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“WELL, YOU COULD BE A MURDERER...”
AND OTHER REASONS WHY I SHOULD STOP USING DATING APPS:
A PERSONAL NARRATIVE ABOUT DATING IN THE AGE OF
TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Presented

by

Gabriella Granillo

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
Specializing in Interdisciplinary Studies

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Abstract

Dating isn't easy. I'm sure we've all had that thought before. How are we even supposed to meet people nowadays? In the grocery store? At the mall? In a library? No! Why not utilize the one thing that we, as humans in the 21st century, can't seem to live without, our cellphones! We have just about everything else at our fingertips, why not have the next best thing, a relationship, a hookup, or just a friend with just a swipe and a touch of the phalanges?

I have been using dating apps off and on for about six years, and I am getting the notion that it's not working. Is the fact that I am trying to find a mate on an app the reason why I'm still single? Has the invention of smartphones and apps made us, as humans, less able to communicate and connect with each other without first messaging through text? Or do I just have horrible taste in a partner?

Come along with me on an emotional ride through personal accounts of bad dates, year-long drama, internet stalking, catfishing and survey participant's online dating experiences, and (actual legitimate) research to get some insight into dating through a screen and to help me figure out if this is a feasible way, for me and you, to get into a relationship.

Spoiler alert: it's not

(for me anyway)

Dedication

To My Family



Patricia Page

Ricardo Granillo

Christina Granillo

Tina Page



To My Friends

Near and Far



Thank you for seeing me through life even when I am difficult, stubborn, and combative

Thank you for putting up with me through the stress and tears

This is for you

I would never have gotten here without you



... and thank you to all the bozos I have met, your thoughtless words and actions, cute faces
and kindness were my inspiration for this thesis



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Methodology

What is and Why Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN)?

“Scholarly personal narrative writing is meant primarily to benefit readers, touch readers’ lives by informing their experiences, by transforming the meanings of events, and, in Gornick’s telling phrase, by “delivering wisdom.”

My life matters, and my story matters. That is what SPN expresses, that we matter. SPN is when we write about our personal experiences and relate it to the reader, research and other scholarly works, and then back to ourselves. I believe that humans are better expressing themselves through stories. Stories are told in music, writing, movies, television, etc; these formats are entertaining, we all want to be entertained! So why can’t a thesis, dissertation, or piece of scholarly work be entertaining? When I read an article that has facts and statistics in it, but the journalist is relating it back to their personal experiences, I find it easier to read, more captivating, and most importantly, more relatable. Stories allow our minds and imaginations to set a scene. My favorite type of literature is fiction. I find this style very entertaining and easy to relate to because I can easily picture the characters in a story. While SPN writing is very much the opposite of fiction (because it is based on true personal accounts), it has what I love most about fiction, the room to imagine, picture, learn, and relate. SPN consists of four components: Pre-Search, Me-Search, Re-Search, and We-Search.

Pre-Search is basically the steps we take to choose to write in SPN form. Before you start writing your body of work, you have to choose a topic. Depending on the topic, we

¹ Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, 28.

may choose to write in SPN. Some good questions to ask yourself if you choose to write in SPN are:

- *Who is my audience?*
- *What will keep me going when I run out of ideas and confidence?*
- *What will be the scholarly glue that holds my writing together?*

Me- Search is when you dig deep inside yourself to relate to a topic and write honestly about it. SPN writing is all about writing and conveying personal experiences, it's about telling your story. To me-search, we have to be able to open ourselves up to our audience, so they can relate to you.

“Your own life tells a story (or a series of stories) that, when narrated well, can deliver to your readers those delicious aha! moments of self and social insight that are all too rare in more conventional forms of research”

Liberating Scholarly Narrative

Re-Search is pretty much that. When writing SPN, make sure you have bodies of work to reference in your narrative, after all it is SCHOLARLY personal narrative, so there has to be some scholar. The research in an SPN text helps to develop a theme, make our stories more relatable and concrete, and to help you make a clear and relevant statement.

“You are a scholar if you are willing to play with ideas. You are a scholar if you can build on the ideas of others. You are a scholar to the extent that you can tell a good, instructive story. You are a scholar if you can capture the narrative quality of your human experience in language that inspires others. You are a scholar if you can present your story in such a way that, in some important senses, it rings true to human life. You are a scholar if you can help your readers to reexamine their own truth stories in light of the truths that you are struggling to discern in your own complicated life story. You are a scholar if you have a passion for language and writing. You are a scholar if you are driven to understand what makes yourself and others tick. You are a scholar if you can feel and think at the same time. You are a scholar if you are willing to allow

your students, and your readers, to enter your heart as well as your head. You are a scholar if you can help your readers and students to realize that their lives signify, that they matter more than they will ever know.”

LSN

And lastly, We-search. I have found that writing in Scholarly Personal Narrative or SPN allows the audience to better connect to the writer. When we write in SPN style, we are writing about our personal accounts and our personal stories, and our stories are universalizable. Whether the audience connects with the entire narrative, or just one sentence, they are still making a connection with the writer, which is making a connection with another human being. As I will talk about later in this body of SPN writing, we all want connection, and I believe the best way for my audience to connect to me and my topic is through SPN writing.

“The point I am trying to make is that scholarly personal narrative writing can take many different forms. While it is personal, it is also social. While it is practical, it is also theoretical. While it is reflective, it is also public. While it is local, it is also political. While it narrates, it also proposes. While it is self-revealing, it also evokes self-examination from readers.”²

SPN writing is about telling your stories and speaking your truth. This narrative is my truth.

Finding Connection

We all want connection. We all want love, to give love and to be loved! Well at least all of us on dating apps. Now, there are different kinds of love you can look for; casual love, forever love, one-night love, I’m-not-sure-what-I-want-but-I-know-I-don’t-want-to-be-alone “love”. I’ve looked for all of the above. From OkCupid to Coffee Meets Bagel and the infamous Tinder, I’ve used quite a few dating apps to find whatever it is I’m looking for.

² Nash and Viray, *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, 3

Dating apps are a new phenomenon. It's something that was created for 20-somethings in the age of technology and smartphones. Now there are apps for baby boomers, the one I've seen on TV is OurTime, another popular one is Silver Singles, as well as eHarmony and Match.com. But let's be honest, dating apps were created for young fast-moving adults. Adults who had Tomogachi's, MySpace (who were your top 8?), LimeWire, LiveJournal, knew how to code (but only few were smart enough to make a career out of it), who were given a flip phone at the age of 14 and have never looked back. Millennials. We grew up waiting and taking so much time to wait for LimeWire to download, that now that we have the access to quick, everything, and quick relationships, we jump at the chance.

This thesis is about my experiences dating in the 21st century focused on dating apps. My dating app profile would read:

Hi! I'm Gabi, a 31-yea-old self-identified millennial. I am in grad school at UVM getting my MEd and I have a bachelor's in studio art. I'm a loving dog mom to an adorably over-protective pooch (#mustlovedogs), I like to cook, read, watch movies, listen to live music and podcasts, hike, swim, dance the night away, ice skate, and be super lazy and procrastinate on my school work. Karaoke is my favorite past time, Laughing is my favorite ab workout, yoga is something I enjoy, but don't do often enough, and I live a boujee life on a pauper's salary, what can I say? I love to online shop and eat out!

I think that is a pretty good description of myself. Well, it's a culmination of my many dating profiles over the years. Today, I have shortened it down to:

Looking for someone to share my amazing beautiful life with! Fuck boys need not apply

Yeah, it's changed quite a bit. But what I can say is, us busy, bustling Millenials don't have time to read long descriptive profiles! We are too busy on our way to work, sitting at a stop light, swiping *left, left, left, oh he's cute! right swipe, it's a match! Left left, left...* At work, *right right, right, ev! Left...* In a meeting, *left, left, Why do all men have a picture of them holding a fish?*

And my personal favorite place to swipe: On the toilet, *left, left, right, left, oops accidental right swipe, Oh, he's cute! Ugh, never mind, he's has one too many American flag clothing items and WHY are there multiple pictures of him wearing them?! Hard left.* Our fast paced, attention deficit, always on that grind lives, have led us to this: dating apps. Fast paced dating for fast paced lives. Millions of people in the palm of your hand. You can set an age range, from 16-99+, a distance radius 100 miles away to... 2 feet?! Where is he?! Men, women, both. Some apps you can discard religious people, or smokers. Some are very specific like, Lumberjackdating.com, farmersonly.com, blackpeoplemeet.com, etc. We literally have it all on a tiny device, cracked screened, in our back pocket.

Ok, so I have so many options! Millions of people, literally MILLIONS! So, why am I STILL SINGLE?! I'm not entirely sure, I plan on figuring out why. Through studies done by other scholars, books on dating in the 21st century, interviews, and a lot of heartbreakingly embarrassing personal stories, I hope to figure out why I'm single, why you, and you, and you are single, and why we turn to dating apps in the first place. What makes them work, what makes them so popular, and what makes them a big huge failure. I don't plan on figuring out all the answers, or dismantle the patriarchy (hello Tinder), or to figure out your sad- equally-pathetic-to-mine dating life, but maybe give some insight, provoke thought, or just provide some camaraderie and laughter in this dog-eat-dog dating through a silver screen, world.

Did you know that, according to eHarmony.com, 40% of Americans use online dating apps? Or that more men use dating apps than women (THEN WHY. AM I. STILL. SINGLE?!), oh, because 53% of online daters lie on their profiles. I can attest to that, no, I'm not the liar, but it has been my experience that 100% of men under 6'1" add a couple of

inches to their height. 48% of relationships started on dating websites end through email³. Hey, at least some people get an email, dating apps have spawned whole new terms related to dating such as “ghosting” which is when someone doesn’t even send you an email, they just disappear, with no explanation, never to be seen again (unless you live in a small town such as Burlington, VT, and you run into them because, oh you know, it’s a small town). I will be talking about all of these statistics and so much more in this scholarly personal narrative style thesis.

³ Matthews, *27 Online Dating Statistics & What They Mean for the Future of Dating*, 2018

Disclaimer

Before we get into it, I want to state a few facts about myself. I am 29. I am a woman who identifies as a woman and uses she/her/hers pronouns. I am multiracial, half African American, half Latina. I am of the middle-class, I have a bachelor's degree and am attempting a master's degree. I am literate, I am physically and mentally abled, and lastly, I'm cute (well that's what they tell me anyway *hair flip*). I want to make you aware of all of my salient identities, as these identities have a lot to do with my experiences on dating apps and my navigation through life. I also say this to recognize that people who do not share my identities have different experiences than I do, and to remind you that this is a reflection of my personal experiences in relation to statistics and scholarly research on the topic of online dating.

Also, I made a questionnaire and sent it out to anyone who was willing to fill it out. The questionnaire was answered by mostly women, as apparently, men do not have ten minutes to spare to help a sister out. I do have a few male participants, but just to let you know, more women filled out the questionnaire. I feel like this may have to do with a not surprising statistic: that women get far more luck on dating apps than men do. "Even a guy at the highest end of attractiveness barely receives the number of messages almost all women get. But that doesn't mean that men end up in the online equivalent of standing alone in the corner of the bar. Online there are no lonely corners. Everywhere is filled with people looking to connect."⁴

⁴ Ansari, *Modern Romance*, 89

So, you may agree, disagree, relate, or find this completely unrelatable, and a huge waste of yours and my time. But I truly hope this at least makes you laugh, or snicker, or smile, or grin? Maybe?

Chapter 1: Where it All Started

Dating apps didn't just start with that, just like the humans didn't just appear on the earth, make fire, the wheel, and learned how to read and write. There was an evolution to both. The first type of non-face-to-face dating was the in the 1960's with the emergence of computer data dating. This was where people filled out a questionnaire, and a giant computer matched you with a partner based on your answers to the questionnaire. Then there were personal add service in the newspaper. People would put an introduction in the personals, a potential partner would read it, call a 900 number and hear a voice message left by the hopeful dater in the paper. If the caller liked what they heard, they would leave a voicemail saying how exciting they were and how they would like to meet, and hopefully a match would happen. This continued on into video dating services. A wannabe lover would sit in a studio with a video crew and record a short video explaining what they were looking for in a partner and who they were. Every once-in-a-while they would receive a video in the mail with a potential match, and if they liked what they saw, would set up a date. I couldn't imagine participating in the ancient ways of "blind dating", ugh! It just takes too much time. But I guess if you're really busy and looking for someone to be with, you'll do anything.⁵

This takes us to more modern ways of dating. In 1995, Match.com started, and instead of a computer algorithm matching you with a partner, users were able to see and select who they were attracted to. Now, in 1995 I was... six years old. So no, I wasn't on a dating website. I was crushing on Michael from Barney and this little toe-headed asshole named Brian who would cut me in line at school. So problematic crushing on a boy who was mean to me. But as I got older, I learned that my friends were meeting people online, no,

⁵ Ansari, *Modern Romance*, 5

not on Match.com, or on any other actual dating website. We were still in high school and that would be weird. No, they were meeting on MySpace.com and LiveJournal.com and on AIM (AOL Instant Messenger, wow this is taking me way back), just to name a few that I remember people meeting others on. Which now looking back was SO VERY UNSAFE. For teenagers to be talking to some random person who could have a fake profile to meet up and be in potential danger! That's why the show *To Catch a Predator* was created. Man, you never wanted to see Chris Hansen standing in a kitchen of a 13-year-old girl's house, your ass was swiftly on it's way to jail. Well, I guess that's not too different than meeting someone on an app nowadays. But here is a fun statistic: "Online predators commit 16,000 abductions, 100 murders, & thousands of rapes a year"⁶ GREAT!

