person." These sentiments run counter to the ideal of

romantic growth by reducing the possibility of succeeding dates with a Tinder match if the initial

rendezvouses are anything less than exceptional. Thus, they contribute to the casualization of dating performances.

Besides convenience and accessibility, an emotionally detached engagement with romantic partners is further enabled by what some of my participants call "a large pool of options" that the app presents. This large pool trope readily evokes the oft-noted online consumer behavior of getting excited about the variegated product offerings and placing several of them in a digital shopping cart (on websites such as eBay), which at the end of the day may or may not lead to an actual purchase (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010a). Tinder's enlarged choice set is especially made salient via the swiping motion and deck-of-cards style catalogue, which collectively give the impression that one can never exhaust the deck. Exhibition of one's matches in a scorecard format further makes users regard their Tinder matches as dividuals (Deleuze 1992)—in other words, data points in their Tinder-centered romantic games—since it allows them to compete with their friends based on the number of matches they get on the platform. Combined with the app's direct messaging function that allows for simultaneous interaction with multiple matches in adjacent tabs, these app features are instrumental in disseminating the belief that finding committed, long-term relationships is child's play:

> Meredith: Why do I feel the need to be in a relationship with someone or have something with someone when I know that I can pick up my phone and find a hundred of them? I haven't had a boyfriend [for a while]. The guy I dated during the sophomore year was my last official boyfriend I had. So I just don't feel the need to be worried about it like "Oh my god! I'll never find someone. I don't have a boyfriend." Because I know I can find one if I wanted to like in a second. I guess my ego is up here! It might not be true, but that's what I'm thinking right now. It's actually good for me, because I don't need a relationship. It's another safety net. I don't need a relationship. I don't have to feel the need to find a relationship, because if I really want to, I could. I can swipe through a million people and find three guys that might be good for a relationship and do my own Bachelorette thing with them. I'm not going to, because I don't feel like I need to do that right now. In the future if I wanted to, I could.

Meredith's remark of "swip[ing] through a million people" showcases the salience of the large pool metaphor in her outlook on her dating life. With other users being considered dividuals in one's large pool and the human element behind the swiped profiles getting lost, Tinder's gamified interface sets in motion a mode of engagement that is distant from what the regular dating script allows. This detached mode of engagement, though, is observed among the users of other contemporary digital platforms as well. Some examples are Twitter users who harness different hashtags simply for publicizing their self-brands rather than developing collective identities (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016) and fashion bloggers who regard their followers as audience rather than community and ignore their comments and suggestions (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Furthermore, Meredith's idea of doing her own Bachelorette competition with "three guys that might be good for a relationship" is a testament that metaphors associated with gamification extend beyond app usage and become effective in shaping her future plans about a serious relationship. This casualized understanding of finding a committed partner, however, diverges from how real-life dating performances unfold and discounts the fact that emotional intimacy is cultivated over time rather than depending merely on a gamified choice process.

A variation on how the accessibility and convenience Tinder brings to dating performances refashion emerging adults' real-life romantic-sexual experiences is discernible in the following quote from David's interview. Having always been a sociable, self-confident, and talkative person, he notes that he recently started abstaining from making in-person romantic advances for the first time in his life:

> I remember thinking when I was 22-23-24. I'm going out to the bars, I want to meet women, and I'm going to go into that bar, find the most beautiful women, and I'm going to talk to her. Even if I get shot down, I'll talk to another girl. I will make it my goal. I

was kind of aggressive about it. Not aggressive, but actively trying to force myself to say things even though I was nervous. Whereas now it's taking some of that stress off. Because I've got several other girls I am kind of talking to on this app right now. It's not so much pressure. It's not that I don't have any women I am talking to. That gives you that relief that you don't have any options. You definitely have options. We talked about that bottomless pool of options. There is options out there and you don't have to go out and talk to girls at a bar.

While "that bottomless pool of options" is manifest in Meredith's passage as per the peace of mind it provides by assuring her that she can easily find a boyfriend when she wants one, it demonstrates itself as the reason why David opts out of pursuing intimate interactions in the bar scene in this latter case. Taken together, these instances evince that the accessibility, convenience, and emotionally detached mode of engagement that Tinder inculcates play a role in refashioning the romantic-sexual lives of emerging adults beyond app-mediated intimate performances. In this sense, these performances are analogous to roller derby grrrls' risqué gender performances (Thompson and Ustuner 2015). The rifts they create are not confined to their immediate performative fields; they further challenge and pave the way for reinterpreting the conventional dating or gender scripts.

To summarize, by virtue of the ease of access it affords and the allusions to an expanded choice set it invokes, Tinder paves the way for emotionally detached dating performances. Inasmuch as detachment dilutes the formal qualities of dating, it accentuates a more casualized form of this intimate performance.

Toxic disinhibition. The emotionally disengaged approach to dating is accompanied by a disinhibition of the norms of civility that one abides in real-life dating performances. While

certain dimensions of the hookup culture are specifically based on a loosened understanding of these norms (e.g., reliance on alcohol as an excuse, establishing meaninglessness after the encounter), a disinhibited attitude towards intimate interactions is incompatible with the dating script. Psychologist John Suler (2004, 321) initially coined the term (online) toxic disinhibition to describe cases where individuals "say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say and do in the face-to-face world" including "rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats" (see also Belk 2013). The Tinder version of toxic disinhibition corresponds to instances in which users (1) end interactions in abrupt and discourteous ways (i.e., ghosting, blocking, or standing up Tinder matches) and (2) exhibit sexually suggestive and misogynistic behaviors on the platform or Tinder-mediated dates.

To begin with, based on their investigation of what emerging adults understand from the term, Lefebvre and colleagues (2019) conceptualize ghosting as a one-sided relationship dissolution practice whereby one party, abruptly or gradually, ceases communication with the other in one or multiple digital mediums. While these authors' objective is establishing a broad definition of ghosting and exemplifying how it transpires across multiple online platforms, some of their participants specifically mention that ghosting has become an ordinary practice on Tinder. As indicated by one of them, "it's appropriate if you like find someone on like Tinder. You start talking for a little bit but you're not into it, you can just start ghosting them" (9). Even though there is a lack of consensus regarding what ghosting exactly entails—some arguing that it does not count as ghosting if you haven't had a face-to-face meeting yet—, nearly all my participants note instances of ghosting and having been ghosted by their Tinder matches. When recounting their own ghosting behavior, most of them immediately add that this is not how they usually behave. Take the case of Angela, one of my older respondents who started going on

Tinder dates after her rather expected divorce. Since she was not entirely sure as to what she wanted to get out of these dates, she recalls instances where she abruptly changed her mind about ongoing intimate connections:

> Angela: Like there was one guy that I, and we weren't really dating, but I just… I don't know. Like at some point, I was just like, "I don't wanna talk to him again." I didn't not like him, but it was just like, "Yeah," it's just kinda like, "I'm done with this."
>
> Interviewer: So, what did he do?
>
> Angela: He tried to contact me a couple of times and I just never responded. And then he stopped. And I shouldn't have, that's not very adult of me. That was early on in the process.

On the one hand, Angela's quote shows a mild regret for ghosting her (potential) partner which she describes as "not very adult of me." On the other hand, however, she justifies her disinhibited behavior by noting that they "weren't really dating" even though she "didn't *not like* him." It is common among Tinder users to not consider app-initiated intimacies as dating in the regular sense as per the casual spirit ignited by the app. At the same time, given the relatively large number of potential partners they meet thanks to the app's gamified interface, they find it burdensome to take the time to have a breakup talk after each unsatisfactory date. Thus, discrete Tinder-initiated intimate performances diminish in importance and ghosting becomes more acceptable. On the whole, while the traditional dating script would require one to politely let his/her partner know about her/his disinterest in having a second date, abrupt termination of communication after a hookup is not surprising as per the hookup script's establishing meaninglessness principle.

While Angela's quote demonstrates one side of the abrupt relationship dissolution coin, the other side is well-represented in online discussions about Tinder. The complaints about having been ghosted or even blocked and unmatched are abundant in Tinder subreddit and other mobile dating-related forum discussions which, in essence, are outlets for mobile daters to get unpleasant Tinder experiences off their chest and seek advice from anonymous and like-minded frequenters of dating platforms. The following Tinder subreddit post from a 29-year-old, male New Yorker exemplifies the frustration that comes with being abruptly dismissed after an enjoyable first date:

> Had a good first date with a 27F. Lots of eye contact, laughs, flowing conversations, no awkward silences. Hit her up the next day with "Thanks for coming out last night! I had a good time. Hope to go out with you again soon." She responded with "Thanks for showing me a cool new place! I had a good time too." I thought in my head it was notable that she didn't mention about wanting to meet up again. So to be sure, I asked her out for another date with specifics. Got blocked and unmatched. I understand that even if people have fun, sometimes they don't want a second date. It happens, but it would have been nice if I was told that…. Whelp. On to the next one.

In this commonplace relationship dissolution scenario, Tinder functions as an enabler as per its direct messaging function. This function allows the users to interact without exchanging phone numbers or social media accounts so that one party can simply unmatch and block the other one after the first date without dealing with the hassle of giving an explanation. Having got blocked and unmatched, the initial reaction of this Reddit user is yearning the courtesy of traditional dating script. However, as evinced by his "[o]n to the next one" remark, he acknowledges the casualization of relationship dissolution on Tinder and chooses to play along, nonetheless.