MySpace

Anyways, my friends were meeting people online via their social media accounts. MySpace was wild. You had a profile that was crafted to fit your personality. You could change the background picture, have music on your homepage, link your website, post pictures, comments, music, links, everything. You had a top 8, only the most important people were on your top 8, and if you were knocked off of a friend's top 8, you were about to fight. So in a way, this was kind of like what a dating app profile is like now, except with a lot more coding (man, I should have taken that more seriously, I could be a high paid coder right now). Random people would go into a wormhole of friends and friends of friends and different high schools and find you, the person of their dreams and send you a friend request. Then from there, you were in a high school relationship, with someone you met online. I had this friend June*⁷ who met her boyfriend on MySpace. They had mutual

⁶ Matthews, *27 Online Dating Statistics*, 2018

⁷ Name changed for anonymity

friends, which I guess was kind of safe...? And they IM'd back and forth until one night her parents were gone and she invited him over. They started dating. Their relationship was on and off for years, and finally ended because they both had a lot of issues, even for teenagers. I had a Myspace. I never met anyone from it.

LiveJournal

I also dabbled in LiveJournal. A friend had a LiveJournal and ended up meeting a penpal on it. Not a romantic relationship, but close enough. My friend and her penpal are still friends until this day! They wrote back and forth, via snail mail, for years and eventually met in person. I remember my friend flying somewhere to meet her penpal, and the penpal eventually moved to the same city my friend was living in. That is kind of wild too.

LiveJournal was a website where you had basically a public journal. You could also set up a special background and have music to match the mood of your journal entry. You could make certain entries private or public, or ones that just a few people could see. This website also involved a lot of coding. When I think about it, it's actually kind of a great way to meet a match, someone you have something in common with. LiveJournal isn't as surface as Myspace was. You were writing journal entries, sometimes personal ones, sometimes silly ones, but it was your voice, and people could read and relate to you and reach out. It's like a teenager's version of SPN writing, without having to go to school to learn about it! I never met anyone on LiveJournal though, I was too lame.

AIM

AIM (America Online Instant Messenger) was the most dangerous of them all. This is what the show *To Catch a Predator* was about. AIM was a predator's dream! Anyone who had AOL could get on AIM and get into any chat room they wanted to and talk to anyone.

There were so many chat rooms. There were ones so that people could get together online and talk about Dungeons and Dragons and video games. You could join a chat about hair, about a city, about anything! And anyone could be lying about who they were. ASL was a popular message. Age, Sex, Location? People asked this when they liked what you had to say and wanted to know a little more about you.

I met so many people on AIM, not IRL (in real life), but just online. If you liked what they had to say and their age, sex, and location, you would then private message them and continue to chat. I chatted with quite a few young men, and then it fell off because, I don't know, one of us got bored? Or I was in middle school and had limited computer time? Or because I was actually chatting with a 45-year-old man who lived in Fayetteville and was a creep and they found someone else who would invite them over sooner than I would (I would NEVER). I only got on AIM to chat with people I did know IRL and to go into chat rooms and piss people off. I LOVED going into a chat room and just fighting with people, it was hilarious. People would get SO MAD for no reason, and they couldn't do anything about it! Which as I will talk about later, is part of the problem with social media and conversing through a computer screen. I actually did this IRL at a bar last year. My friends and I went to a bar for a drink, and a basketball game was on. It was the Celtics against... someone, and I started rooting for the other team. People were getting so mad, I thought it was hilarious. No, I did not meet a potential partner that night. Man, I have problems.

Dating Apps

“You are more likely to encounter an alien than meet a potential partner. Statistically speaking, your chances of finding true love on a night out in London are around three in one million. That’s 500 times less likely than the chances of us finding intelligent life in the universe.”⁸

Yeah. That is a scary statistic, especially for someone like me, who just wants a partner! Maybe I should just start sending off soundwaves into space and find a partner in an extra terrestrial. I would probably get along better with one of them than I do with a human man. Haha, just kidding (but not).

Here are a few statistics I found interesting about online dating from an article on Datingnews.com:

- There are almost 8,000 dating sites in the world
(I need to branch out!)
- Nearly 50 million people have tried online dating
(I’ve met all of them)
- More men use online dating than women
(which makes the statistic that women get more revenue on dating apps than men, make sense)
- Half of people think online dating is a good way to meet potential dates⁹

⁸ Johnston, *Finding True Love*, 2018

⁹ Matthews, *27 Online Dating Statistics*, 2018

Chapter 2: OkCupid Mishaps: Please Don't Play Me Your Mixtape

Ok, I'm going to bite the bullet, I haven't had any luck IRL, so I'm going to the internet. A few friends have told me that they have met someone online, I know quite a few people who have met mates on MySpace, LiveJournal, etc. I should have some luck, right? I'm cute and funny. I have a college education. I've had boyfriends. I can do this. I opened up my computer and typed in www.okcupid.com took a deep breath and dove in. I uploaded pictures, wrote a profile, answered question after question about my life; my preferences in a partner: smoker? No. Religious? Depends... Explain. Drinks? No alcoholics please. I answered probably over 100 questions, and I was done. I took a deep breath and clicked "Done". Ok, OkCupid, let the hotties roll on in. Ping, ping, ping... I didn't hear the sound of people liking my face and wanting to meet me! Ugh, maybe this wasn't going to be easier than meeting someone face to face, but I'll keep on trying.

I ended up meeting quite a few people on OkCupid. The professor who was working on his dissertation and judged me because I nervously made the mistake of saying Mexico was in South America, when I very well know it is part of North America. There was the veteran who would have PTSD when my dog would bark. A few other guys, but my one of my favorite OkCupid stories is Aaron*¹⁰. After chatting for a few days online, Aaron and I agreed to go to dinner and if dinner went well, a movie. As I always do before meeting someone in person, I looked up Aaron's Facebook profile. His profile was limited to people who were not his friends, but he had a few public posts, and given their nature, I could see why they were public. Aaron was an aspiring music artist, to be exact, an aspiring rapper. He

¹⁰ Name changed for anonymity

had a few of his songs available to listen to straight off his Facebook profile, so of course I listened. It was tinny, as if it was recorded in a garage or with a really bad recording system. The music wasn't great and the lyrics so so. "Eh," I thought, "I'm not going to judge this person based off their hobbies." I couldn't listen to the whole sample CD he had uploaded, my ears had been assaulted enough.

A few days later, we met up for dinner at a sushi joint in town. The conversation was OK, not great, but he wasn't boring and was nice. He did bring up that he made rap music on the side as well as working. I asked a little about his music, but not too much, because I had already heard it and didn't like it. We had a good enough time at dinner, so we went to a movie. Against my better judgement at the age of 24, I got in his car and we drove to the theater down the street. As we were driving, he asked me what kind of music I liked to listen to. I said mostly all of it,

"Do you like rap?" he asked,

"I do!" I said, thinking he was going to put on some new underground hip hop artist I hadn't heard of yet. But no. He switched his radio to the CD function and a tinny voice came through the speakers. The music wasn't great and the lyrics so so. He was playing his own music for me. He didn't give me a heads up, didn't ask if I wanted to hear his stuff, he just put it on, and said nothing. Since I knew it was his music, I didn't say anything either. We went the entire car ride in silence, him waiting for me to say something about his bad rapping, and me wanting him to say literally anything. It was so uncomfortable. I, of course, ended up seeing him a few more times, but it didn't last long.

I wonder how that date would have gone had I not looked him up on Facebook first. Probably still not great. I didn't like his music the first time I heard it, and I definitely didn't like it on the surround sound in his car. And the fact that he didn't say anything to preface

what was about to happen to my ears was weird and a turn off... well obviously not too much of a turn off because I went out with him again, and again. But in this situation, I don't think Facebook stalking helped or hurt my dating situation, if anything, it just made for a funny, cringe worthy, eye roll worthy story to tell my friends.

I did eventually end up meeting and dating someone from OkCupid. Our relationship lasted six months. He was cute and kind. He had a job, a car, and put up with my dog. He had an eight-year-old daughter too. All of these things I knew before I even met him, thanks to his profile and the internet. I ended up moving to another city 4 hours away while we were dating. The distance and the fact that I found out he lied to me about the time span between me and his last, very serious girlfriend, helped to make me realize that he wasn't the right person for me. Sometimes the internet helps us stay in touch with each other, but there is a difference between chatting with someone on facetime and actually seeing them face to face.

*"The important thing to know about worthiness is that it doesn't have prerequisites. Most of us, on the other hand, have a long list of worthiness prerequisites—qualifiers that we've inherited, learned, and unknowingly picked up along the way. Most of these prerequisites fall in the categories of accomplishments, acquisitions, and external acceptance. It's the if/when problem ("I'll be worthy when ..." or "I'll be worthy if ...")."*¹¹

¹¹ Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 2012

Chapter 3: Trust Issues

Dating is rough all around, on and off the apps. I took a very brief hiatus from dating apps during the summer of 2018. I decided that I would rather meet people in person, and that I was just plain old tired of even trying. I went out with my friends one night to see a band play '80's covers. It was my first time at this bar, so it was a new scene, new people, new vibes. I happened to witness this guy run into some decorations that were hanging too low from the ceiling causing his glasses to fly off his face. I laughed and he saw me laugh and came up and started a conversation. He was cute, looked to be some kind of brown skinned, and had nice shoes (very important). We got off the dance floor and talked for about an hour, long after my friends had left. His name was Amir*¹². Amir was smart, funny, seemed down to earth and well-traveled. So naturally, I gave him my number. Amir and I met up later the next week for a date. We went to a place I had frequented, and I ended up running into a coworker while I was waiting for Amir to show up. He was late, but I am always late, so I decided to not hold it against him. Amir showed up about 20 minutes late to our date. He invited my coworker to come and sit and drink with us while we watched a small string band play in the back of the bar. I was ok with this, that was a kind gesture.

After the band finished, my coworker left, and it was finally just me and Amir. He handed me a drink menu and asked what I wanted. I took a while to study it, as all of the drinks had a lot of ingredients and unnecessary descriptions. I had to google to find out what they were. I spoke to Amir as I went through my choices, "Oh! This has gin, lemon juice, lavender syrup, mint, and honey..." he listened and acted interested. I still couldn't decide what I wanted but was reading the menu intently asking for his opinion. I asked Amir a

¹² Name changed for anonymity

question, but when I looked up, he was gone! I looked across the room, and there he was, at the bar, ordering a drink. I assumed that he was getting me one as well, maybe one of the ones I had said I was thinking about, helping me with my indecisiveness. No, he just got himself a drink, which is fine, I've learned to never expect anything from anyone, especially on dates. But he had asked me what I wanted, so I assumed. When he came back from the bar, he asked me if I was going to get another drink. I said no, mildly annoyed. We watched as another band set up for their set and chatted a bit. Amir seemed to be a little distracted, but I didn't think too much of it. He told me he had just come from an interview with a gym to be a personal trainer, which explained why he was dressed in basketball shorts, tennis shoes, and a t-shirt on our first date. But now that I think of it, is that protocol for trainers to go to an interview in workout clothes? I don't think so. Anyways, the band started doing mic checks and it got a little loud in the bar, but they seemed like an interesting band, so we stuck around to hear some of their set. During the music, Amir and I chatted when we could hear each other. However, it seemed to be a one-sided conversation most of the time. Amir would ask me a question, and as I was answering, get up and leave. I would be in the middle of answering him, and I would be looking down because I don't keep full eye contact while talking, and I would look up and he'd be gone! On his way to the bar, or the bathroom, one time he even walked out of the room and I wondered if he was coming back!

Amir and I sat and listened to the band for a while. He suggested we leave and find a quieter spot to talk and get to know each other better. I agreed, but on our way to a quieter place, remembered it was karaoke night and suggested we go. He said ok. It's usually not too loud at karaoke since no one ever really goes to this spot. We settle in at the bar and order some drinks. Amir proceeds to ask me questions, ones that were kind of weird and were hard to answer, like,

“What makes you tick?”

I told him that was a weird question and I didn’t know how to answer it.

He said, “Oh you know, what makes you tick, what makes you you?”

I said, “I don’t know... those are things that you just have to find out about me over time. I’m not as simple as answering a question about what makes me, me.”

He followed with, “Ugh, come on! You know, what do you like to do?!” All annoyed.

“Well, I like to eat...” I said.

He gave me a weird look. It was supposed to be kind of funny and elicit a reaction, but not that one.