The discourteous dissolution behaviors, however, are not limited to those that take place through the platform itself. A few of my participants recall being stood up on top of being ghosted. Toby, who has signed up on multiple mobile dating apps after realizing that he is one of the few single people in his close friendship circle, is one of them. Frequenting Tinder and its counterparts predominantly for finding serious dating partners, he endures several experiences which do not align with his expectations:

> Definitely sort of a classic. We were supposed to meet up at a restaurant, grab some dinner. I showed up. 30 minutes later still just me, 40, 50, hour ends, it's like, okay, "I'm so sorry" to the waiters. I guess, well, gotta stood up. Basically messaged her being like, "Hey, I'm at the restaurant." No response. Never got a response ever again.

Since meeting at a restaurant is not part of the hookup script, being stood up is technically not an issue in hookup performances. However, as per its invocation of a carefree mode of engagement with one's romantic-sexual partner, this disinhibited behavior aligns with the overall spirit of this form of intimacy. Thus, Toby's case is another illustration of how the casualness of the hookup script infiltrates into the dating performances commenced through Tinder. Again, users' reliance on Tinder's direct messaging function plays a role in this infiltration as it contributes to the prevalence of ghosting, standing up, and similar disinhibited behavior. Given that the app interface is more amenable to simply ignoring or blocking matched users compared to other communication mediums, it becomes susceptible to disinhibited behavior.

Another form of toxic disinhibition that abound on Tinder is sexually suggestive behavior (Hess and Flores 2018; Gillet 2018; Thompson 2018). The ease of meeting ever-new potential partners and the concomitant decrease in the importance of each match make it easier for Tinder users to engage in such behavior. Making sexual advances early on might expedite getting

sexually intimate with a Tinder match. If this approach fails and turns off this particular Tinder match, then the user can simply go back to the "bottomless pool of options." As such, both male and female participants report receiving sexually forward messages. There are also cases of being exposed to their Tinder matches' sexual advances after meeting them in person, which are at times reciprocated depending on the receiving party's intentions:

> David: There is definitely women who meet you and you can tell they are all over you. Some women are really forward. "Hey, where is your place at? Why don't we go get drinks at your place?" "Okay, I know where this is going. I'm cool with that" (laughing).

However, female participants add that some of the messages they receive also include misogynistic and objectifying elements on top of being sexually forward. To illustrate, during our interview, Karen showed me the following first message she got from a new match: "Hey, fat bitch, you wanna squeeze some man-meat?" While sexual suggestiveness and objectification of (especially women's) bodies are staples of the hookup culture (Bogle 2008; Wade 2017), Tinder further enables their infiltration into app-mediated dating performances (see Hess and Flores 2018). Kelly, who vocally pronounces her dislike of casual sexual encounters, recounts instances where she was misled to believe that her Tinder matches were interested primarily in getting to know her, whereas their intentions turned out to be otherwise once they were on a date:

> Yeah, I think with Tinder, I think just like, just going back to that whole aspect of like how forward guys were. So it was like oftentimes it came across as more of like creepy or gross. So I think that factor was definitely there, like, "Wait, why am I doing this?" almost in a way. Or like, it's not "Why am I?" I think it was more like, "I can't believe this sort of people exist," you know, sort of thing. But, and yeah, I think there was like maybe one or two people I met up with that were, and there's two people that I met up with that had a very, you know, strong intention for one thing and it's just like, "Okay, back off!" sort of thing.

Other participants report similar cases of unexpectedly being subject to gendered displays of sexual suggestiveness on Tinder-initiated encounters. While such disinhibited behavior contradicts with the traditional dating script, it becomes part of Tinder-mediated dating performances to an increasing extent. In this respect, these intimate performances diverge from roller derby participants' unorthodox gender performances (Thompson and Ustuner 2015). While the latter become complicit in reproducing orthodox gender norms in certain ways (in no small part through emplacing the female body as a spectacle in front of an audience), they also expand the possibilities for embodied resistance by juxtaposing gendered discourses and practices that are thought to be mutually exclusive such as overt erotic femininity, physical aggression, and foul language. Thus, they resignify longstanding normative gender roles as much as they reproduce them. In contrast, Tinder's toleration of sexually suggestive and objectifying messages (and related practices) that are predominantly directed towards women makes this performative platform a hostage to such anachronistic gendered power structures.

While Tinder has been for the most part derelict in addressing the issues of sexism, misogynism, and sexual objectification of women in its platform, its main competitor Bumble was strictly built with the idea of women empowerment through eliminating toxic masculine messages and providing a safe space for women seeking romantic or sexual intimacy. Starting from its launch in 2014, Bumble's brand image was based on the person-brand of its founder Whitney Wolfe who herself has been recognized as a prominent figure advocating equal opportunity for women in tech industry. The following excerpt from a *New York Times* article titled *With Her Dating App, Women Are in Control* demonstrates her account of what Bumble as a platform strives to accomplish (Bennett 2017):

"I think everyone in this room has had terrible dating experiences or been in an emotionally unhealthy relationship," Ms. Wolfe said carefully…. "But I've thought long and hard about this," she added, "and I think a lot of the dysfunction around dating has to do with men having the control. So how do we put more control in women's hands?"

A walkthrough analysis of Bumble's user interface further showcases how the app strategically differentiates itself from Tinder through its unique functions and features. Most prominently, when two users match on Bumble, the app allows women and women only to send the initial message. If they do not make the first move within twenty-four hours, the app automatically unmatches the users (see Figure 10). While the app claims that this feature will help fend off "unwanted messages," most of the mobile daters regard this claim merely as lip service.
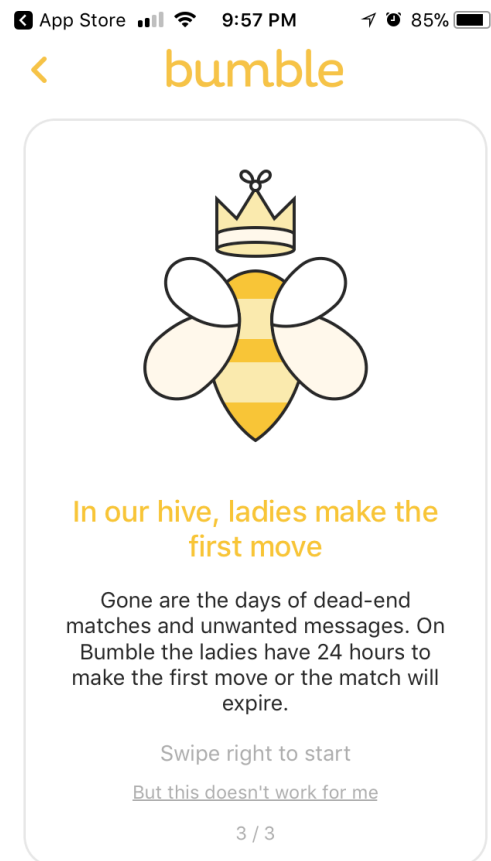
Figure 10: Bumble giving women priority to initiate conversations

To clarify, Bumble does not distance itself from hookup culture and welcomes a broad spectrum of users seeking casual sex, committed relationships, or simply entertainment (Sumter et al. 2017; Ward 2017). Moreover, its user interface features most of the gamified elements—such as visualized profiles, swiping, scorecard of matches, mutual like, and direct messaging—that readily evoke Tinder. Therefore, except for insistent communication of its key principles of kindness, empowerment and respect and a few app design tweaks that ostensibly alleviate sexually suggestive and misogynistic behavior, Bumble's user interface and its operating logic are not all that different from Tinder's. However, the app has been rather successful in attracting a relatively more equality-minded clientele as per its distinguishing reputation of being the "feminist Tinder," as also acknowledged by a few of my study participants who self-selected into the app after their frustrations with Tinder. Thus, while Tinder stands out as the epitome of how gamification casualizes dating performances, Bumble—which is the second most popular mobile dating app as of September 2019 (see Figure 3)—also contributes to this casualization, though to a lesser extent.

All in all, by foregrounding an emotionally detached and disinhibited mode of dating, Tinder cultivates a casual understanding of this intimate performance that in several ways evoke the hookup script. This unceremonious, playful, and versatile approach to dating performances fits squarely with middle-class emerging adults' penchant for experimentation in different spheres of their lives (Arnett 2015; Weinberger et al. 2017). None of my study participants—including Jim who recently stepped into the hookup culture as a sophomore-year college student; Meredith who is in the process of transitioning to a fast-paced, time-constrained lifestyle as a new college grad; or David who has had great success in initiating casual sexual encounters through Tinder thanks to his sociability, self-confidence, and good looks—discount the

possibility of starting a committed, long-term dating relationship with someone they met through Tinder. In fact, dating for them is a type of experience (just like being an active participant of the hookup culture) that one must have as much as possible before transitioning into full-fledged adulthood. However, with their flexible and time-constrained lives which are filled with changing jobs (and careers), moving cities (and countries), and seeking variety and novelty (Weinberger et al. 2017); abiding by the rules of the conventional dating script and being in steady relationships that are fundamentally play-marriages (Bailey 1988) are not ideal for these young individuals. Tinder's casualization of dating performances allows them to experience dating in their own terms, without the rigidities of this now-old-fashioned intimate performance.

Hybridization of Dating and Hookup Scripts

By virtue of the detachment and disinhibition mechanisms, Tinder becomes an ideal medium for individuals looking to go on dates without getting entangled in the norms and expectations pertaining to the classical dating script. At the same time, by virtue of the interest profiling and safeguarding mechanisms, it accommodates the romantic-sexual projects of individuals looking for sexual intimacy in a more controlled and regulated manner compared to the carefreeness of the hookup script. At the end of the day, by simultaneously enabling a formalized style of hooking up and a casualized style of dating, Tinder blurs the symbolic boundaries between these two intimate performances and paves the way for date-like hookups and hookup-like dates. Accordingly, as a commercial introductory service, it is associated with both dating and hooking up. This is evident in the categorical ambiguity of this digital platform in both academic and journalistic accounts. In contrast to online dating websites which are mainly recognized as conduits for romantic dating as their name suggests (Heino et al. 2010;

Maclaran et al. 2005; Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012); Tinder and its counterparts have been

interchangeably referred to as mobile dating and/or hookup apps (David and Cambre 2016;

Hobbs et al. 2017; Lefebvre 2018; MacLeod and McArthur 2019). Speaking from experience,

my study participants also acknowledge this categorical ambiguity. Michael suggests that "I

think Tinder is everything now. It used to be hookup focused. It used to be a little more around

that. But now it's just so popular that it's a little bit of everything." This "a little bit of

everything" ethos which makes it impractical to draw boundaries between Tinder-mediated dates

and hookups is further echoed in the following Tinder subreddit post:

> "There are three main reasons people use tinder.
>
> 1. As a hookup app
>
> 2. For entertainment
>
> 3. For a relationship
>
> *Or any combination of those*" (emphasis added).

When subscribers see Tinder-mediated interactions as a combination of dating, hooking

up, and entertainment, what several of my participants call "Tinder dates" turn into ambiguous

intimate performances that are neither dates nor hookups in the classical sense. In most Tinder

dates, the parties cannot be certain as to whether the encounter will lead to casual sex, a possible

committed relationship down the road, or something in between:

> David: So it's so convenient to have something like this. It takes care of that yes or no
> physical attraction right off the bat and you know both people are looking at opportunities
> with the opposite sex. You don't know quite yet maybe if it is a serious thing or if it is
> more of a casual thing. But at least you know they think you are attractive and they want
> to know more about you. And then you can set up a meeting to talk in person. So, for me,
> I think that's ideal.

As David suggests, while Tinder enables individuals to meet at the common denominator of finding each other attractive, it is usually (intentionally) left unclear what the ensuing Tinder dates entail. These intimate encounters, on the one hand, bear resemblance to leisurely dates whereby the couple goes to a restaurant or a bar with the intention of getting to know each other (Illouz 1997). The couple, therefore, spends private time together and has a face-to-face conversation. On the other hand, they also draw from the hookup script. Tinder daters frequently report resorting to alcohol as a social lubricant and it is not uncommon for them to get sexually intimate without developing an emotional connection first. During the rendezvous, they gauge their partner's as well as their own intentions and make negotiations to see if they can arrive at a mutual understanding.

However, as per the ambivalence of Tinder-mediated intimate performances, individuals' intentions might also change during the course of a Tinder date, complicating the trajectory of their interaction even further. In a comparative study of interactional practices of gay male Grindr users and heterosexual Tinder users in Paris, Licoppe (2020) finds that the former group frequent the app almost entirely for casual sex, and thereby, in-person meetups are expected to take place at one of the user's home. In contrast, Tinder users, even if their primary plan in to have casual sex, prefer meeting at a café or bar. Moreover, most of these Tinder-mediated meetups are arranged right before dinner time in order to leave the door open for turning the encounter into a dinner date if both parties enjoy each other's company. In line with these findings, my participants' accounts further demonstrate that this ambivalence requires Tinder daters to constantly read social cues and renegotiate their mutual understanding at each step of

their encounter. The following quote from Jan illustrates a series of negotiations whereby she

and her Tinder date switch back and forth between dating and hookup scripts:

> Jan: And I also went on a date with this guy. It was like a really nice date. We had fun. We like got drinks, and we got dinner, and we went on a walk. And he came back to my place and we drank wine and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then like we had sex, and then he kept on being like, "You're not going to one night stand me, are you? Like, are you just looking for a hookup? You're not going to one night stand me, are you?" It's like, "No, I like you, we'll hang out." And then he stopped talking to me. So I don't know, which I was like, "What?" I was kind of confused by that.

The rendezvous starts with an evening-out which resembles a proper date with the couple

spending private time at a commercial establishment. It continues with the couple going to Jan's

place and getting sexually intimate while intoxicated, invoking the hookup script. Then, it reverts

back to the initial scenario with her partner's insistent expressions of his romantic interest and

expectation of future dates. Finally, it comes to an end with him unilaterally ceasing

communication in a disinhibited manner. This performative interaction, in the first instance,

could be interpreted as a sequence of boundary violations as the couple transgresses the

prescribed sequence of events and the concomitant normative structures of both dating and

hookup scripts in each respective step. However, as illustrated by the abovementioned Reddit

user's realization that Tinder is used for "any combination of" dating, hooking up, and

entertainment, David's acknowledgement that he doesn't "know quite yet maybe if it is a serious

thing or if it is more of a casual thing" before a Tinder date, and Licoppe's observation (2020)

that Tinder users opt for keeping the possibility of a dinner date open even if their initial plan is

hooking up, Tinder-mediated intimate performances do not strictly stick to dating or hookup

scripts. They rather follow a hybridized performative script that draws from both of these

conventional scripts.

While gamification is the catalyzing force behind Tinder's hybridization of dating and hookup scripts, other apparatuses of digitalization have also been effective in hybridizing different cultural logics. Microcelebrities' navigation of the boundaries between audience and community logics is a case in point. McQuarrie and colleagues (2013) reveal that as fashion bloggers augment their online brand images, they change their attitude towards followers and start seeing them as fans rather than peers. Nonetheless, in order not to lose their following, they resort to practices of misrecognition and re-cultivate the community feel by emphasizing the "mundane and ordinary aspects of their lives that downplay the glamour and rarity of being a fashion insider" and sharing self-deprecatory posts about their physical appearance, vices, and embarrassing stories. In the same vein, Senft (2013, 350) notes that microcelebrity practices "blend audiences and communities, two groups traditionally requiring different modes of address. Audiences desire someone to speak *at* them; communities desire someone to speak *with* them" (emphasis in original). As such, in parallel with Tinder-mediated, hybridized intimate performances; the performative interactions between microcelebrities and their followers draw from both audience and community logics.

To reiterate, this section dealt with the question of how gamification—as an apparatus of digitalization—transforms dating and hookup performances in the context of Tinder. My analysis has shown that Tinder's gamified interface inculcates a playful, serendipitous, and carefree spirit and prescribes a set of rules, objectives, and boundaries for app-mediated performative interactions at once. As it hinges on this play-game dialectic, Tinder subsequently has formalizing and casualizing effects on intimate performances. On the one hand, it formalizes the conventionally more casual hookup performances by providing an online starting point for individuals to declare their interest to potential partners at no social cost (i.e., interest profiling)

and instilling a sense of control over the conditions of the intimate performance (i.e., safeguarding). On the other hand, it casualizes the historically more formal dating performances by helping diminish the long-established ceremonial rituals that accompany real-life dating performances (i.e., detachment) and allowing for the exacerbation of misogynistic, sexually suggestive and objectifying behavior on and beyond its gamified platform (i.e., toxic disinhibition). Together, formalization of hookup performances and casualization of dating performances give rise to the emergence of a new hybridized script that draws from both dating and hookup scripts. As Tinder-mediated intimate performances follow this nascent performative script, each Tinder date becomes ambiguous and the partners need to gauge each other's (and their own) intentions and constantly negotiate as to whether their rendezvous will lead to casual sex or subsequent dates. Under these circumstances, how consumers navigate these hybridized intimate performances becomes a significant question, which will be addressed in the next section.

HOW CONSUMERS NAVIGATE TINDER-MEDIATED HYBRID INTIMATE PERFORMANCES

The growing ascendancy of Tinder-mediated intimate performances necessitates consumers to attain a new set of competencies as they navigate this altered performative field. Since Tinder's hybridized performative script intermixes different cultural dimensions of the already existing dating and hookup scripts, these competencies are not entirely novel. On the one hand, they involve modified and reformatted versions of competencies that were crucial for successfully navigating dating and hookup performances even before Tinder. In addition to these, they also include newfound competencies that specifically came into prominence with Tinder's refashioning of intimate performances.

Through my data analysis, I identified four interrelated competencies that are pivotal for navigating Tinder-mediated hybrid performances—namely, (1) Tinderized displays of economic and cultural capital, (2) Tinderized displays of sexual capital, (3) mobile social media savviness, and (4) code-switching capabilities pertaining to dating and hookup scripts. The first two denote the forms of capital that have always been necessary for one's success in her/his romantic-sexual life, enhanced with the capability of translating these into relevant digitalized displays. The latter two, on the other hand, are capabilities that recently gained significance as per their roles in managing the digitalized and hybridized performative field of intimacy. In the next subsections, I will detail these four competencies in turn.