So I said, “Yeah, I like to eat, A LOT.”

“Ok, and...” he questioned.

“Um, well I like to cook, read, go on hikes with my dog, watch movies and binge shows...”

He still looked so disinterested.

“I like to draw sometimes...”

His eyes lit up,

“Oh! Are you an artist?” he asked.

“No. I just like to draw and paint and craft sometimes. Well, I have my bachelor’s degree in art, but no I’m not an artist.”

He said, “So you are an artist?”

“No, I like to make art sometimes, but I wouldn’t call myself an artist,” I replied.

Amir then asked if he could see some of my art,

“Well, I don’t have any pictures on my phone, you know, because I’m not an artist, sorry,”

and to that response he guffawed and rolled his eyes. He literally got mad at me for not

having pictures of my drawings, because I'm not an artist who has pictures of her drawings!

After this, I went up to sing my karaoke song. When I got back, Amir gave praise,

“Wow, you were really good!”

“Thank you!”

“No, you were like, really good,”

“Thank you...”

“Like, you practice a lot,”

“Well, I come here a lot, I really love karaoke,”

He stared at me as if I was the idiot, “No like, in the car, or in the shower...”

“Well, yeah I sing in those places too, who doesn't?”

He again, rolled his eyes at me.

I didn't quite know what was happening on this date. Was he expecting something of me?

Did he think I was someone else? I was so confused.

I asked Amir how old he was, he said 24. Well, that explained a lot, but still not the totally weird behavior throughout the night. He asked me how old I was, I joked “84,” he just stared at me, “ok ok, I'm 42,” He looked at me as if he couldn't quite figure out if that one was a joke or not. And then as I was saying my actual age, he interrupted me and just brushed me off. I had had it by that time. I sat there trying to figure out my next move. Amir then said to me,

“You know, you're really allusive. Like, you have a lot of walls up. Oh! Oh, I get it, you have trust issues, don't you?”

I sat there, mouth agape, not believing what I just heard come out of his mouth. I didn't really know what to say. I was offended, and I had also just gone through something kind of

traumatic that made me not want to date anymore. I should have listened to myself. I said back,

“Well, doesn’t everyone?”

I looked down at my glass, almost empty, wondering what to do. I wanted to leave, but I also love karaoke, so I wanted to stay. When I looked up, Amir was getting his check. Of course he didn’t add my drink to it, not like I was expecting it, but after disrespecting me so hard it was the least he could do. He signed his bill and said,

“Well, I’m out.”

“Ok...”

“Are you just going to chill here?”

“Yeah, I’m going to stay here. I’m having a good time. Bye!”

He didn’t even hear the end of that last bit because, naturally, he had disappeared, one foot already out the door. Classic Amir.

I did not meet Amir on a dating app, but I feel like it is relevant to my story. Amir was 24 to my 29. Five years is kind of a big age difference when you’re in your 20s, and as I recently saw on an Instagram post screenshotted from an article found on Google, men don’t fully mature until age 43 (eye roll, face smack, ugh) compared to women who fully mature at age 32. Amir grew up with a cell phone, with a computer already in his house (probably), technology was very advanced by the time I was 15 and he was 10. I feel like the internet has created this whole generation of people who no longer have a filter. They grew up with screens in their faces, putting something in between them, and the people they are trying to connect with. Hiding behind a screen allows you to be immoral, it allows all of your ethics to go out the window. You are no longer looking someone in the face. Some people do have the audacity to say mean, rude, or disrespectful things face to face, but it is easier to

say awful things when you don't have the facial expressions or immediate reactions of the person you're harassing. With the presence of a screen and the absence of a human face, we lose the emotions that come with the connectedness a face-to-face interaction provides us. I believe that all humans have a base first moral language of emotivism. Emotivism is "the position that all ethical thinking is based primarily on feelings,"¹³. I say a "base" first moral language because it may not be everyone's true/core first moral language, but I believe that biologically, we as humans think on emotions first, and then everything else comes after. Biologically through evolution humans react to their surroundings a certain way because of past experiences. We instinctively sense danger in the dark because our ancestors experienced bad things before we invented fire and light. As humans, we have survived not because of the hatred of one another, but because of the love of one another. I think, instinctively, we prefer kindness and love over malevolence. The Dalai Lama shares my sentiments in his book *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, "We are all, by nature, oriented toward the basic human values of love and compassion. We all prefer the love of others to their hatred."¹⁴

Now don't get me wrong, I love the internet and all it has to offer. I mean, come on! I'm trying to find love on the internet! What would we do without the internet? Now that we have it available to us, basically anywhere at any-time, we, as humans in a first world country, feel we cannot live without it. I certainly feel that way most of the time. The internet has provided us with so much. We have access to articles and books, pictures and videos, music, television and movies, we can even shop for just about anything on the internet. We can even shop for groceries online; we basically never have to leave our homes. For some of us,

¹³ Nash and Jang, *Preparing Students for Life Beyond College*, 2015

¹⁴ Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion*, 76

this is a blessing. In our society, people live very hectic and busy lives. Whereas back in the 20th century when people turned 18, they got a job and a family and usually the men were the breadwinners. Now, in the 21st century more people have access to higher education and better careers. People are starting families later in life, if at all, and women are prominent in all workplaces, so doing tasks that used to be left to the “housewife” are now left to both partners, or for the single person completely supporting themselves.

The internet has provided us with a way that we can do it all. We can have the busy career, the family, and still go shopping for necessities without having to convince the earth to slow its orbit around the sun to give us more time in the year. We can book a hotel and plan an entire trip to another country without having to book a travel agent. We can chat with someone on the other side of the world without it having to take days or weeks for a letter to arrive. With the click of a mouse and a press of a button we have access to different parts of the world, other cultures, and other people. Our lives have become very convenient and interconnected. I don't think there is anything wrong with this convenience, except that maybe it has allowed us to have less face-to-face human interaction. We no longer have to interact with the cashier at the store, we can just shoot someone an email at work, text a friend or family member, or comment on a picture to remain “friends” with an old classmate.

I think, with less of that face-to-face human interaction, we have forgotten how to communicate with one another with real compassion and respect.

The internet and social media allows us to talk to and connect with people around the world, people we know personally and people we don't know at all. It allows us to express ourselves and our thoughts on a public platform, no matter what your thoughts or values are. This is wonderful, but it can also be harmful. School bullying is at an all-time high

because of social media. When my parents were kids, even when I was a kid, bullying of course still existed, but the bullying stayed at school. Kids would bully face to face, maybe even settle the score in person. If this happened, then it was easier for an adult to step in if they were aware or saw fit. And then you went home, and you hopefully had some mental and emotional rest from the bullying. In current times with the internet and social media, bullying no longer stays on the playground, it is brought into the home, we have access to it 24/7. A kid can be at school for eight hours and be verbally abused by her classmates, and then go home, get on Facebook, and the bullying continues.

It's not only children who bully each other over the internet, adults are guilty of it as well. Some adults resort to the same kind of bullying that goes on with kids, name calling, fat shaming, calling people stupid, etc. But what I experience most are adults disagreeing with each other about politics, religion, and human rights. The internet gives people a platform to express their opinions and their politics, I'm using the word politics as an all-encompassing definition of human differences and issues. The access to a platform isn't the issue though. The issue is that we don't agree with each other's opinions or politics. The interconnectedness the internet provides allows us to be cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitan ethics says that "no one part of the world has exclusive possession of moral truth"¹⁵. What people forget is that we don't have to agree with each other! In the world, there is no right or wrong. We are all so different, there are so many different opinions, so many different ways of living, that no one can be right or wrong about anything. And with the case of Amir, I feel like he, and a lot of younger people I talk to now-a-days, don't know how to interact with people face to face. They have social media to build fake relationships on, the "like" button to feel validated, they don't remember what it was like to pass notes in class or to

¹⁵ Nash and Jang, *Preparing Students for a Life Beyond College*, 2015

settle a spat in the hallways by the lockers after school at 3! They don't remember how to speak to people without the screen. Now, I'm not saying this is all younger people, but there is definitely a difference, and a major shift. This all could be the case with Amir, or like many have suggested, he could have been on cocaine, or perhaps, just a jerk.

I ended up running into Amir on the street while I was actually on my way to a Bumble date. He was walking behind me and complemented by calf tattoos. I thanked him as I was turning around. I looked at him, and he stared at me for a beat too long. He didn't recognize me at first! He said hi, asked me how the rest of my night went, from our date, and asked me out again. I cringed, and his response was, "Or maybe not?" and I said I didn't know. What I should have said was, "No! Because you were rude to me all night and asked me if I had trust issues, you coked out jerk!" But hindsight is always 20/20.

There is another experience in which I feel is worth mentioning in this chapter, as it has to do with being rude because you're not face to face with a person. Hiding behind a screen allows you so say some pretty horrible things to people. The worst thing that was said to me (given it could have been a lot worse and this didn't faze me one bit) was from a guy on Tinder, lets call him Leroy. It was a pretty standard dating app experience: Right swipe, match, "Hey beautiful, how are you?" I was out with my friends this night, at a weekly event called "The Funk Jam". Leroy and I exchanged a few messages throughout a short period of time, in which he asked me what I was doing and if I wanted to hang out. I told him I was out with my friends, and that he should come and join us. He said he was already settled in for the night and that I should just come over. Red flag number one. I don't meet random people online at their home or any place that isn't public, not only is that extremely dangerous for multiple reasons, but you could get yourself into something that you can't talk your way out of. I told Leroy no, that I was having a good time out, and that if he wanted to

meet up, he had to meet me at the Funk Jam. After a few back and fourths, one trying to convince the other, I gave up, and said that I wasn't going to go to his house to meet him, and "hook up", that's not my style. This is not what Leroy wanted to hear. He said, "fuck you", and a few other things, but what I will never forget is this quote, "Whatever, you'd be way more attractive if you lost a few pounds anyway." When I read that, I laughed so hard. My mom has been using the same line on me since I was 12, it didn't faze me at all. I just couldn't believe that that was the best insult he could come up with, and I told him so. I said something like, "Wow, really? That's the best insult you could come up with? It's such a cliché to try to hurt a woman by calling her fat." To which he responded with a few more "fuck you's" and I unmatched and blocked him.

Chapter 4: My 9...8...7... Day Boyfriend

“Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of non-forgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence.” – Eckhart Tolle

Antarctica is 9,721 miles from Vermont. That is about a 23-hour plane flight. Shotty mail and no internet. So, what is the point?

Chef. Traveler. Believes in ghosts and aliens. Great at texting. Thoughtful, attentive, and giving. That’s the point. Stephen*¹⁶ is great. I met Stephen on Bumble during a Bumble messaging frenzy. I was talking to about 4 different men at the time, I swiped right on Stephen, and we matched! The conversation started with my new signature move: two hand-wave emojis. Stephen responded the next day commenting on the food I was eating in one of my pictures, Laotian pork ribs... mmm. I learned quickly that Stephen is a chef, just got back from living out in Colorado, and would be leaving soon to work in Antarctica for five months. With my then current dating circumstances, the fact that this person was leaving in a month didn’t faze me much; I had been having such bad luck with dating and had so many horrible dates, I figured this would be just like the others, so who cares if he was leaving soon? Also, Antarctica? Sounds like a “I’m being shipped off to Timbuktu in 3 days, so don’t call me” excuse. Ha!

It took us almost 2 weeks to get off the dating app and into real life talking, a good amount of app to text to face to face timing, in my experience. Our first date was to get

¹⁶ Name changed for anonymity

drinks first, feel each other out, and dinner if we felt a connection. We ended up having a wonderful dinner together, chatting about the food and critiquing the flavors (as a chef, his taste buds were on par with my not-formally-trained-yet-boujee-palate). He was kind, listened, and did not say anything rude. Yes, this is what my expectations for dates have been deduced to, someone not saying something rude to me. At the end of our date, Stephen and I agreed to meet up the next night for drinks and dancing.

Antarctica is 9,721 miles from Vermont

Eleven days later, we were still hanging out, going out on dates and enjoying each other's company. My roommate, Sara, asked me if I liked Stephen. I did. My friends asked if I was sad he was leaving. I didn't exactly know how to answer that question. Yes, I was sad he was leaving because he gave me in eleven days what so many couldn't in months: kindness and respect. Why had Stephen and I made such a great connection in such a short amount of time? Well chemistry for one, and the fact that he was a decent person. But I feel like with the quick swiping dating world, I barely have enough time with one guy to find this out. So what was different with my situation with Stephen? Sara came up with a great observation: because he was leaving for Antarctica in a few days! She said that maybe we were going into this knowing that there was a definite ending, so we were taking advantage of the time limit - the expiration date. If our first date didn't go well, we would have said our goodbyes and thought nothing of it. But it went well, our second date went even better, and so, we continued to live our time together to the fullest. I thought of it as a terminally ill person, someone who knew their life were to end soon, so they decided to live each day to the fullest, doing everything their hearts desired.