Tinderized Displays of Economic and Cultural Capital

Despite being mostly neglected by early CCT researchers who theorized market-mediated performances as demarcated, liminal events; most market-mediated performances are embedded within social hierarchies and concomitant power dynamics that structure consumers' everyday lives (Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Ustuner and Thompson 2012). The Bourdieusian concepts of economic capital (i.e., one's wealth and financial resources) and cultural capital (i.e., "knowledge and skills that are acquired through one's primary socialization as a child and young adult—via family, educational institutions, peer groups, and media— and secondary socialization through latter life experiences and personal pursuits" [Henry and Caldwell 2018, 160]) are among such structuring factors. Ustuner and Thompson's analysis (2012) of the performative interactions between hairdressers and their elite customers—which respectively hail from working class and middle- to upper middle-class backgrounds—lays out how economic and cultural capital shape these market-mediated performances (see also Van Marrewijk and Broos 2012). The performative script governing these interactions involves multiple displays of differentiation between the low economic capital, low cultural capital service providers and their high economic capital, high cultural capital clientele, and thereby, is replete with examples of symbolic violence. Capital differences are also manifest in Tinder-mediated intimate performances—though in a slightly different fashion.

As explicated in my historical overview, economic and cultural capital have been among the key determinants of one's prospects in his/her romantic-sexual life (see also Laumann et al. 2004). In the calling era, compatibility assessments were based on potential partners' financial resources and their position within the social strata (Illouz 2012). From its very emergence, the market-mediated performance of dating has been considered as an exchange relation,

accentuating men's ability to afford and organize lavish yet tasteful dates in restaurants, dance clubs, and movie theaters (Bailey 1988; Belk and Coon 1993; Illouz 1997). In the proceeding dating and hookup eras—the going steady complex, rise of commercial matchmaking services, and college hookup culture—as well, having a sufficient amount of economic resources and valued cultural experiences and identity pursuits gives individuals competitive advantage in their romantic-sexual lives. Tinder-mediated intimate performances are no different. Inasmuch as economic and cultural capital are important, mastering how they are best translated and communicated through the app's gamified interface also becomes crucial.

To begin with, one of Tinder's key premises is to match geographically proximate users in real time. For this purpose, the app harnesses GPS technologies to detect the location coordinates of its active users. Leaning on this mobile media affordance (Schrock 2015), it constructs a customized catalogue of profiles of available users from within the perimeter specified by the user. The majority of my study participants report choosing a 1- to 5-mile radius. While the convenience of going on an impromptu date without spending a whole lot of time for transportation appears to be the major reason, this preference paves the way for a greater number of dates among individuals coming from similar residential areas and hence similar economic and cultural backgrounds (Laumann et al. 2004). As such, contrary to several of my respondents' assertions that they have met and dated people with whom they would not normally cross paths in real life; Tinder, in the aggregate, results in a greater rather than lower degree of homophily— i.e., "the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001, 416)—by matching individuals from the same neighborhoods.

However, some profiles from "the wrong neighborhood" occasionally seep through the perimeter filter. When that happens, economic and cultural capital differences manifest themselves in yet other ways. In Tinder's gamified interface, it is crucial for users to display their economic and cultural capital in ways that fit into the app's visualized profile format and make them stand out in the app's deck of cards style catalogue. After familiarizing themselves with the app's operating logic, many users learn how to read into the basic information and mix of images presented in their potential matches' profiles. Consider the following excerpt from Meredith's interview. As she swipes left (i.e., "Nope") on a Tinder profile, she explains why she does not consider the profile owner as a compatible match:

> Meredith: (looking at the profile) Goes to [lower-ranked college], I don't like that.
>
> Interviewer: What's wrong with that?
>
> Meredith: I'm not so picky about where you go to school. I'm sorry but if you went to [lower-ranked college], I think people at [her own college] may potentially have the potential for a better job in the future.

Noticing that the profile owner attends a lower-ranked university compared to hers, Meredith makes inferences about his relative level of economic and cultural capital. As a form of institutionalized cultural capital, college education is a significant aspect of one's primary socialization. As Meredith mentions, it also translates into economic capital by paving the way for better (or worse) job prospects. It is important to note that as Meredith along with many other participants pronounce their desire to get to know their partners even when they are mainly looking for casual sex, economic and cultural capital considerations are prevalent in not only dating but also hookup performances.

While Meredith's quote showcases how a single line of verbal information becomes a deciding factor for swiping left or right, users also become proficient in reading visual cues in

Tinder profiles. These cues play a part in gauging one's stock economic and/or cultural capital.

Consider the following comments from David right after our swiping session:

> When we just [swiped] right now, the photo I paused on the longest was probably the one with handlebars in front of the lake. I've never seen a photo like that on Tinder. It was more of an artistic photo. It really didn't even show her. It just showed the handlebars by the lake. But for her it showed "I like to bike, and I like lakes." That's why she probably chose that photo. I'm more likely to swipe on her because she is unique, and I like unique women. Maybe some guys don't. Maybe they are like "what the hell is this photo?" Usually it is all picture of their face, pictures with their girlfriends, out at a bar, out at a wedding. You can quickly then swipe because the only variation is their features.

As David explains, most Tinder profiles are quite generic: "picture of their face, pictures with their girlfriends [or guy friends for men], out at a bar, out at a wedding." Under these circumstances, rapidly picking up on differentiating visual cues becomes an important skill for the average Tinder user. As such, the "artistic photo" which communicated the profile owner's leisure interests without even showing her attracted David's attention by signaling a particular level of cultural capital. Taking the point of view of the profile owner, it is also an important skill to be able to emplace visual cues in your profile which would be picked up by individuals with similar levels of economic and cultural capital.

To conclude, while economic and cultural capital remain deciding factors for navigating intimate performances, the way they are initially signaled is reshaped in Tinder's user interface. On top of having a sufficient stock of these competencies, a Tinder user needs to be able to transmit (and interpret) them via his/her radius selection, and verbal and visual cues integrated in her/his and potential partners' profiles.

Tinderized Displays of Sexual Capital

Apart from economic and cultural capital, sexual capital is—rather expectedly—another competency that is instrumental in navigating intimate performances. According to Green's sexual fields framework (2008), there are three intersecting pillars of sexual capital: (1) bodily and facial appearance; (2) body language and expressions of masculinity and femininity; and (3) sartorial style (see Green 2012 for a detailed discussion of how sexual capital differs from Hakim's conception of erotic capital [2010]). An important characteristic of sexual capital that Green forcefully emphasizes—which is rather amiss in the conception of erotic capital—is its field dependence. In Green's (2014) words, "[a] sexual field emerges when a subset of actors with potential romantic or sexual interest orient themselves toward one another according to a logic of desirability imminent to their collective relations" (26), and thus, sexual capital "must be considered, in part, a property of a field rather than a property of an individual" (49). Accordingly, what is considered a sexually desirable quality in one field may not be treasured in a different field. Insofar as the structures of race, ethnicity, religion, class, and age determine the currency of sexual capital; there are striking differences among sexual fields (Ellingson et al. 2004).

Since Tinder is the most popular and thereby mainstream mobile dating app, the sexual field constituted by Tinder-mediated intimate performances follows the hegemonic sexual desirability norms that prevail in the geo-social contexts it is used. Given that my participant sample mimics the demographic characteristics of the average American Tinder user; a Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual emerging adult understanding of attractiveness governs what counts as sexually desirable displays of appearance, gestural repertoire, and clothing style

on the platform. The following conversation from Meredith's swiping session demonstrates the physical characteristics that she finds attractive:

> Interviewer: What do you look for in a potential match?
>
> Meredith: Essentially if I know they are ugly, [looking at the first picture of a profile] this guy, I'm not into him immediately. Not interested [swipes left]. This guy [another profile] looks like a baby, that's a no [swipes left] …. Looks tall. He is tall, 6 foot 6. Okay, so this looks good. He is a year younger than me though, so we'll see. Uh, this guy is actually attractive [swipes right].

Focusing mainly on bodily and facial appearance (and expressions of masculinity by implication), this vignette is one illustration of what markers of sexual capital attract a college-going female emerging adult's interest on Tinder. For Meredith, having a handsome face with the right blend of masculine features ("looks like a baby, that's a no") and a tall physique are important. Despite her initial hesitation to swipe right on the third profile owing to their age difference, the profile owner's aggregate sexual capital makes her err on the side of giving him a shot. Thus, the constricting effect of the age structure is lifted as per the compensatory effect of the high stock of sexual capital for this one case. Moreover, note that Meredith first realizes her potential match's tall physique by glancing at the first picture ("Looks tall"). Later when she reads the bio, she finds out that he is 6' 6''. Given the importance of one's—especially men's—height in swiping decisions, it is quite common for users to declare how tall they are in their profile. David explains:

> I put my height in there because I think women are interested. They want to know if you are taller than them and they want to know if it's going to be really awkwardly different. If she is 5'0'' I'm going to be a foot and a half taller than her.

While Tinder remains the digital dating platform with the greatest number of subscribers, the paramountcy of a Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual currency of sexual capital is far from

ideal for a great number of consumers interested in mobile dating. The field dependence of

sexual capital amounts to differential understandings of sexual desirability among individuals

coming from different racial, ethnic, and/or religious communities as well as sexual orientations

(Laumann et al. 2004; Green 2014). Relatedly, following Tinder's success with a mainstream

audience in the US, manifold niche dating apps catering to different communities with relatively

homogenous conceptions of sexual desirability emerged over time. Several of my study

participants acknowledge using some of these apps in tandem with Tinder as per the latter's

shortcomings in properly accommodating what they consider to be sexually desirable. As a

bicurious woman who signed up on Tinder after her divorce, Jan realized early on that the

platform is geared predominantly towards heterosexual intimate performances, and so, she was

uncomfortable with putting on a display of herself that would be better aligned with the sexual

desirability norms of women who have sex with women. While she still uses Tinder for meeting

men, she has also signed up on Her—a mobile dating app for lesbian, queer, bisexual and

bicurious women and non-binary people—where what is regarded as high sexual capital in terms

of bodily and facial appearance, gender expressions, and attire are markedly different than

Tinder. Similarly, besides Tinder, Kelly frequents DilMil—the leading South Asian mobile

dating app—where her Indian cultural heritage grants her relatively higher sexual capital. Ryan

and Roy as well have active JSwipe accounts which gives them the opportunity to meet women

whose understandings of sexual desirability are also shaped by their immersion in the Jewish

community.