“Life is available only in the present moment. If you abandon the present moment you cannot live the moments of your daily life deeply.” – Thich Nhat Hanh

Usually when dating a potential partner, we (I’m using “we” only assuming that the other person is playing the same game as I) play games where we are not too quick to text each other. We might leave a week’s time in between dates, pretend to not be too interested, and over analyze every little nit-picky thing about the other person. I think this is because we are planning for the long term. We take time to feel each other out, think about future experiences: Can I travel with this person? Can I bring them home to my family? etc. But Stephen and I only had a few weeks. There was no time to play games or over analyze. We went by the first impression that we liked each other, and worked with it. If he got on my nerves in a few weeks, or I his, it wouldn’t matter, he would be 9,721 miles away, with no internet, and with shotty snail mail, basically no way of contact.

Unfortunately for me, Stephen didn’t get on my nerves. Before he left, he asked me if I wanted to basically date. Had he stayed; I would have said yes. But he was leaving. And long distance tends to not be great for relationships, especially ones where the time difference is a day ahead and contact is extremely limited. Stephen left for New Zealand and we continued to facetime and message on Facebook when it was available to him. Once he got to Antarctica it was basically impossible for him to stay in touch. He got a calling card and had limited access to Facebook. He called me a couple of times from Antarctica, which was very cool. Thanks to technology, we were able to keep in limited touch during his time there, and we didn’t have to send snail mail.

I have a friend who met her husband on OkCupid. A week after meeting, he moved into her apartment. A month later, they were engaged. Four months after meeting, I was

holding a video camera at their wedding (my sobs providing a soundtrack for their vows) recording their promises of devotion and love they have acquired in four months. They met, got along, and went with it. Now, I'm not saying that this is the right move, for me or anyone else; it may have been the right move for them as they have now been married for 5 years. And I'm not saying that I will be moving to Antarctica any time soon (or ever) or that for five months I will be pining and preserving myself for Stephen. I'm saying that maybe putting all of the nit-picky games aside will be better for making a connection with someone else in the long run.

Chapter 5: Being the Other Woman in the Age of Technology

In October of 2017, I matched with a guy named Tony^{17*} on Bumble. His pictures were ok, his profile nothing to write home about. I was actually a little hesitant to swipe right. When swiping on a dating app, you make snap judgements about people based on a few pictures and *maybe* a few words, if you're lucky. You have to portray your personality, likes and dislikes through 6 carefully chosen photographs. Sometimes these pictures are on top of a mountain, with your pet, with friends, most of the time men have one with a fish? Tony's pictures were the type where they could be funny if you knew the context, he could have been really cute or look like a drug addict. After much scrutiny, I swiped right, thinking "eh, I don't have to talk to him if I don't want to." Bumble gives you 24 hours to start a conversation with someone before your match is lost forever. I took almost the entire 24 hours to start the conversation, still scrutinizing over those damn photos. I still don't know if I regret starting that conversation.

After a couple of weeks of talking, we decided to meet up. I met him at a local spot called The Gryphon. As I walked up, I saw a man standing outside on the phone. From afar, it definitely could have been Tony; I did not like what I saw. I walked up closer, looked at him, he looked at me, but I realized it wasn't him. I went inside and immediately spotted Tony at the bar. He was sitting there with a glass of whiskey on the rocks reading a book. I was impressed already. He smiled when he saw me walk up to him. A good smile, sleepy but with a twinkle. We ended up talking for three hours, shutting down the joint. He walked me home, well close to home as I didn't want a stranger to know where I lived. Surprisingly, he

¹⁷ Name changed for anonymity

lived right around the corner from me, literally a minute walk down the street. Tony texted me right after the date saying he had a nice time and would like to see me again. This was the first guy in a while I had had such an immediate connection with, who felt the same, and who wanted to see me again. Nowadays, I feel it is rare to get a text the same night of a first date; this was a good sign. We went out again about a week later, and a few days after that I cooked him dinner at my apartment. Every date, we talked for hours, laughed a lot, and just got to know each other. I really liked Tony, and he really liked me. We held hands in public, he told me I was funny and interesting, and the most amazing person he had ever met. I was beginning to trust Tony. I told him about my trust issues, about my apprehension of jumping into relationships and about my six-month dating expiration date. We talked about all of this, and he made me feel comfortable and secure in what we were building together.

On our fourth date, Tony and I decided to go back to The Gryphon, this time for dinner. They were busy, so we stood in the lobby of the building figuring out somewhere else to go. It was the middle of November. As we stood huddled in the lobby, laughing and reading menus on Yelp, a girl and her friend come in the door. They look at us and paused. **CONFESSION:** I knew exactly who this girl was. Before ever meeting up with Tony, or really anyone off a dating app, I do a little bit of internet stalking. The girl was his ex-girlfriend. From what I could see on his restricted Facebook profile (since we weren't friends yet) they had been broken up for at least 2 months, she was young, and happened to have some of the same physical traits as me.

Tony's ex says, "Oh Hi."

Tony responds, "Um, what are you doing here, I thought you were going to 'Duino Duende'?"

At this point my mind is reeling. I know who she is, he doesn't know I know, why do they know about each other's whereabouts? Aren't they broken up? Do they still talk? Are they still friends? His ex puts out her hand to me and introduces herself to me as Clair*¹⁸, as I am telling her my name she says,

“You're Gabi right?”

How did she know about me? How did she know my name? Did she know we were going to be here? Did she just drag her friend over here to crash our date? Knowing she was younger, I assumed all my previous inquiries to be affirmative. After some more incredibly awkward moments, Tony and I continued our date. He seemed shaken and distracted, kind of upset. I had to keep up the rouse that I didn't know who that was, so I just acted normal, trying to brush off what just happened.

At the end of the date, Tony and I stood in the cold outside of my apartment talking about our relationship. He told me he didn't want to move too fast, I agreed. He said he didn't want to hurt me... I didn't know what that meant and he didn't do a good job of explaining. We said goodbye. I texted Tony the next day asking him who the girl was. I didn't hear back from him for three days. I texted him again saying that I liked him, I thought we were good, and that it was ok if he didn't want to see me anymore, just to not ghost me. He got back to me saying that the girl was his ex (I knew) and that he wasn't ghosting me, he just didn't know how to tell me who she was and that they were still friends. I really liked Tony, so I decided to let it slide. Yes, it was a red flag that he and his ex were still friends, that they not only spoke to keep in touch, but on the regular for her to know who I was and where we would be that night, but I decided to overlook it, let this slide. Who

¹⁸ Name changed for anonymity

am I to assume anyway? I am still on good terms with some of my ex's. I don't talk to them in detail, but I could if I wanted to. I decided I wouldn't hold it against him.

After that happened, I could feel Tony distancing himself from me. We still hung out, but he wasn't being as intimate or complimentary. In December, before I left Vermont for Christmas break, Tony and I had another talk about our relationship. He told me he just wanted to be friends for the time being, that when I got back from NC, we would reconvene and talk about being where we were. I was upset, but agreed. I asked him if it was because he wasn't over his ex, he said no, they were over, he didn't have feelings beyond friendship for her. Tony and I agreed to spend New Year's together.

While I was at home for the holidays, I, of course, went on Facebook and saw that Tony had been tagged in a picture. It was of him and his ex, cheek to cheek, with a heart emoji as the caption. I didn't want to totally jump to conclusions, but I will say that it ruined my first two weeks home since I had moved to VT five months prior. I tried to brush it off, but I couldn't. He and I were taking a break, so I felt I couldn't text him and try to fish around to see what was up. I couldn't tell him I saw it because we weren't friends on Facebook, and he would have figured out that I knew who his ex was before I met her. Well, I had to let it slide and pretend that nothing had happened. Honestly, I wasn't just upset, I was devastated.

On my fifteen-hour drive back to VT, I texted Tony asking him if he still wanted to spend New Year's together, fully expecting a "I'm sorry, but my ex and I are back together... have a nice life!" text. But to my surprise, he said he'd love to spend NYE with me. I was confused, but again, couldn't ask about it, so I just proceeded to make plans. We hung out on New Year's Eve and had a good time. We continued to talk and text and hang out after that. He wasn't as available as he was prior to Christmas, but he made time for me.

He would talk about hanging out with a “friend”, but I knew he was talking about his ex. Much to my relief however, in the middle of January, I found out through Facebook (of course) that Clair, Tony’s ex, had moved back home to another state. I didn’t have to worry about her being around anymore! I didn’t have to worry about them hanging out and him falling for her again. He all of the sudden became a lot more available to me, both with his time and attention.

Over the next couple of months, Tony and I got closer. We hung out a lot, went to dinner, movies, shows, out for drinks, he came over to my apartment to watch “Jeopardy!” and eat charcuterie, and I went over to his place to watch movies and sports, we got really close. I asked him where we were in our relationship, he told me he wasn’t ready yet to commit, he wasn’t ready for a girlfriend, he needed time to not be tied down, but he did like me, and he would be ready soon. That was until one weekend we were both going to Massachusetts for the weekend. He was going to Boston and I was going to Martha’s Vineyard. Since I would be driving through Boston, I offered to carpool, he declined saying that it wouldn’t work with timing and he wanted his car in the city. Made sense. It made even more sense when I got on Facebook the following Monday to see him tagged in pictures posted by his ex-girlfriend of them in Boston together. They weren’t scandalous by any means, so I just liked them and went about my day. That was until I logged back on during my break at work and saw more pictures. This time a little scandalous and with the caption of her saying she was moving back to Vermont. I immediately texted Tony asking him what was going on and if they were getting back together. He said no, they weren’t. That they had had a conversation about their relationship and that they were never getting back together, that she met up with him in Boston to visit friends, and that she was in town visiting her friends who lived here, and that I had nothing to worry about. He told me that my assumptions were

wrong and that it wasn't cool that I overreacted the way I did. I apologized and agreed to just forget about it.

That was until a few weeks later when I was watching the Yankees play the Red Sox at his apartment. He had had a picture of him and his ex up in his apartment dressed up in costume on a bookshelf. It was gone. I thought, "Ok, he wasn't lying, it's really over between him and his ex. The picture is gone, it must really be over." However, my curiosity got the best of me. I wondered if he, or she, just moved it to his bedroom. So, while he was out smoking a cigarette, I looked in his room for the picture, just a quick scan on surfaces, no searching. Just as I was about to leave the room, I saw it, a frame on his nightstand with a notebook on top of it. I picked up the notebook and looked at the picture it was on top of. It was the photo of them dressed up, on a stack of other papers and things, face down. "Ok, cool, he took it down but didn't put it away. I do that, move things but don't actually do anything with them all the time," I thought. As I was putting the picture back, the notebook on top, I noticed what was written on the paper. I skimmed it, thinking it was one of his random thought writings or weird poems I had seen scribbled on scrap paper around his apartment. As I skimmed, I stopped and started to read it. It wasn't random, it was a note. It had a lot of personal stuff in there, but it was from his ex about their time spent in Boston together and the time they spent together in Vermont. It was basically a love note, one ending in "I love you to the moon in back," my least favorite of the love quotes. I was furious. He lied to me! That wasn't just some random trip to see friends, she wasn't just in town visiting her friends, they took a vacation together! She was in Vermont to be with him! I didn't know what to do. I wanted to be honest with him, bring it up and confront him about lying to me and ask him what was going on. But I couldn't, we had been having such a nice time hanging out, I didn't want to ruin it. He came

back in from smoking, and we sat there together in silence, with only the sound of the bat hitting nothing but air, Strike! I was too upset to stay. I had to go.

I left his apartment, but as I was walking away, I realized that I had to suck it up and say something. I walked back up the steps to his door and knocked. He let me into the apartment and I came clean. He wasn't so angry about me snooping, more about the fact that I was upset about what I had found. We fought. He told me he still had feelings for Claire. He told me he had told me that before, "Do you think I would have continued to try to make this work as a relationship if I knew you still had feeling for your ex?!" We yelled at each other. He started getting defensive, knowing he was caught in a lie and that my memory is better than most people's. He eventually kicked me out of his apartment. I had never been kicked out of somewhere before, especially someone's who claimed to care about me and have feelings for me's place.

After that, Tony and I didn't talk for a while. Usually after an argument I would send him a text saying I was sorry for overreacting and that all I wanted was for him to be honest with me, and he would send one back saying that he wanted to be honest and he liked that I was honest, but he needed some time to think, but that we should hang out Tuesday to talk about things. And we would, and everything would be ok. But not this time. I didn't send a text. I was so hurt, so offended. All I wanted was for him to be honest about his and his ex's relationship. I asked him so many times about it and begged him to be honest. I reassured him that it wouldn't make a difference to me, that our friendship was more important than us moving our relationship to the next level, or his relationship with his ex. But he lied. He didn't deserve an apology text. Just silence.

During the time we weren't in contact, I moved out of the apartment I was living in, and moved out of the neighborhood. As I was moving into my new place, I found a couple of

things of Tony's. I didn't want to keep them, but they were too important to throw away, so I returned them to his place, shoved in his tiny mailbox. I got a text from him later that day, a month after the last time I saw him. He said he missed me and was sorry for what happened, I said the same. We agreed to meet up and talk things out.

After arguing and apologizing, we became friends again.

Am I sounding like a broken record yet?

This time felt different. There were no expectations, we were just friends. Just hanging out, having fun, no romantic endeavors, just friendship. Everything was going great, I finally felt like I could relax in our relationship. Until one day he came to my apartment and told me he was thinking about us being more than just friends. He said that we have never just been friends, it's always felt like we were more, and he wanted to be more. He was finally ready to commit to me. I sat there in utter disbelief, for me this had come out of left field, I wasn't expecting it at all, but I had to admit that I was happy he had finally come to this conclusion. We ended the conversation with me telling him I had to think about it, that I didn't want to make a mistake in allowing myself to catch more feelings only to have him take it back, again. The next couple of days were rocky, we agreed to meet up to talk about where I was at with our conversation. I was going to tell him that I was in, that I wanted to be with him. It made sense, it was all that I had wanted for months, and why not take the opportunity. But, Tony was MIA. I couldn't get a hold of him the day we were supposed to meet up. I blew up his phone, and he just didn't answer. Finally, the next day, he got back to me. He basically took back everything he had said, he didn't want to commit, he didn't want to be with me. That was probably the most hurt I had ever been in my life. I cried so hard for a while, and then went and played Dungeons and Dragons with some friends. After that Tony and I talked about it and decided to just start over completely.

But naturally, things don't work out that easily.

Yes, now I definitely sound like a broken record.

My friend ended up seeing Tony and his ex walking downtown two days after our argument. I had to confront him. In my gut, I knew there was something going on when we had the conversation about him finally wanting to commit. I knew I couldn't trust what he was saying, but I wanted to believe it so bad. I had to confront him, catch him lying to me, so that he would finally be honest. My friend and I ended up finding them at a bar. I played it cool, pretending to not see them, but making sure they saw me. Eventually I "ran into him" in passing at the bar, and I asked him what was going on. He told me that she was just visiting, and came out of the blue, a surprise. I asked if her being here was the reason he took back what he had said, he said no. I didn't believe him one bit. I drilled him a little bit more, but he ended up just shutting down. That's when his ex came up and started talking to me. She and I said that we should meet up and get to know each other, but she was leaving town the next day, so it wasn't going to happen.

Well, it happened. The day after the bar incident, Claire and I met up to get to know each other, she even told him that we were meeting up. Oh, did I get to know her. It all came out. About how they broke up a week before I met him. About how they had been trying to work on their relationship since their breakup. About how he told her that he and I had never slept together, that we were just friends, that he wasn't ever interested in dating me and how he wasn't attracted to me. Claire and I shared and compared stories and timelines, and by the end, figured out that he had been lying to both of us for nine months. He had this crazy way of avoiding seeing me while she was in town and avoiding her while we were hanging out. So many lies were told, I was surprised he kept up with them as well as he did, which wasn't that well at all.

So, what to do next? Because of all of Tony's insane lying, manipulation, and gaslighting, we decided the only way to resolve this was to confront him together. He wouldn't be able to lie to both of us if she and I were there to back each other up. We went back to his apartment (she had the key) and waited for him to get off work. He happened to be getting off work early that day so they could drive back to New York together to work on their relationship! I helped her pack up her stuff and we sat there and waited in the middle of summer, in his hot, unairconditioned apartment. Finally, he knocked on the door so she could let him in, she answered, and she said, "We're both here." He tried to get away, saying that he didn't want to do this right now, but of course we weren't going to let him get away with lying to us again. We sat Tony down and confronted him about everything that had happened, about all of his lies. He said some pretty hurtful things. By the end, I was done. I couldn't be there any longer, I had just had my heart stomped on. I left, and told her that if she needed anything, she could contact me.

Claire and I ended up talking and supporting each other for a month after the confrontation. We helped each other get through the pain. Honestly, I didn't completely trust her, and she didn't me, but sometimes you just need someone there to know exactly what you're going through to get through it. She even helped me get some revenge. Which I am not proud of. I made a Facebook post to a private Burlington group about how he had lied to be about having multiple sexual partners and put mine and other women's health at risk (which was true), and that he preferred women of color (which was also true), complete with a few photos that he put on his Bumble and Tinder profile (courtesy of Claire). The post blew up. People were liking it left and right, commenting about how they had seen him around, how they knew him from their place of business, I even got DMs (direct messages) with women sympathizing with me. An ex of his contacted me and said that if I needed to talk or some

support, she was there for me because he had lied to her during their relationship too. I decided to post in a private group because I knew it was a safe space for women, everyone on my friends list wouldn't see it, and because I didn't want everyone to see it, just a few women who would benefit from it. But it ended up getting a lot bigger than I had expected, so after two days, I took it down. I felt guilty, and petty, and immature. This wasn't who I was. Claire asked me why I took it down, and I told her that it had served its purpose.

The rest of the summer went by smoothly. I deleted my dating apps, and just had fun with my friends. I wasn't over it, but I was healing and it felt good to not have lies and pressure and bullshit looming over me all the time. But of course, nothing can stay good forever. One night I was sitting on a bench downtown talking to my best friend on the phone, waiting for karaoke. I saw Tony and a friend walking down the street and just looked past him. I didn't want to even acknowledge his existence. A couple of minutes later, he was standing in front of me, wanting to talk. I put my phone down (but didn't hang up) and said what do you want? He apologized. For everything. For treating me like garbage, for lying to me, for leading me on. He apologized for how he handled everything and everything after. He apologized for not apologizing sooner. I sat there, in the dark on this bench in the middle of downtown, with my jaw agape. I just stared at him, with my mouth wide open as he looked at me waiting for a response. I told him that I didn't know what to say. And that was it, he walked away, said he hoped I was doing well, and left. My friend and I gushed about how ridiculous that whole conversation was after he left, she of course had heard the whole thing, as I had hoped.

I hadn't deleted Tony's number from my phone, I just changed his name to "FuckFace". I texted him and said that I would like to talk. I decided that I didn't want to be friends, but I didn't want to be enemies. I didn't wish any ill will toward him and I wanted to be able to see him on the street and not feel awkward. We agreed and ended things on that.

A few weeks later, I ran into him at a bar and we talked for a while. He told me that right after everything had blown up between Claire, him and me that his sister had passed from a heroin overdose. I felt horrible that I couldn't have been there for him. We had still been very close friends, and no matter how much I hated him, I still wanted to support him in his time of need. We talked about it for a while. I had a roommate pass from a heroin overdose, so I could actually give him some insight and tell him the process with the police. We decided to keep in touch after that.

Now Tony and I are friends. It has definitely been a bumpy road after we decided to keep in touch. It hasn't been easy forgiving him. It hasn't been easy believing him, I am constantly questioning if he is lying to me. He is dating someone new. We have had a few arguments here and there about communication and trust, but we always come out on the other side better for it. Sometimes I feel foolish for continuing any type of relationship with Tony. Even writing this is making me rethink our relationship. But what I know is this: love is blind, love has no limits, and love is forgiveness. I know I'm at risk here for sounding sappy and ultimately crazy, but I fell in love with Tony, despite all of the craziness. Because between the insanity there were a lot of laughs, a lot of deep connections, and a deep understanding of one another. We've had a lot of good times together. He is one of the only people I can have plans with to watch a movie and we never watch it because we spend 4 hours just talking. He is the only person I can have a real constructive argument about politics and the current political climate with. He is the only person where the hours just slip away from us and brunch soon turns into dinner. He is the only person who can really make me feel better when I am sad or lonely, who I want to talk to every day, and who brings me back down to earth when my mind is spiraling into space. He is the only person who I can go through something like what we have been through with, and we BOTH still want to be in each other's lives. He is the

only person I have ever had these feelings for. He is the only person I have ever been in love with. Tony and I met over a year ago, and we have been through so much together, it has only made our bond stronger. Through all of the lies (on both sides) and deceit, we are still close friends, and we still listen to each other and try to make it work. Like I said, it's been hard. Trust is very important in a relationship, and our trust has been broken. But I know who he is despite all of his bad decisions and he knows me, and ultimately, that is what I want out of a relationship, just not one with him.

“You own everything that happened to you. Tell your stories. If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should have behaved better.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Lamott, *Bird by Bird*, 156

Chapter 6: “I’ve Never Been with a Black Woman Before!”: Dating as a POC

What is a POC? A POC is a Person of Color, anyone who is not White/Caucasian, if you didn’t know this already. I am a POC, as I mentioned before, I am half Black/African American and half Latina (Salvadorian to be exact). To be frank, in general, life isn’t easy for a POC in this country. The United States was built off the backs of slaves and seed sewn in the blood of Indigenous peoples, and this country has never recovered or reconciled it’s dark, racist history. If you haven’t watched the news lately, POC, black people in particular, are constantly and consistently mistreated-treated as less than human, and disproportionately jailed, murdered, and grossly underrepresented in media.

I was watching the news about the protests happening in the US right now to “Open Back Up” (being closed because of the global pandemic we are currently facing), and the protestors are all white, armed to the teeth with assault rifles in government spaces and buildings (illegal), all while putting so many other innocent people in danger just because they are exposing themselves to the public, and mine (and so many others) thought was, ‘Damn, if they were black, they’d be tear gassed, pepper sprayed, hosed down, beat down, etc.’

“Gabi,” you’re saying, “what does this have to do with you and social media and dating?” Well, it has everything to do with my experiences in dating. The deep seeded institutional and systemic racism that this country was built on affects my (and other POC) chances in finding a match, and other aspects of my dating life, in a major way. In 2014, OkCupid released a study confirming that a racial bias was present in our dating

preferences²⁰. The two groups who were deemed least desirable were Asian men, and, you guessed it! Black women. Ugh. “White, Asian-American, Native American, Latino, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander and black men all wrote back to African-American women at about a 20% lower rate than they did to all other races and ethnicities! (Yes, even black men sent fewer responses to black women than all other women).”²¹ A study done by Columbia University showed that while Black women strongly preferred black men, the Black men did not reciprocate their interest.²²

Why is this? What makes black women less attractive or less approachable than women of other races? There are some biological theories as to why people find Black women and Asian men less attractive. One study explains how both institutional racism and biological factors play into attractiveness of Black women and Asian men:

1. Legacy of slavery contributed to African-American male idealization of white women as forbidden fruit and status symbols.
2. As slaves, black women were raped as the property of white men and have ongoing aversions of white men as a result.
3. Black men have been oppressed by white men, black women are taught to have “stand by your man at all costs” loyalty to them
4. Evolutionary mate selection theorists say height, hairiness, and larger penises are associated with greater masculinity. Petite ness and long hair are associated with femininity. Asian men are shorter and less hairy (on average) than black or white men. Black women have shorter natural hair and have slightly greater muscle and

²⁰ Sharma, *Tinder has a race problem nobody wants to talk about*, 2016

²¹ Young, *Unequal Love Across the Color Line*, 2010

²² Young, *Unequal Love*, 2010

bone density (on average) than other women. So Asian men are viewed as less masculine than others.

5. Stereotypes about Asian submissiveness and black aggressiveness fuel assumptions about what patterns will be most “masculine” and “feminine,” and who will be the bad boy and good girl.
6. White standards of beauty devalue Black women and Asian men and our media embrace these stereotypes.²³

While interracial marriages have increased exponentially since the 1960’s, one study showing that the rise in interracial marriages increased over the past 20 years coinciding with the rise of online dating²⁴, there are still societal biases placed on POC, especially in the dating world. “Dating websites and apps like Tinder have created such a vast pool of potential partners- millions of matches- that people have to start to generalize and draw the line somewhere. These generalizations are often drawn from institutional racism and generalizations.”²⁵ One method used to test whether people harbor racial stereotypes is by using immediate word associations people who say they aren’t racist use while describing a person of another race. For example, people who denied they were racist, or had racial biases, “took longer to associate positive words, such as ‘good’ or ‘warm’ with people of groups of the opposite race.”²⁶

Yes, dating in the age of social media is difficult for a Black woman (and Asian men) for sure, but I will say for the most part, I haven’t had that much trouble getting matches on

²³ Young, *Unequal Love*, 2010

²⁴ Brown, ‘*Least Desirable?*’, 2018

²⁵ Sharma, *Tinder Has a Race Problem*, 2016

²⁶ Sharma, *Tinder Has a Race Problem*, 2016

the apps and having the matches respond. So, what sets me apart from other WOC (women of color)? I am not just black, I am Latina, I am of mixed race, meaning that I have a lighter skin tone and less kinky natural hair than women who are not mixed. I feel really weird admitting that is why I have more luck than other Black women on dating apps, but it's true. There is a major problem in this country (and around the world) regarding the shade of a person's skin, or colorists. A colorist is someone, a lot of times of the same ethnicity as the person they are regarding, who is racist or biased against a person because of the tone of their skin. My mom is from Harlem, New York, and she lived in a black neighborhood where they would do something called the "brown paper bag test". This is a "test" where the color of your skin is measured to that of a brown paper bag; if you're darker, you're not welcome. If you are the same tone or lighter, you're welcome. This is also deeply rooted in historical racism and the fact that lighter skinned slaves were usually the ones working in the house, not out in the fields, and if the slave was lighter skinned, it most likely meant they were a child of the master.