     To sum up, as with economic and cultural capital, sexual capital remains a determining

factor of one's success in the romantic-sexual field that is penetrated by mobile dating apps.

While Tinder-mediated digital presentations of sexual capital hinge on a white, middle-class,

heterosexual understanding of bodily aesthetics, gendered gesticulation, and fashion style; consumers that hail from distinct backgrounds and orientations moderate their reliance on Tinder for seeking emotional or sexual intimacy and may turn to other platforms which better accommodate their conceptions of sexual appeal.

Mobile Social Media Savviness

Having a seamless Tinder experience, in the first instance, depends on the user's ability to stand out among hundreds of other cards in the deck. For this reason, constructing an online self-brand and curating an eye-catching profile stand out as pivotal aspects of navigating Tinder-mediated intimate performances. Within Tinder's performative field, all users practice micro-celebrity and compete for their share of attention, right swipes, and messages (Senft 2013; Marwick 2013).

Like many other mobile social media platforms, Tinder's user interface is predominantly based on images (i.e., multimediality) (Schrock 2015). Consequently, creating an attention-grabbing profile depends to a great extent on having a grasp of the visual aesthetics and concomitant unwritten conventions of this medium. In fact, Tinder subreddit has a specialized discussion thread where app users share their profiles and seek advice from each other regarding which photos to keep/drop and how to order them, how to improve short bios, and which pieces of information to highlight. The following excerpt is taken from a conversation where the poster replies to one such advice request:

> 21f here. As the last poster alluded too as well, you're pretty hot and Tinder is mostly
> centered around looks so you're honestly in pretty good shape no matter what you do. I

would definitely focus on writing a good bio as your main concern but you seem to want feedback on your pics so here's some detailed thoughts:

Link one: Pic 1: okay but not the best Pic 2/8: it's on the weird side and you look a bit short Pic 3: Definitely the cutest pic, I would consider even breaking the multiple faces rule to put this first. You could also block if your friends face with an emoji. Pic 4/9: poor quality and again makes you look a bit short Pic 5: very grainy Pic 6: good Pic 7: good

A striking point in this excerpt is the reference to the "multiple faces rule," which is among the unwritten conventions that every Tinder user must know. According to this rule, the first picture of a profile (which is the only visible image when a user quickly swipes through the deck) should involve the profile owner and the profile owner only. If the profile owner wants to include pictures involving friends or family members ("multiple faces") in the mix, these should be accessible only after the swiper can precisely identify who the profile owner is (i.e., the fourth, fifth, or sixth picture of the mix). This rule of thumb is important as most swipers make a decision to swipe left or right directly after engaging with the first picture. In many cases—which I have also observed during the swiping sessions with my respondents—an ambiguous first picture where the profile owner cannot be easily detected among other faces is enough reason for being eliminated in Tinder's bottomless pool of options.

Other unrecorded rules include keeping the bio concise so as not to bore potential matches with too many details and yet provide sufficient material for initiating a conversation, and selecting a variegated mix of pictures involving different camera shots and angles (e.g., closeup or selfie, medium shot, long shot) and featuring the user engaging in different leisure activities. Beyond abiding by the aesthetic and communicative conventions of the platform, the competence in curating a profile is also instrumental in converting one's economic, cultural, and sexual capital into a Tinderized format. As explicated above, this conversion is key to one's

success in navigating app-mediated intimate performances by attracting (and matching with) the desired profile of people.

Nonetheless, satisfactory outcomes on the app are not predicated solely on curating an outstanding Tinder profile. They rather require an overall mobile social media savviness, which further entails a knowhow of and presence in other mobile social media applications that follow a similar visualized self-branding logic. Two such prominent platforms are Instagram (Marwick 2015) and Snapchat (Bayer et al. 2016). For one thing, by granting its users the opportunity to link their Instagram accounts into their profiles, Tinder allows swipers to view an assortment of preselected Instagram pictures without leaving the platform. Several of my participants use this feature so that they can embed more pictures in their profile. This proves especially useful when swipers who are still indecisive to swipe left or right refer to these Instagram pictures as a last resort, which I witnessed multiple times during the swiping sessions with my participants.

Furthermore, Instagram and Snapchat stand out as platforms through which most Tinder users are comfortable connecting with each other. This stems from these platforms' similarities to Tinder: They are highly visualized, and they feature minimal textual information about the profile owner. Therefore, it is quite common among Tinder matches to switch to one of these mediums once they feel like they are hitting it off. For Andy, connecting through Snapchat is a means for getting to know his Tinder matches better:

> Most of the time I'll just get their Snapchat, because I feel, and a lot of people kind of feel the same way I guess at our age, that getting someone's Snapchat is [more] subtle, like, you don't have someone's phone number, right?.... So having Snapchat, it's subtle, and also if you like Snapchat picture messaging back and forth, you kind of get a feel for what a person looks like off social media.

A major reason why Snapchat is preferred by mobile daters is that its profiles involve minimal amounts of personal information. Thus, as Andy explains, Snapchat interactions are more "subtle" compared to having someone's phone number or connecting through Facebook, both of which make it easier to access a good amount of personal information and pushing for maintaining contact even when the other party does not feel like it. In this sense, Snapchat's impersonal nature and the sense of control it creates align with Tinder's safeguarding mechanism. Furthermore, since Snapchat is a medium for "picture messaging" with minimal verbal communication, its operating logic and communicative conventions are also in line with that of Tinder. Thus, as mobile social media platforms widely used by US emerging adults (67% and 62% of 18- to 29-year-olds respectively [Perrin and Anderson 2019]), Snapchat and Instagram also turn into venues that Tinder couples connect through. This being the case, being active on these platforms provides an additional competitive advantage for Tinder users.

To sum up, mobile social media savviness is another key competence for successfully navigating Tinder-mediated intimate performances. It entails not only the capability to curate a noteworthy profile in line with the visual aesthetics and unwritten conventions of Tinder but also proficiency with and active participation in similar, highly visualized mobile social media platforms. Failure to possess these skills may result in subpar experiences within the Tinder-centered performative romantic-sexual field.

Code-Switching Between Dating and Hookup Scripts

In linguistics, code-switching denotes the practice of alternating between two or more languages during the course of a single conversation (Auer 1998). In her ethnographic study of

the consumption patterns of a Haitian American family, Oswald (1999) utilizes this concept to illuminate how immigrant consumers switch between multiple cultural identities. She notes that code-switching is manifest not only in their rather effortless transition from one language to another but also in their everyday consumption practices such as food preparation and clothing. In the context of Tinder-mediated intimate performances, we observe a parallel case of code-switching due to the hybridization of dating and hookup scripts. As illustrated by Jan's recounting of her turbulent Tinder date (quoted on page 75), consumers adroitly alternate between these two performative scripts as they strive to gauge whether their encounter will lead to a hookup experience or turn into a more serious dating relationship. Since this ambivalence whereby partners continually weigh their options is the prevalent ethos in Tinder's performative field, code-switching is a necessary skill in navigating the hybridized intimate performances. The following quote from Karen captures this ambivalence and highlights the importance of code-switching in Tinder-mediated encounters:

> I like just letting things go where they're gonna go, like, just let it. Don't go into something with too high of expectations…. So it could be, you meet, even though they're not maybe that interesting or whatever, you still have kind of a connection or whatever, say, you hook up with them and that's cool. But you know, if it just seems platonic, then that's cool.… I'm not gonna be like, "Oh my gosh, I have to be in a relationship right now." But, you know, if something happens, it happens.

As Karen explains, "having too high of expectations" from a Tinder date is likely to disappoint. A Tinder date should rather be thought as a gateway to a number of possibilities ranging from a casual sexual encounter to an affectionate relationship. In line with the "letting things go where they're gonna go" attitude, individuals should be observant and ready to code-switch between dating and hookup scripts in each step of their rendezvous.

As per the app's hybridized performative script, code-switching has become a particularly important competence for Tinder users. Since many other mobile dating apps followed Tinder's lead and integrated elements of gamification into their user interfaces, code-switching has further become a staple of the broader mobile dating culture. This constitutes a point of contrast to online dating websites. These early generation digital dating platforms were designed primarily for relationship-minded consumers who are more compliant with the dating script. Thus, code-switching does not stand out as a treasured practice that would help these consumers succeed in online-initiated dating performances.

However, even among Tinder subscribers, code-switching is not a practice that everyone can easily get accustomed to. For individuals who are not willing to abide by the rules of Tinder's hybridized performative script, confusion with the principles that guide app-mediated intimate performances turns into resentment over time. Holly's brief tenure on Tinder is a case in point. Having signed up on Tinder and Bumble shortly after her divorce, Holly ventured into the world of dating after a decade-long hiatus. Nevertheless, her disappointment with the ambiguity of Tinder and Bumble dates, where she had a hard time trying to read the intentions of her partners, led her to take a rather radical decision soon after. Getting disillusioned by the contemporary app-mediated dating culture, she decided to quit dating altogether at the age of thirty-five, after going on seven mobile-mediated dates only. This decision, however, is not entirely unwarranted. With a growing proportion of active daters over the age of thirty turning to mobile instead of online dating (Anderson et al. 2020; Smith 2016)—including my study participants Kevin, Phyliss, and Angela besides Holly—, it is well-reasoned to expect that code-switching will infiltrate beyond app-mediated encounters and become a more widespread practice within the broader romantic-sexual field over time.