But while I have had my "advantages," I have also had my disadvantages, most specifically in the realm of being fetishized by mostly white men. The sentence, "I have never been with a Black woman before," has come into my dating app inbox one too many times, as well as,

"So, are you like other Black girls?"

"Have you ever been with a white guy? My dick might be too small for you," I'm sorry, what?

"Is your hair real?"

"What are you? You can't be just black," Why not?

"Oh, damn you MUST have a fat ass,"

And the list goes on and on.

These comments used to be answered with a ha! and a witty response. I no longer entertain ignorance like this though, so sometimes, if I feel like getting on my soap box, I will rip them a new one and then un-match. Thankfully, I don't get a lot of these comments anymore.

Maybe it's because the world is becoming more socially conscious and no one wants to be problematic anymore. I feel like men have definitely learned to not just say whatever horrible thing comes to their minds, well some men. In an article "Being black welcomes its own struggles-as racism does- but being a Black Woman I feel constantly dehumanized by the partners that pursue me. As black women, we're understood as a group rather than as individuals, leading us to be defined through mainstream stereotypes that are then imposed on us in relationships."

I will be honest, I do date mostly white men. I have grown up in predominantly white spaces, gone to white schools (elementary-grad school), and according to studies it is common for people to gravitate towards people who look like their parents, or people who lived in their neighborhoods. I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. "When it comes to attraction, familiarity is a really big piece. So, people tend to often be attracted to the people that they are familiar with."²⁷ Do I have a preference of white men, yes, but only because they're who I'm used to. Do I have a preference in white men because they're white? No, definitely not, I go out of my way to try and date POC. Unfortunately, like I said, I am always finding myself in predominantly white spaces with little to no Black community, so it's hard to find men of color, a research participant by the name of Malcom*²⁸ agrees

²⁷ Brown, '*Least Desirable*', 2018

²⁸ Name changed for anonymity

with me, “Usually women of color are my preference, [but] they’re few and far between here (in Burlington, Vermont).”

Saying that I go out of my way to find POC to date might sound a little problematic, or fetish-y, but let me explain myself. While I am more comfortable with white partners, I would prefer a partner of color for the simple fact that we have a lot of similar experiences because we are POC, and it would be easier to introduce each other to our families. This is assuming that the white partner I have chosen doesn’t already have family members of color, but believe me, it is not easy meeting white parents. I try to avoid meeting parents until it gets serious, which it never does, so yay for me! This is because I have found that men, white men in particular, don’t tell their friends or family about my race. So when I walk in that door ready to have some dinner that will most likely need salt, the parents feign shock. And then there is the conversation about my race, my background, where my family is from, which are normal questions to ask of a person dating your child, but they come with a lot of weight and baggage that fills the room with thick, uncomfortable energy. When I say that I’m mixed, allude to being middle class, say I’m getting my masters, the parents are 100% of the time surprised and pleased (sometimes seemingly of themselves). Sometimes the comment, “My brother’s cousin married a black woman... beautiful children.” Yikes! Can you tell why I want to avoid these conversations? But hey, I’m not going to stop dating because of this, and I’m not going to write off a white person because I might have to sit through this. I have learned to come to these dinners prepared. I always ask if my partner has told their parents I am black. If it’s a no, I tell them to tell their parents right now, because I am not going to step into the lion’s den. I also follow up with, what did they say? Usually, they don’t care, or they don’t say they do, but I have to know just in case.

There are other reasons why I try to find partners of color. One being that even after the potentially awkward conversation, I never feel like I fit in completely. I feel like I have to be on my best, colonized behavior. I have to have the best table manners, and use the best English I can muster. I have my guard up and it can be exhausting. There is also the un-comfortability in my blackness related to my body type. The other night, I was stalking a potential Tinder partner on Facebook, as we have learned I tend to do, and I saw a bunch of pictures of his family swimming in their backyard pool. The whole family, his siblings, their partners, and their kids. They all looked like they were having a great time, they looked very close and like they actually all enjoyed each other's company. I tried to picture myself there, in those matching t-shirts, in my bathing suit, and I immediately felt uncomfortable. Part of it is because of my internalized over-sexualized view of my body. I pictured myself laying out by their pool in my two-piece, my boobs exposed (gasp!) and my big butt and thighs spread over their lounge chairs, and imagining them think, "Oh no, this is inappropriate for the kids to see," all while the rest of the family is scantily clad in their string bikinis. Now, I am not the only women of color to have internalized over sexualization of one's own self. This is also an issue deep seeded in historical racism. Since I can remember, I have always been over sexualized. I was told I couldn't wear a two piece until, well until I decided that one day, I was going to wear one, all the while feeling so uncomfortable and as if everyone was staring at me. My hair couldn't be a certain way because it was too sexy, I couldn't wear a mid-drift top because it was too sexy, I couldn't do so many things my white girl friends did, because it was too sexy. Little Black girls are constantly being over sexualized, having said, "You look too grown, go change!" "Take your hand off your hip, you look too grown!" To them over and over again. This goes along with the master and slave rape, Black women being only seen as sexual objects, continued for generations, still now portrayed in rap music videos.

These are some pictures from a tweet posted on Instagram comparing the sexualization of black girls to non-black girls²⁹



I can't blame my mother and all the Black mothers before and after her for this though. "When abuse occurs, they are less likely to be believed and supported. A report published by Georgetown Law Center found that 'adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers.' Black girls are perceived to be more independent, more knowledgeable about sex, and in less need of protection."³⁰ Doesn't it sound like we need more protection though, or at least the same as our White counterparts. Recently, a documentary about the rape and child pornography trial against singer/songwriter R. Kelly came out. He was keeping women trapped in his many houses, he married Aaliyah, who was 15 years old at the time of the marriage, and actually wrote music about it, and was finally found guilty of his charges. All of his victims were Black. It took so long for these women to get (long awaited, but not enough) justice because of people like a juror from R. Kelly's 2008 child pornography trial. The juror said "he did not believe testimony from Black women because of how they dressed and 'the way they act', Kelly was acquitted of the charges."³¹ Another case made popular, or one that went viral,

²⁹ Twitter @lavienus

³⁰ Finoh, Sankofa, and Fellow, *The Legal System*, 2019

³¹ Finoh, Sankofa, Fellow, *The Legal System*, 2019

was that of Cyntonia Brown, a 16-year-old girl who was kidnapped for sex and forced into sex work. She murdered her captor and was found guilty of murder with intent of robbery. Brown was tried as a adult and sentenced to life in prison, “despite (her) age and circumstances, juries found (her) culpable, less innocent, and in need of less protection”³². After an extensive clemency campaign and nationwide outcry for her freedom, Tennessee governor Bill Hallam overturned her conviction and she is a free woman, after being in prison for 15 years. “Because Black women and girls have historically been dehumanized, considered un-rapeable, and left without legal recourse, they become easier targets for abuse and are more reluctant to come forward. Daniel Holtzclaw, a former Oklahoma City police officer convicted of sexual violence in 2015, specifically targeted low-income Black women because he thought they were less likely to be believed.”³³ This quote has to do specifically with Black Women victims of sexual assault, though I also find it relevant to every aspect of healing from inherited trauma for Black women, “Many cultural considerations can hinder healing of Black women survivors: the burdensome expectation of strong Black womanhood; the power of the Black church; the desire to shield Black men; and the lack of self-care examples are all real dynamics Black women survivors endure.”³⁴

35% of Black women experience some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime.

African American girls and women 12 years and older experienced higher rates than White, Asian, and

Latina girls and women from 2005-2010.

40% of confirmed sex trafficking survivors in the U.S. are Black³⁵ –

³² Finoh, Sankofa, Fellow, *The Legal System*, 2019

³³ Finoh, Sankofa, Fellow, *The Legal System*, 2019

³⁴ Finoh, Sankofa, Fellow, *The Legal System*, 2019

³⁵ The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, *Statistics of Black Women and Sexual Assault*, 2018

40%! That's almost HALF OF ALL WOMEN who are sex trafficking survivors. Let that sink in, BLACK women ONLY, almost HALF

It's a catch 22. We shouldn't be oversexualized because we will experience self-hatred, but tell us to not act or look too sexy because we have to be kept safe; because no one else, not even our legal system will keep us safe.

Thankfully in the Black community, women are taking back their bodies. If we want to be sexy, we are sexy on our terms and no one else's. But this is only in the black community. As we have talked about in this chapter, racism is institutional, it is passed down from generation to generation. Just because my community has decided we will not be used as sexual objects, doesn't mean that other communities feel the same. Personally, I know that my own internalized sexualization was implanted by my mother, who had to hear the same things I did as a child. But I can't fault or blame her for this. She (and many other Black parents) is protecting their little girls the best way they know how, by telling them that they have to try, through hell and high water, to NOT be sexy, not look too grown, not attract unwanted attention from men. But as we are learning through movements like Me Too, it's not our fault. Rape is not a women's fault, sexual abuse and assault is not our fault. Women do nothing to entice a man to assault her. So maybe we need to teach our young men, and white men, and white people, that women are not sexual objects, black women are not sexual objects. I can't control the size of my hips or breasts (As studies have shown, Black women have more muscle mass *shrug*), but other people can control how they view my body. Unfortunately, my white partner's parents don't think about these things, so I just have to either be uncomfortable with my thighs melting through the cracks in their Adirondack chairs, cleavage glistening in the sun, or wear pants and a tee while swimming, OR date within my race.

“Dating while being a Black woman is a constant realization and fear that you will be analyzed when an analysis doesn’t need to be made. You’ll be compared to women you’ve never met.”³⁶

³⁶ Brinkhurst-Cuff, *This Is What it's Like*, 2015

Chapter 7: Catfish

“Due to the asynchronous nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC), and the fact that CMC emphasized verbal and linguistic cues over less controllable nonverbal communication cues, online self-presentation is more malleable and subject to self-censorship than face-to-face self-presentation.”³⁷

Looking back on the Tony story, I am still grappling with if it was good that I used Facebook as a method to keep tabs on him, before I knew him and during our relationship. I wouldn't have known about his ex at all had I not Facebook “stalked” him before I had met him. I would have had an OK Christmas at home with my family... But Facebook and the internet can be an excellent tool when online/app dating. There is a show on MTV called Catfish, where people who are in online relationships contact these two documentarians to come and help them figure out if their online partner is really who they say they are. So, catfish has been a term coined in the age of online dating meaning that the person you met online is not who they say they are in real life. Finding someone's Facebook off a dating app is very helpful to making sure the person you swiped right on, is a real person, to make sure you're not being catfished. Yes, it takes a bit of work, and some Facebook knowhow, but it's not too hard to find someone on social media off the little information given on a dating app. If the person doesn't have Facebook, google their name, location, school/work, whatever information the app has given you, and you will most likely be able to find them. You can even get a picture off the app and put it into your google image search and find them that way. I should be a private investigator.

This isn't only helpful to make sure you aren't being catfished, but also to make sure the person you're going to meet up with isn't a total creep! I was talking to this guy on

³⁷ Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, *Managing Impressions Online*, 2017

Bumble once whose birthday was coming up. He wanted to go out with me the night before his birthday, but he didn't live close to Burlington, so I was apprehensive about making a long drive to someone I had never met before. After a bit of Facebook searching, I found him. I am so happy I did. His cover photo was of a bumper of a pickup truck that had a decal on it that said, "I'm a republican because I'm not on welfare". Eek! Political beliefs are usually not a total deal breaker for me, but that kind of ignorance is. I didn't meet up with this guy, thanks to Facebook.

We're All Liars

Aren't we all catfishing in a sense? Even me, who has tailored her Bumble profile to resemble a man's, when for five years, I had done it the way I wanted to. We talk online first so that we can tailor our conversations to fit what the other person wants to hear. By communicating first online, we can take time to think about what we're going to say, what our next move will be. We have time to sound funny, intelligent, witty, who we think the other person wants us to be based on their profile pictures and personal summary. *"Research suggests that when individuals expect to meet a potential dating partner for the first time, they will alter their self-presentational behavior in accordance with the values desired by the prospective date."*³⁸

One of my research participants said that her worst experience on a dating app was when she was catfished, she said that "the dude looked nothing like his pics." Thankfully I have never been in this experience, seeing that *more than 50% of Americans lie on the profiles.*³⁹ There are people who look a little different, but not vastly. I did have an experience where I talked to the potential date, Edward*⁴⁰, for a little bit online and we decided to meet up. As

³⁸ Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, *Managing Impressions Online*, 2017

³⁹ Matthews, *27 Online Dating Statistics*, 2018

⁴⁰ Name changed for anonymity

usual, I found his Facebook and Instagram profiles online. He was actually cuter on his social media platforms than on his dating app profile. Score! We met up for an early morning cup of coffee. I walked into the coffee shop, and we made eye contact. As one of my research participants, Natalie* said when asked what she's learned through her experience on dating apps, "...that you can't trust anyone when they tell you what their height is."⁴¹ Yeah, this guy was about two inches shorter (which I have always said was the standard for men to lie about on apps), than his profile stated. After my initial surprise at the height discrepancy, I said hi, and he said "Hi Gabi!" and right then I knew it wasn't going to work. Edward's voice was very high pitched and a little nasally. I know this sounds a little nit-picky and a lot shallow, but it was jarring. I went through the whole date. He was really nice and laughed at my jokes, so I decided to go on another date with him. The second date went a little better than the first, I was expecting his tone, and we went to dinner and a comedy show. But throughout the date, I kept thinking, gosh just please stop talking. It was a little too much for me... eek. But again, I had a good time. I thought long and hard when the end of the date came along. Did I want to see this guy again? Could I get over his voice? Was all of this worth it? I drove Edward home, and I gave him a hug goodbye. I could tell he wanted a kiss, and in that moment, I thought about what he would sound like during intimacy. It wasn't good. I said goodbye, and we didn't go on a third date. I realized that even though someone might seem really great, that sometimes there are things that you just won't be able to get over. After a week of feeling kind of bad about ditching a guy because of his voice, I realized that I also wasn't fond of the way he communicated when we weren't face-to-face, he didn't text me unless it was to set up a date, he wasn't as available as I would like a partner to be, and his voice!

⁴¹ Reference Questionnaire *Name changed for anonymity

Now there was no way I was going to know how Edward would sound unless we had talked on the phone before our date. Which might have been nice. Edward wasn't lying about anything (other than his height), but he did have something that was a setback for me, and possibly other potential partners who were equally as shallow as I? Studies have shown that being honest when looking for a partner online is not as easy as it seems. One study suggests that *"there are three domains of the self: the actual self (attributes an individual possesses), the ideal self (attributes an individual would ideally possess), and the ought self (attributes an individual out to possess); discrepancies between one's "ideal self" influenced perceptions of their romantic partners in the direction of their ideal self-conceptions."*⁴² This means that even though we are trying to be as honest as we can be, we may still portray ourselves as who we want to be, who we would like people to perceive us to be, who we think the potential partner we matched with on our dating apps want us to be, rather than who we really are. I think a good way to avoid the "ideal self" and "ought self" portrayals is to just be as honest about who you are in this moment on a profile and while talking to a potential date as possible. You can tell the person what you are striving for in life, but don't say you're already there.

I would assume that people who are on dating apps for a relationship would deter from lying on their profiles. If you want a real connection with someone, you should be honest about who you are and what your intentions are. In my experience, people will always find out when you're lying or deceiving them, so why do it in the first place? A good example of this happened to one of my research participants, Carrie*. Carrie's says, "One guy slept with me a few times, it was meh, and then he messaged my roommate, who had the body of a Barbie, and asked her out for drinks and explicitly asked her to not tell me. Then she rejected him, he ping-ponged back to me in search of attention. I shut him down

⁴² Ellison, Heino, Gibbs, *Managing Impressions Online*, 2017

and asked him to not speak to me ever again. He ping-ponged back to Barbie, said ‘Carrie and I aren’t speaking anymore’ as if that would be some kind of endearing quality which would turn his luck. Thankfully she was an OG (original gangster) roomie and we talked shit for a while about him.”⁴³ Well I’m glad Carrie had a good friend, an “OG” roommate, that had her back. Just, don’t lie. It’s really that simple.

Apparently over 60% of online daters are already in a relationship, and people often catfish often do so out of loneliness/boredom, or for revenge.⁴⁴ I can see this happening. I mean, I personally wouldn’t lie on my dating profile, but I do tend to get into relationships because I’m bored and lonely. Lauren*, a research participant, agrees with me *“I have learned that most people use these apps when they are feeling insecure or lonely, myself included. There is a lot of research that shows you should NOT get on these apps when you are feeling lonely, because you are craving a real connection that you won’t get from apps. Then in turn you feel lonelier. I have learned that I mostly used them for validation, which is why I never got much out of them.”*⁴⁵ Whoa girl, I feel that hard. I would say all of my relationships that started from an app started because I was bored and/or lonely. Including meeting and sticking around for Tony. I didn’t really have any friends, and while I wasn’t looking for a partner at the time, I was looking for some kind of companionship. And, as you can see now because I am still single, it never worked out.

*“It is very important to be genuine and honest if you really want to have success (with dating apps). Often times people see right through falsehood and if you aren’t honest, how can you hope to find whatever it is you are looking for. Be you and be truthful.”*⁴⁶ - John*

⁴³ Reference Questionnaire *Name changed for anonymity

⁴⁴ Matthews, 27 *Online Dating Statistics*, 2018

⁴⁵ Reference Questionnaire *Name changed for anonymity

⁴⁶ Reference Questionnaire *Name changed for anonymity

Chapter 8: Forever Alone (or Not)

So here we are, at the end. It's no surprise that after these horror stories, I am still single. But that's the thing, I don't want a relationship with someone to be a horror story. I have been through a PG13 horror story of a relationship before, and I don't want that again. I have learned so much through my experiences navigating being a millennial and on dating apps. I have learned that I don't want to settle. I don't want to settle for anything that I don't want, I don't want to just say, *'Well I can get over that'*. I don't want to have to get over anything. I want to love someone fully, flaws and all, because I think if I love them, their flaws won't really be a flaw at all.

I have learned that, for me, dating apps aren't working. They are good tools to meet new people, definitely, and they work for so many other people, as they have for most of my research participants. I have been using dating apps for six years, and I just haven't met the right person. Yes, I have been in a relationship with someone I met off an app, but clearly it didn't work out. I think the problem I see with dating apps is that people are on them for specific reasons, and I am not necessarily here for any of those reasons. People get on apps for either friends (why?) hookups, or a relationship.

I don't really see the point in making friends from a dating app. They have apps to help you meet people, as well as real life things you can do. Oh you know, IRL, where you meet someone in person because you have a shared interest? Like, at the library, *"Oh, I've read that book! It's one of my favorites!"* Potential friend MADE. Eating alone at a restaurant. I met someone this way, so has one of my friends, and she introduced me to the girl she met, and now we're all friends! Improv class, pottery class, a yoga class, *"This was fun! I feel so good now, how long have you been coming here?"*. Ok, that one sounds a little like a pickup line, but you get

the point. And the classic place, a bar, *“Hey! Want can I play the next round with you?”* Of pool, ya know, billiards? Yeah, there are ways to meet friends outside of dating apps, so all of the people who say that they are on there just to meet friends are lying. Tony said that to me, and some of my research participants said the same thing. Yeah, they’re looking for friends, friends to hook up with or date, which is not looking for just a friend. If you like a one stop shop, Bumble has three options: Bumble Date, Bumble Bizz (which is networking for a job), and Bumble Bff, yes, an app to find a friend.

I remember dating apps having the reputation for being an easy way to find a hookup. The first actual app I had heard of (because OkCupid was a website first) was Plenty Of Fish. I was at work and one of my coworkers was swiping on Plenty of Fish. Everyone in the office had a conversation about it. We all agreed that it was a hookup app, and so was Tinder. I think that was the reason I downloaded Tinder on my phone, because I didn’t want a relationship, I just wanted an easy hookup, which I found, easily. I think even if you get on a dating app specifically for a relationship, you’re going to have your fair share of hookups (unless you have a lot of self-control). And there is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to just hook up with people, seeing you’re doing it responsibly, respectfully, and safely of course. Unfortunately, a lot of people say they are on an app for a relationship, but really only want to hook up, leaving others hurt and disappointed, and feeling cheated and disrespected. I’ve been there, it sucks, but I also know to not expect anything from anyone, so...

But like I said, a lot of my research participants are in committed relationships from dating apps, one of them even met her husband on an app! I don’t know exactly what the status of every one of my participants who found a relationship on an app was when they got into the relationship, or their partner’s status, but I know what I know from my

experiences. I know that I've met so many guys on apps who once we started hanging out, started things up with their ex soon after (I seem to have that effect on people). Seriously, almost every guy I've met on a dating app since moving to Vermont over a year ago ended things with me because they were still hung up on their ex. Ugh. Tony was just out of a relationship and looking for a rebound. I also know that Tony didn't put much time from one serious relationship to the other, the shortest amount of time being mere weeks. Tony is currently in a relationship with someone he met on a dating app, someone he met three months after the debacle with me, and weeks after dating two other women. Desperate, lonely, and everything in between, he is. Blair* confirms my case about rebounding, "*Right after I used OkCupid, I met someone in person who was my downstairs neighbor and we hit it off more than the people I met online. I dated him for three years, and then we broke up. I went on Bumble, and met someone I dated for a year.*"⁴⁷ - long term rebound.

I don't want to be someone's rebound.

I think I've only met one guy off an app who was looking for a real relationship who wasn't just out of one, in fact it had been a year since his last relationship, and he ended up finding someone, who wasn't me.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with looking for a relationship on a dating app. I just don't think it's for me. I don't want to just find friends, and I don't want to hook up, so the last reason for me to be on an app is for a relationship, and I don't want to find one from an app. Through my experience, I've found that people who are looking for a relationship on a dating app are either bored, lonely, desperate, or just broke up with someone and are looking for a rebound. Lauren* agrees with me, "*To be honest, if you want*

⁴⁷ Reference Questionnaire *Name changed for anonymity

casual sex and/or something casual and fun, go for it (dating apps). The apps are great for instant gratification and if you aren't looking for anything serious, it will probably satisfy that for you.”⁴⁸

I met this guy on Bumble who said something that really resonated with me, and helped to change my perspective about dating apps. Before we met in person, I asked him what he was looking for on Bumble (hookup, casual dating, relationship, etc.) - I wish I hadn't deleted him from my match list because it would really help right now - but he said something along the lines of that he was looking for a connection. He wanted to meet new people who he was attracted to and to have fun with and if it turned into a relationship, he was open to it. He said, “People who are looking for a relationship will find one,” out of context, that's a “duh” statement, but in context he was saying that you're going to find what you're looking for, even if it's not what's right for you, or exactly who you're looking for, because it's what you want. And I found that to be so true for me and everyone else I've met, on and off dating apps. It's like going to the pound to find a dog. You're going to find so many dogs, and you might get one, but it may not be the exact right fit for you. The only difference between these scenarios is that you can train a dog, but you can't train or change a person. If you're looking for something, you're going to find it, in one person or another because it's what you want to find. That's literally how most of my relationships have started, because I was bored and looking for something, really anything, that would fill that void, and that's what I have experienced with just about everyone else I've met on dating apps as well.

⁴⁸ Reference Questionnaire * Name changed for anonymity

I Know What I Want, and I'm Not Going to Settle

Dating apps have taught me so much. They have shown me what I really want out of a relationship. I know, I've talked some shit about my past relationships and experiences, they really messed me up, but I've learned so much from all of my previous relationships. For example, I fell in love with Tony because he had all of the qualities that I loved in my previous partners in one person, aside from being a dirty liar. But since then, I have met other people who fit the bill. I am starting to think that every romantic partner I've had since have been getting better, and I am getting closer and closer to finding exactly what I am looking for, which, no coincidence here, is how I view life experiences; every experience teaches you something and leads you down a specific path. Because of all of my past experiences, I learned that I want someone who has all of the qualities I am looking for in a partner.

- **I want someone who is going to be open and honest with me and who will have mature communication with me.**

Through all of my past relationships, I have learned that the number one thing I find most important in a partner is having an open and honest relationship. I have realized that with any relationship I have, friends, family, romantic, etc. open and honest communication is essential to it being successful. For real, if someone has an issue with me, tell me and we can talk about it. If a partner is getting a wondering eye and might want to explore other relationships, tell me! And we can figure things out together.

- **I want to have things in common with my partner.**

I feel like this is an obvious one, but I don't think a lot of people really know what this means. I think a lot of people say that they like certain things to make themselves seem more exciting, but that's not who they really are. Through my journey with my past partners, I have compiled a list of what they are.

- I have realized having similar energy levels is so important. I have dated guys who were lazier than me, which drove me crazy, and guys who were always on the go, who I just couldn't keep up with. My ideal partner would love to eat out and go to movies, likes to walk around downtown and by the lake (or body of water or park). We would both like to sit and watch movies and tv and veg out, and read and talk. I want to be with someone who likes chill activities, but will also go on a scenic hike with me and my dog. Now that doesn't mean that I can't be with someone who doesn't match my vibe exactly. I find that someone who is more of a go-getter than I am motivates me, but sometimes that turns into me feeling ashamed of my inherent need for rest, which isn't a healthy mindset to have. There's always a good balance to find in relationships.
- A good partner for me will have similar political views and similar beliefs, but is also willing to challenge each other on both. One of my favorite things to do with a partner is to talk about politics and current events and have constructive arguments about them. Agreeing about specific topics (feminism, racism, etc.) is important to me, we need to be on the same team, but finding little things that we

disagree with and we talking about them until we come to our mutual understanding means that we have great communication skills.