Under these circumstances, it did not take long before a market-mediated solution emerged. Consumers unsatisfied with the hybridization of dating and hookup performances contributed to the emergence of relationship-oriented mobile dating apps which took an anti-hook up stance. Hinge—"the dating app designed to be deleted"—has been the pioneering platform to seize this opportunity. Having started with a Tinder-like, gamified interface design in 2012; Hinge launched a major rebranding campaign in 2016 after the publicization of the *Vanity Fair* article "Tinder and the Dawn of the "Dating Apocalypse"" (Sales 2015). Blaming gamification for the aggravation of a dehumanizing hookup culture, the company declared on its official blog that "Swiping is an addictive game designed to keep you single. Hinge isn't playing anymore" (Hinge 2016, para. 1) and modified their app design accordingly. In a *Washington Post* interview (Markowitz 2017), the app founder and CEO Justin McLeod explains how this new brand philosophy is reflected in the renewed interface design:

> "It's not authentic to just swipe right on someone's face. I have no idea whether you're swiping right on everyone, or if you're really thoughtful. The new Hinge interface [which replaces swiping with a system that lets users comment on photos and profile essays] adds cognitive load that forces me to think: What do I like about this person and what do I want to say about it? That's a signal to me that this person actually cares and is interested."

Even though this rebranding strategy is a frontal attack that condemns all things Tinder, Hinge's deployment of the affordances of mobile media casts doubt on the extent to which it is really different. However, its elimination of swiping and matching and emphasis on starting a genuine conversation by commenting on photos and mini-essays give this app a more online-dating vibe. As such, Hinge has become an ideal platform for emerging adults who do not prefer the old-school questionnaire-driven matchmaking platforms and yet are not comfortable with Tinder's

hybridization of dating and hookup performances. As a result of this remarkable rebranding campaign, Tinder's parent company Match Group fully acquired Hinge in 2019 in an effort to diversify its product portfolio (Perez 2019). This strategic move allowed the company to not only offer an alternative to mobile daters who are mainly interested in initiating committed romantic relationships, but also emphasize vigorously that Tinder's hybridized nature is first and foremost geared towards emerging adults who are proficient and content with code-switching.

To summarize, navigating Tinder's hybridized intimate performances necessitates consumers to obtain a new set of competencies. To the extent that they can translate their economic, cultural and sexual capital into Tinderized displays; effectively create and actively manage their digital profiles on several interrelated mobile social media platforms; and enhance their skills in (and develop a liking for) code-switching between dating and hookup scripts, they are likely to attain satisfactory outcomes within this hybridized performative field.

DISCUSSION

This dissertation began with the question of how digitalization transforms market-mediated performances. Focusing on the case of mobile dating app Tinder, I examined the mechanisms through which the app's user interface, through its reliance on gamification principles, reshapes the intimate performances of dating and hooking up. My analysis demonstrates that Tinder's gamified interface induces a formal spirit in hookup performances which are conventionally more spontaneous and engenders a casual mood in dating performances which are historically more formalized at once. As a result, it creates a hybridized performative script that simultaneously draws from both dating and hookup scripts. My analysis further shows that Tinder users develop a new set of competencies which they fall back on as they navigate app-mediated, hybridized intimate performances. These competencies include exhibiting their existing economic, cultural, and sexual capital in a visualized mobile app-friendly format, adroitness in using Tinder and similar mobile social media applications, and an ability to naturally code-switch between dating and hookup scripts by getting accustomed to Tinder's hybridized performative script.

These findings contribute to the extant literature on market-mediated performances in several ways. Firstly, while aptly theorizing how these performances might endow consumers-as-performers with different identity benefits (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi et al. 1993; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Higgins and Hamilton 2019) and even help them challenge the structural conditions that constrict their everyday living conditions (Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Ustuner and Thompson 2012); previous studies mostly treated the performances themselves (and their performative scripts) as rather static. The first and foremost objective of

this dissertation was to highlight the dynamicity of market-mediated performances by explaining how they evolve and take different forms over time. For this purpose, I specifically focused on the intimate performances of dating and hooking up, the social histories of which are well-documented in both academic and journalistic accounts. Through my sociohistorical review, I delineated the various forms they took in line with the broader cultural changes over the last century. Then, through my data analysis, I explicated the ways in which gamification of Tinder's user interface—as part of the broader digitalization movement—have been further reshaping these performances in recent years. Fuentes and colleagues' examination (2017) of how consumers' extensive smartphone usage transforms the socio-material configurations of retail stores also provides a dynamic perspective on retail performances between consumers and sales associates. However, it is beyond the scope of their analysis to trace the social history of these market-mediated performances and delineate how digitalization specifically alters their performative script.

Relatedly, the second contribution of this dissertation is its firsthand theorization of the organic and malleable nature of performative scripts. These living and breathing cultural templates are what animate market-mediated performances; therefore, discernible changes in the latter are predicated on relatively subtle reconfigurations of the former. In fact, extant literature involves several references to the notion of script. In different market-mediated performances, scripts are manifest by way of their forceful presence (Van Marrewijk and Broos 2012; Ustuner and Thompson 2012), relative absence (Arnould and Price 1993), or an oscillation between the two (Celsi et al. 1993). However, since scripts are not focal points of theorization in these earlier studies, their organicity and malleability are for the most part overlooked. Thompson and Ustuner's depiction (2015) of the glocalized enactments of roller derby performances is a notable

exception which manifests the adaptability of performative scripts. The authors, for instance, demonstrate that the usage of swear words is toned down in the local interpretations of the roller derby script out of respect for the family friendly small-town settings. Like the roller derby script, dating and hookup scripts may also be interpreted in quite divergent ways in accordance with the specific contexts they are enacted. However, instead of a focus on how discrete appropriations deviate from the main script, the current dissertation lays emphasis on the broadscale reshaping of the original forms of these scripts. This emphasis aligns with a cognitive anthropological perspective that is sensitized to the cultural constructedness of scripts (Quinn 2005; c.f., Schank and Abelson 1977). According to this perspective, performative scripts are organic cultural entities with social histories of their own. Their cultural dimensions and overall compositions are bound to be shaped and reshaped by broadscale sociocultural developments. The digital revolution is one such development that has had (re)formative effects on dating and hookup scripts. As per their malleable nature, these scripts are merged into a hybridized intimate script thanks to the simultaneous casualizing and formalizing effects of Tinder's gamified interface. While the case of Tinder demonstrates one instance of how digitalization shapes performative scripts, there are yet other ways in which script alteration can transpire some of which I will discuss in the next subsection.

Thirdly, this dissertation extends earlier work on the consequences of market-mediated performances beyond immediate performative fields. While previous studies address the ways in which enactment of performances yield benefits that carry over to consumers' everyday lives, they mainly focus on relatively modest changes at the individual or interpersonal level. Whether consumers (or service providers) experience emotional and existential cleansing or embark on a series of lifestyle modifications at the individual level (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Higgins and

Hamilton 2019) or make attempts to modify class- and gender-based hierarchical social relations and power dynamics in their life worlds (e.g., Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Ustuner and Thompson 2012); their efforts are unlikely to translate into changes in more widespread cultural understandings. The current dissertation, however, goes beyond these earlier accounts and explicates how a market-mediated performance may significantly contribute to changing prevalent convictions regarding a fundamental domain of human life—that is, romance and sexuality. As illustrated by David's admission that he no longer feels the need to initiate contact with the opposite sex when he goes out to bars, Meredith's comments about finding a boyfriend by doing her own Bachelorette competition with her Tinder matches, and Andy and Jan's preference for using Tinder for getting to know their hookup partners in advance and planning the time and place of their casual sexual encounters; Tinder's hybridized intimate performances have been restructuring how dating and hookup performances are experienced by app users. With Tinder nearing an audience size of eight million people in the US only (Statista 2020), the projections of further growth in the mobile dating apps industry over the next five years (Madigan 2020), Facebook's entry into the digital dating business, and old-school dating websites rolling out new mobile-friendly (although not as gamified as Tinder) applications; it is likely that these hybridized performances will take further hold and shape the entire romantic-sexual field for emerging adults in the near future.

In addition to these contributions to the market-mediated performances literature, this dissertation further strives to extend previous work on digitalization, gamification, and dating and hookup cultures. In the next subsections, I will discuss the different ways in which digitalization may influence performative scripts, the same digital platform's countervailing effects on consumer experiences, broadscale implications of gamification, and Tinder's creation

of derivative dating and hookup cultures. I will close with limitations and future research directions.

How Digitalization Influences Existing Performative Scripts

Tinder prompts a fundamental shift in the ways intimate performances are perceived and experienced by hybridizing the scripts of dating and hooking up. While this is a striking case of how a digital technology may reshape existing performative scripts, the influences of digitalization may be manifest in yet other ways in different contexts. In this subsection, I will reflect on four other ways in which digitalization has altered (or is likely to alter) widely recognized performative scripts—namely, script maintenance, script disruption, script reinforcement, and script dismissal. In doing so, I will bring to bear the conception of performative scripts to several prior studies whose authors not necessarily used this theoretical lens.

To begin with, digital technologies may help consumers maintain certain traditional scripts even when they cannot physically come together. A notable exemplar of *script maintenance* is long distance family performances which are kept intact thanks to video conference software (Epp, Schau and Price 2014). In their study on how families with one or more members living away utilize branded and technological resources to recreate familial consumption experiences, Epp and colleagues provide examples of this form of script maintenance. While some of their participants find it awkward to maintain ritualized family traditions through video conference, others readily utilize such digital platforms to connect with family members who cannot attend family gatherings. They note that some of their participants

further consider utilizing these technologies for virtually celebrating holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving) together. These findings have taken new significance during COVID-19 pandemic as script maintenance through video conference became part of the new normal with families celebrating birthdays and attending weddings and funerals online.

In contrast to script maintenance, digital technologies may also result in *script disruption*. A case in point is consumers' extensive engagement with their smartphones during shopping trips which hinders retail assistants from interacting with them. Fuentes and colleagues (2017) document that consumers use smartphones for checking social media, listening to music, making phone calls, or making comparisons with other stores' products. They note that "shoppers engaging in conversations or chatting on their smartphones move differently around the store and can be difficult to engage with" for retail assistants, "interrupting the scripted ways of acting in-store" (274).

However, the very same smartphone technologies can be turned into an advantage for marketers as they can also be used for *script reinforcement*. Continuing with the retailscape context, smartphone applications can be integrated into the overall retail experience in ways that could redirect consumers' attention to the store's atmospherics and product assortment. Fuentes and colleagues mention that smartphones can also facilitate service provision as consumers sometimes refer to these devices for asking more specific product-related questions to the retail staff. Similarly, QR codes can be strategically used in stores to help consumers access product information beyond what is provided in the physical environment. Another example of script reinforcement is the online customer ratings on platforms such as Airbnb, Uber, and Yelp. While tipping generously or recommending commercial establishments to one's social circles after satisfactory service experiences are part and parcel of the service script, these digital platforms

reinforce this script by adding a new layer through which consumers can communicate their appreciation to an extended number of people.

Lastly, digitalization may pave the way for the weakening of the social in socio-material assemblages and thus result in *script dismissal* in certain settings. Some primary examples of script dismissal are discernible as human-to-human interactions came to be partially replaced with human-to-object interactions owing to the rise of artificial intelligence and the internet of things (Belk, Humayun and Gopaldas 2020; Hoffman and Novak 2018). However, many of these technologies are in earlier stages of their development and it is likely that we will see more prominent examples of script dismissal once they become commonplace. For instance, self-driving cars are planned to be initially used for taxi services in the near future. Inasmuch as they replace taxi drivers and thus do away with the performative driver-passenger interactions, they constitute a case of script dismissal. Another example of script dismissal comes from the context of dating and hookup performances. A technological advancement which is likely to make dating and hookup scripts and even Tinder's hybridized performative script—at least for a fraction of the population—obsolete is sex robots. While sex doll is a more accurate term for currently marketed human-like mannequins used for sexual satisfaction, AI-integrated sex robots which will be able to make small talk and involve other human-like features are expected to be the next trend in the industry in coming years. With the proliferation of this technology, it will be literally possible for consumers to purchase sexual partners and thus dismiss the existing romantic-sexual scripts entirely. However, as the technology further progresses and sex robots become more and more intelligible, it is also possible to see a comeback of modified versions of these scripts calibrated for performative human-object interactions. This conjectural switch from selecting partners from an online catalogue (as in Tinder) to purchasing (and even customizing) partners

and its effects on how romance and sexuality are perceived are exciting future research topics that would provide further insights regarding how fundamental human experiences of meeting and mating are shaped and reshaped and reshaped again by the digital revolution.

All in all, apart from script reshaping as exemplified by Tinder's hybridization of dating and hookup performances, digital technologies may pave the way for the maintenance, reinforcement, disruption, and dismissal of performative scripts. While this is in no way an exhaustive list, future research is needed for a better understanding of the nuances and intersections of various ways in which digitalization influences different performative scripts.

The Countervailing Effects of Digitalization

It is shown in previous CCT literature on digital technologies that digitalization does not have uniform effects on consumption practices. As such, different digital platforms and technologies might shape how consumers consume in divergent and even contradictory ways. Two areas of study in which divergences of this nature are documented are consumer desire (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013; Kozinets et al. 2017) and identity value generation (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016). Focusing on digital virtual consumption—and specifically on wish lists, watch lists, and virtual goods—, Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2013) explain that deployment of digital platforms in arousing, actualizing, but also managing desire leads to a redistribution of such desires within the emergent human-software assemblages. As a result, consumer desire is attenuated as evinced by "a reduced level of commitment to actualising consumption intentions in the materially real" (1571). In contrast, Kozinets and colleagues' analysis (2017) of the online food image sharing phenomenon

elucidates how digital platforms may amplify consumer desire. The authors find that the activity

of sharing and promulgating "extreme, even pornographic, [food] images" (19) (mainly on

Instagram) enables consumers to channel and concentrate their desires within "acceptable

interest structures" (11) and thus legitimizes and amplifies these desires.

Digital platforms can similarly generate divergent types of identity value for consumers.

Muniz and O'Guinn's influential work on brand community (2001) demonstrates that

community-initiated Internet sites become key venues through which members carry out key

brand community activities such as celebrating the brand history, sharing brand-related stories

with one another, and publicly reinforcing their commitment to the brand. Thus, these websites

play a key role in generating communal identity value whereby members identify strongly with

the brand as well as the community. Arvidsson and Caliandro's analysis of brand public (2016),

in contrast, focuses on the practice of harnessing brand hashtags (on Twitter) for the purpose of

increasing one's online visibility without seeking any form of community or brand identification.

In the author's words, "members of brand communities develop shared meanings that they

identify with. In brand publics no coherent collective identity is articulated around the focal

brand" (728). Brand hashtags, then, are used by consumers with "an urge to share a point of view

or an experience" or out of a "desire for visibility" (728). They are means for generating

publicity for the tweeter rather than genuine sources of identity value.

My analysis provides further evidence that digitalization does not have uniform effects on

consumption practices. It also takes this argument a step further by showcasing that the very

same platform can have countervailing effects. After all, Tinder's hybridization of dating and

hooking up is a product of its simultaneous casualization and formalization of intimate

performances. While the play-game dialectic that governs Tinder's gamified interface stands out

as the catalyzer of these countervailing effects, other digital platforms and practices (which not necessarily hinge on gamification principles) also engender bidirectional, hybridized consumer experiences. As indicated in the findings section, microcelebrity practices constitute one such example as per their hybridization of audience and community logics (McQuarrie et al. 2013; Senft 2013). By blending these two conventional modes of engagement, microcelebrity culture creates hybridized performative interactions between social media influencers and their followers, whereby the former treats the latter either as fans or as peers depending on the occasion.

Another contemporary context in which the countervailing effects of digitalization can be seen is the transition to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. As widely observed in the last couple months, switching to digital platforms blurs the boundaries between domestic and professional activities. On the one hand, the professional invades the domestic as individuals reserve parts of their domestic spaces and allocate parts of their time at home for professional activities. The opposite effect is also observed: The domestic imposes itself on the professional as elements of at-home life cause interruptions in professional activities (e.g., pets or small children making unexpected appearances in their parents' Zoom calls). This leads to the hybridization of these previously demarcated spaces and activities—much like the hybridization of the market-mediated performances of dating and hooking up. As such, the countervailing effects of the same digital platform is not specific to the case of Tinder; it can be extrapolated to many cases where digital hybridization is observed.

Broader Implications of Gamification

Over the last decade, gamification has been used in industry circles principally as a way for reinforcing desired consumer and employee behavior (Robson et al. 2015, 2016; Seaborn and Fels 2015). Research also suggests that the application of game design techniques in contexts such as education, financial wellness, healthcare and exercise, and sustainability proves effective as these applications enable positive changes in individuals' lives (Dicheva and Dichev 2015; Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa 2014; Seaborn and Fels 2015). Therefore, its advocates suggest that in the long run gamification can help mitigate broadscale problems in these important matters (McGonigal 2011, 2014; see also Thaler and Sunstein 2008). Critical game design scholars, however, take issue with this suggestion, asserting that gamification is fundamentally a marketing technique whereby real-life outcomes are supplanted by game-based, symbolic rewards (Bogost 2011; Raczkoswki 2014; Rey 2014; Woodcock and Johnson 2017). As their argument goes, gamification renders the apps ends in themselves and facilitates nothing but further engagement with these platforms by inciting a competitive mood through trivial game design elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards. At the end of the day, gamified platforms do not generate any real-life benefits.

A notable portion of Tinder users also acknowledge that they started using the platform merely for entertainment. As shown in my analysis, this entertainment mindset endures even among users that actively look for romantic-sexual opportunities with their Tinder matches. Many of the participants indicate that swiping on Tinder feels like a game where each match equals a win. They also admit competing with their friends to see who will get the greatest number of matches in a given time, treating each Tinder match as a data point. In this sense,

Tinder's game-based rewards are at times more captivating than real-life outcomes for its users—which corroborates the aforementioned critiques. It is to a certain extent true, as Tinder co-founder Sean Rad remarks, that "[n]obody joins Tinder because they're looking for something…. They join because they want to have fun." (Quoted in Stampler 2014). However, my analysis further shows that gamification in Tinder does have actual consequences that extend beyond the realm of the app. Even though the entertainment element is what initially brings users to the platform, it becomes effective in shaping their romantic-sexual lives by promulgating its hybridized intimate script once they start matching and meeting other users. There are mixed opinions among the app users as well as in media portrayals as to whether this is a positive or negative change. In any case, this finding contradicts with the critics' assertion that gamification has no real-life outcomes.

To sum up, this dissertation contributes to the discussion on whether gamification generates real-life benefits or not by finding the middle ground. It demonstrates that gamification, in certain instances, induces Tinder users to frequent the app merely for entertainment purposes without showing any interest in further contact with their matches. However, it also shows that, once the users set their foot in and begin interacting with their matches, the app engenders changes in the ways they understand and experience romance and sexuality. Whether these changes will bear positive or negative results requires further consideration.

Tinder, College Dating and Post-College Hookups

The emergence of the college hookup culture has attracted great academic interest over the last two decades (see for example Bogle 2008; England et al. 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Garcia et al. 2012; Heldman and Wade 2010; Wade 2017). One prominent fault line in this literature has been whether hookup culture brought about the demise of dating on college campuses. Until recent years, the consensus was that hookups have replaced traditional dating to a great extent, meaning that going on dates with the purpose of relationship initiation is no longer a common practice among college students (Bogle 2007; England et al. 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001). Recent research, however, challenges this claim and showcases that dating qua leisure consumption whereby couples enjoy a night out for the purpose of getting to know each other remains to be a viable route for initiating relationships (Luff et al. 2016; Wade 2017). Thus, they argue, this intimate performance might not be as outdated as argued by previous literature.

My analysis provides further evidence that dating remains to be an accepted option for seeking emotional intimacy on college campuses. Although the majority of them are keen participants of the hookup scene, my college-going study participants also indicate their interest in going on dates with potential romantic partners. Many of them acknowledge that using Tinder has helped them meet and date a significantly increased number of people compared to more traditional ways of finding romantic partners (e.g., classes, student clubs, and friends of friends). In this regard, contrary to the media-induced critiques of Tinder as bringing about the demise of dating, the app operates as a catalyzer of traditional dating on college campuses. Thanks to the casual spirit it instills in the otherwise formal dating performances, it enables college-aged emerging adults to embrace this form of intimacy which in its platform-mediated format feels

closer to the hookup culture which they are socialized into. Thus, I concur with the latest research that dating remains to be prevalent on college campuses (Luff et al. 2016; Wade 2017). I also make an addition to this line of work by showing that Tinder, contrary to the opposing views, contributes to its prevalence.

While college hookup culture has been under meticulous academic scrutiny, there is a lack of research on the romantic-sexual lives of emerging adults after college graduation, with a few notable exceptions (Heldman and Wade 2010). In her ethnographic study of hookup culture, Bogle (2008) includes alumni's accounts of their post-college intimate lives. She finds that rather than continuing engaging in casual sexual encounters, most graduates look for exclusive romantic relationships. As such, once-avid participants of the college hookup culture start believing that "men and women should find out more about each other before anything sexual happens" (142) after embarking on their professional lives. Conducting a similar ethnography approximately a decade after Bogle, Wade (2017) highlights a slightly different pattern. While her graduate participants also pronounce a preference for dating over hooking up, they describe the transition to dating as a real struggle. One of her participants observe that "hookup culture and dating culture were blurred post-grad. It was as if both sets of rules applied simultaneously and a person could change course at any time" (Wade 2017, 236). Based on this observation, Wade concludes that the transition period is replete with confusions as individuals negotiate which script to abide by on a case by case basis.

My analysis evinces that for Tinder users such negotiations and the ensuing confusions extend beyond the post-college transition period. Tinder, in the first instance, becomes a venue for initiating hookups for college grads who are removed from the college style of socialization. At the same time, as per its formalization of hookups, the app also attracts older emerging adults

who are not comfortable with the overall turbulence of the hookup culture, as its interface makes sexual intimacy in a more controlled manner possible. Thus, it helps create a derivative hookup culture for this group of individuals whose pursuits of casual sex are better aligned with the dating script in certain respects. As such, as with college students, older emerging adults—and in fact Tinder users from any age group—readily switch between dating and hookup scripts in their Tinder-initiated intimate performances.

Overall, my findings show that Tinder enables college students to have more dating experiences while also creating a derivative, post-grad hookup culture for older emerging adults. As such, it extends Wade's (2017) inference that "hookup culture may have infiltrated dating for all adults, shaping dating culture for all of us" (236) by showing that Tinder has been playing a significant role in this infiltration and the consequent hybridization.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The dating and hookup performances this dissertation accounts for are predominantly middle-class experiences. There are two main reasons why a middle-class orientation was chosen in the first place. Firstly, much of the previous literature on dating (e.g., Bailey 1988; Illouz 1997, 2007, 2012; Weigel 2017) and hooking up (Bogle 2008; Wade 2017) also zero in on the experiences of individuals from this social class. Therefore, making intelligible temporal comparisons and advancing an understanding of how Tinder reshapes the mainstream understandings of romantic-sexual experiences were only possible by making similar sampling decisions. Relatedly, Tinder was initially seeded into college campuses and even today most of

its users are either college students or college graduates who are at most ten years into their post-grad professional lives. Thus, most Tinder users come from middle-class backgrounds.

As such, it is no coincidence that my findings regarding how app users navigate Tinder's hybridized intimate performances (and especially their competence with and taste for code-switching) are in line with Weinberger and colleagues' (2017) insights regarding middle-class emerging adults' exploratory consumption orientation. Their participants' penchant for voracious variety seeking and deep novelty and aversion to settling down too early are echoed in my respondents' outlook on and projections about their romantic-sexual lives. Weinberger and colleagues further note that working-class emerging adults' consumption orientation is strikingly different than their middle-class counterparts. Instead of seeking variety and novelty, this group of individuals develop a taste for familiarity, domesticity, and stability. However, this does not mean that working class individuals do not use Tinder (or other mobile dating apps) at all. As mentioned in my illustration of how cultural and economic capital are translated into Tinderized displays, users from "the wrong neighborhoods" occasionally make appearances in the deck of cards presented to my middle-class study participants. As such, while they may not be as active and avid users, working-class emerging adults do frequent Tinder too. Future research may look more closely into their experiences with Tinder and other mobile dating platforms. Is their proclivity for relatively familiar, domestic, and stable experiences echoed in how they navigate these digital platforms? In what ways are working-class-cherished forms of cultural capital manifest in Tinder-mediated intimate performances?

Similarly, as per this dissertation's focus on individuals that have been (at least to a certain extent) actively involved in Tinder-mediated intimate performances, there is an implicit bias of selecting participants who possess the types of sexual capital that have currency in

Tinder's performative field. This focus, for the most part, excludes the experiences of individuals whose bodily and facial appearances, gendered comportments and body language, and sartorial styles do not fit in Tinderized displays. Future research may focus more directly on such experiences. On the one hand, an examination of the experiences of "the losers of Tinder" would enable us to have a more complete picture of digital dating and hookup cultures by demonstrating how the dominant understandings of sexual desirability turn into symbolic violence at the fringes of Tinder's performative field. On the other hand, more detailed analyses of how individuals navigate their app-mediated intimate performances in platforms that cater specifically to various ethnic and religious groups and sexual orientations would provide valuable insights in advancing our understanding of the emergent intersections between digital platforms and romantic-sexual behavior.

Last but not the least, the dynamic and contentious mobile dating apps market is replete with cultural branding implications. As per this dissertation's consumer research focus, insights regarding market players' branding strategies (e.g., Bumble's publicity as the feminist Tinder; Hinge's efforts to rebrand itself as the relationship app) were provided in passing throughout the findings sections. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine them in detail, future research can focus directly on the contestations between Tinder and these rival dating apps which build their brand images based on the criticisms leveled at the former in popular culture.

CCT researchers taking an interest in marketing strategy, indeed, developed the conception of doppelgänger brand image which aptly captures Tinder's problem with popular and social media critiques which spoil the app's reputation (Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel 2006; see also Giesler 2012; Parmentier and Fischer 2015). Thompson and colleagues define doppelgänger brand image as "a family of disparaging images and stories about a brand that are

circulated in popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers, antibrand activists, bloggers, and opinion leaders in the news and entertainment media" (50). In their conceptualization, a doppelganger brand image poses threats to the official branding story by casting doubt on the brand's authenticity and, thereby, undermining the identity value it generates for its consumers. However, later research establishes that, marketing managers can capitalize on these disparaging images by considering them as diagnostic tools and identifying aspects of their branding stories that need to be modified before a crisis point is reached (Giesler 2012). While these earlier studies offer invaluable insights into the emergence and evolution of doppelgänger brand images and helpful advice for marketing professionals to assuage greater threats that are likely to materialize if due precautions are not taken; they overlook the ways in which competitors, by way of their own marketing communications, may contribute to the instigation or exacerbation of a brand's doppelgänger image.

The mobile dating apps market provides unique insights for this research problem. While Tinder has suffered from doppelgänger images of (1) bringing about the demise of dating as per its instigation of a dehumanizing hookup culture and (2) allowing for sexually objectifying behavior and cultivating a misogynistic culture in its platform; Bumble and Hinge have been persistent contributors to these negative images by pitting their brands against Tinder and emphasizing various ways in which their platforms are distanced from Tinder's toxic culture. Future research may look into their branding campaigns to identify the ways in which rival companies can utilize the market leader's doppelgänger brand images with the purpose of carving out unique market positions for their own brands.

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