Nothing is ever left unresolved.

- Having similar taste in entertainment. No, we don't have to like everything the other likes, but we should have similar taste in music, movies, books, and tv. I think this allows for positive time spent together because we either are both enjoying what entertainment or media we are consuming, or we are experiencing something new, that we will most likely enjoy because of our similar taste. Does that make sense? I am always finding something new that I never would have thought about finding myself because partners introduced it to me.

- **I want to be friends with someone before I commit to a relationship with them.**

I think this is the most important thing I've learned through my past relationships, and is a culmination of everything in one. My best relationships have been ones where my partner and I were friends first, and that is what I have realized is what I really want. The reason why I am able to make a list of things that I want is because these are qualities I look for in friendships. I have friends who I have been in fights with, but we come out of the other side stronger. I have friends who I share interests and energy levels with. I have different friends for different things. But the only way I know I will be able to get there with a future partner, and all of my friends, is with time.

Time. That is one thing that you don't necessarily get with a dating app. People are constantly swiping, not giving you enough time to prove yourself or get to where you need

to be to be in a healthy committed relationship. There is this weird timeline thing when you're in a relationship with someone from a dating app. You meet, and then after going on about five dates, decide that you're going to only date each other. And then after a month or two, you say, ok, we're in a relationship. For me, that doesn't make any sense. For me to know that I really like someone, enough to commit to them and want to take it to the long term, I want time to make sure that you have all of these qualities I'm looking for. I want to have the time to make a friend and then say, hey, this is what I'm looking for. I want time to fall in love.

But I Digress...

For me, dating apps and online dating isn't working, but what about the human race? I am but a speck in this big wide universe and while this thesis is about my personal experiences, it is also a study on the human relationship as a whole.

I am not going to make a suggestion as to whether I can tell if technology, and specifically dating apps, are good for the human race as a whole, that is something I can just comment on for myself, but I have come to the conclusion that it's not all bad. There are definitely downsides to communicating through a screen. We aren't our true selves. From as large of a lie as being a catfish, to as small as taking a few more seconds to respond to a message rather than having a real, in-time, flow of consciousness conversation. We find the confidence to be exceptionally rude when we aren't face to face with people. People who are usually non-confrontational find the courage to say the horrible things they wouldn't in person. There is this podcast by comedian Jamie Loftus called "My Year in Mensa" where she took the intelligence test to get accepted into Mensa ("a non-political High-IQ society for bright people," Mensa itself being a Latin word meaning "table" in Latin) for an article

she was writing, passed (much to her surprise), and joined the society. Loftus was harassed and sent death threats by the Mensa members in a Facebook group. After much conjecture with the people who run Mensa, she was invited to a Mensa conference where she met the very people who were harassing her online. When she met these people, they insisted that they were nothing like their online personalities, they were better than that. But why do that?! Why not be a decent person on and off of your communication device? Or why not be a crap person on and off of your communication device? I will never truly understand that. My mindset is that whatever I say online can one day come back to me. I guess some people just don't care. Loftus' conclusion there was that even though they were nice to her face, they were still people who found it OK to be mean to her (and other members) online, therefore, not being great people in general. We should all take this advice, if someone feels comfortable enough to say something rude, mean, offensive, etc. online, they are probably not the best people, and no one needs that in their lives.⁴⁹

As a woman of color, I have found through this research that there are actual scientific reasons as to why I am still single and why I have a harder time finding a mate than my white counterparts. What I had already thought was solidified. I, being a black woman, am less desirable than literally every other race or ethnicity of women, because of people's misconceptions, racial biases, racial stereotypes, and not to mention good old fashioned racism. While this might be unsettling for some people to hear, its not for me. I know now that it's not just my personality or how funny or smart I am, it's people's inherent bias and racism that makes me undesirable. It's completely out of my control! Should that provide solace for me? I don't know, but it does.

⁴⁹ Loftus, "My Year in Mensa", Podcast January 1, 2020

In the 21st century, where we have access to just about everyone and everything in the world, it is normal for us humans to be non-complacent, and to get bored and keep looking for something better. Before technology was what it is today, people only dated within their neighborhoods or small towns. I think it's a good and bad thing. We get so bored now-a-days that we write off someone who could be good for us just because they might not have good profile pictures, instead of taking the time to get to know people. On the flip side, we have so much more access to information, places, cultures, and other people, "... a recent study by international researchers that found that a rise in interracial marriages in the U.S. over the past 20 years has coincided with the rise of online dating."⁵⁰ That's great! Through interracial relationships, we start to understand each other and other cultures, ethnicities, religions, better and therefore become more accepting of the "other".

So, technology: good, helpful, resourceful.

Dating apps: ok? Degrading?

Having hope: 100

Having faith in society: 70.

Technology allows us to be better people. It gives us so much information and interconnectedness that we should really take advantage of that and use it to work to be better people. We should use it to bring awareness to injustice. To voice our opinions (while being respectful of each other). Technology should be used to better ourselves, to learn more. We can teach ourselves so much thanks to technology and the internet and people connecting with one another. For example, I am currently learning the banjo via YouTube and taking lessons with a friend in North Carolina via FaceTime. We should use it to learn

⁵⁰ Brown, *Least Desirable*, 2018

about each other and to better understand each other. I think that is technology's biggest purpose: to grow.

Chapter 9: Deleting the Apps

What a journey! Are dating apps affective? Yes! Definitely. So many people have found love through a dating app. I personally know people who have met their partner on a dating app and married them. However, I just don't think it's for me. I have met some good friends on apps, but as far as finding a partner, I don't think it's in the swiping stars for me; at least not in my current life situation. I don't think I will swear off of them forever, but for now, while I'm living in Vermont, I think I'm going to take a break (after I get rejected from the four guys I just messaged on Bumble. What can I say? I'm stubborn and rarely give up). I don't want to have to sift through the liars, bad dates, rude comments, and all-around soul-crushing occurrences that happen with online dating, when people are hiding behind a screen. It's just not worth my time or energy. I am ok being single. I am even more ok with meeting people in person, I did it until I was 24 years old, I think I can do it now. And I have faith that other people can too. I have faith that other people feel as I do and want to meet someone offline, organically (see we already have that in common!). Research participant James* agrees with me, "I've learned quite a bit about myself and how I relate to people by using dating apps. Most importantly I've learned that dating apps aren't for me, but also they make you feel emotionally and mentally miserable. There's a strain it puts on your mental health that you might not notice at first (because of the initial excitement from using the app), but that'll wear at you after a while. I remember my first time using Tinder I got very frustrated because I sat down and spend a solid hour swiping... I didn't swipe right once because I felt like I was being insincere and judging people based on a surface level (which feels wrong to me). After my third time around using Tinder, I realized that this is how it works and that's where you start. After you accept that you can move onto

communicating with someone if they match with you. That in itself is not how I connect with people. I need a genuine, in-person interaction with someone to know if it's worth putting in all that mental and emotional energy to forming some type of relationship with them. Dating apps don't allow for that because there is the false sense of perfection displayed online and that's your first interaction with that person, a false presentation of self. I also learned that a lot of people feel a similar sense of disdain towards using the apps because of the inconsistencies connecting to people and the amount of negative interactions many have experienced while using dating apps."⁵¹

Us millennials are all into nostalgia and throwbacks, why can't dating take a hint from pop culture and make a throwback too? Let's pretend it's 1994, before Match.com and the rise of smart phones, and talk to each other face-to-face. I picture it going like this:

I walk into a bar where they're doing karaoke. I pick my go-to karaoke song, Maps by The Yeab Yeab

Yeabs and sing my heart out-

"Wait, they don't love you like I love you..."

I leave the stage and take my seat, and a handsome man in his early 30's approaches me and says, "That is one of my favorite songs, I haven't heard it in forever! And you did a beautiful rendition of it. I'm (insert name here), what's your name, and can I buy you a drink?"

And we live happily ever after.

The End.

⁵¹ Reference Questionnaire *Name changed for anonymity

Afterward:

The year 2020 and a Pandemic

It's been over a year since I started writing this personal narrative. A lot has changed, as things do over a year. I am still living in Vermont, not much has changed there. The world is now in the depths of a pandemic. Most countries have been on lockdown, or quarantined for over two months, including the U.S. Everyone is stuck inside their houses, and bored. I am too. Which is why I have gotten back on the dating apps. I am currently on Bumble and Tinder. Since the pandemic and lockdown have taken place "Bumble reported that it saw an 84% increase in video calls in the U.S. during the week that ended March 27 compared to the prior week. Messaging in the app was up 26% week-over-week for that same week. Hinge also registered a 30% increase in messaging worldwide in March compared to January and February."⁵² I have actually been talking to some decent people, but since we are all self quarantined, I haven't actually met any of them in person. Which I think has been a good thing! I'm actually getting to know people first before intimacy gets involved, getting to know real things about them, having deeper conversations. In a recent Vanity Fair article, writer Kenzie Bryant says, "...plenty (of) people might want things like adventure or excitement, 'but when this crisis makes our homes very salient place, it make our need for other people very salient,' he (Dr. Benjamin Karney) said. And as we search for them, we'll get deeper faster. Gone is the banal get-to-know-you conversation, replaced with discussing how you cope with a global crisis."⁵³ My matches and I have been talking on the phone and on FaceTime. Wow, what a great tool to have. Of course, we as a human collective, have had FaceTime since 2010, but a lot of people haven't been using it as much.

⁵² Bryant, *Coronavirus Could Change Dating Forever*, 2020

⁵³ Bryant, *Coronavirus Could Change Dating Forever*, 2020

There is also a platform called Zoom that people use to chat with multiple people at once, usually for work, allowing people to work from home and still having meetings. There is another platform called Fun with Friends, that allows you to start a Group FaceTime and play games with your friends on the computer! How cool! I also started using this feature on Tinder called Tinder Passport, which they made free of charge for a month, that allows you to swipe on people in other states and countries. That has been really cool. I “went” to places I am thinking about moving to, Denver, San Francisco, North Carolina, and connected with a few people from those places. It doesn’t matter that we aren’t in the same place because we wouldn’t be able to go out and see each other anyway! “‘What’s interesting about it is not terribly new,’ (anthropologist Helen Fisher) said. ‘I mean, in Jane Austen’s day, you did have a good earl of conversation with somebody before you went to bed with them. And during this quarantine period, we’re seeing the same thing—the emergence of a stage of courtship before sex and even before meeting the person [face-to-face].’”⁵⁴ Why not get to know someone from afar and have it be very exciting to actually meet in person when we can travel again.

“I want a tall, sophisticated, blond...with enhancements...”

I was a professional matchmaker, for about 3 months. I didn’t know if I wanted to make this a separate chapter, but I decided to add a little, short anecdote about my short, excruciating experience as a professional matchmaker.

In January 2020, I was hired by a professional matchmaking service to be a personal matchmaker. It was a remote job, which was perfect for my life plans at the time, and it seemed interesting and right up my ally. I mean, if I can’t find love for myself, maybe I’ll be

⁵⁴ Bryant, *Coronavirus Could Change Dating Forever*, 2020

good at finding it for someone else. After about a month of training, I was ready to get rolling finding love for other people! The position consisted of a lot of video chatting with clients and potential matches, searching in a database for matches, recruiting people from Facebook, Instagram, dating apps, meetups, and IRL. After you find a match for your client, you set up a date. That meant finding a place for them to meet, restaurant, park, bowling alley, etc. Make calls and reservations, set up calendars, and then wait for the date to start and end. After the date, they rate the date and decide if they'd like to see each other again! Fun!? Well, right before I started, the global corona virus pandemic happened, and the whole world was locked down.

The pandemic obviously changed the matchmaker game. We could still set up people on dates, they just had to be over Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime. We also couldn't go out to public spaces and recruit people. This actually worked to my benefit because it meant less phone calls (which I hate) and no approaching people in public explaining why I'm approaching them (awkward!). Yay technology for keeping me employed during a pandemic!

I am no longer a matchmaker. So why did I quit? To be frank, the clients were not great people, and I found myself not caring if they found love, and actually not wanting to match them up with people, who were all too good for them. All of the clients had enough of an expendable income where they were paying thousands of dollars to be matched up and find a partner, and honestly, I never knew your income would change or affect how you treated other people. I mean, I get it, you're paying a bunch of money to find a match, and you want them to be just what you're looking for. You want them to cross off all the things your "perfect person" list. But you don't have to be rude or gross about it. One client in particular only wanted to date tall blonds. Fine, that's not weird or offensive. But one day, he messaged me saying he just wanted a tall, sophisticated blond with enhancements. I didn't

respond to that message. He said a bunch of other problematic things to me, and said that being a dental hygienist wasn't a "professional occupation". Last time I checked, it was.

I also had a lot of clients and potential matches flirt with me, as if I was the person they were going to be matched up with, when they all knew, I was the matchmaker, and this was my job. One man continuously called me beautiful at the end of every email and text conversation. One potential match was very nice and friendly with me, sharing a bunch of personal information, but when he met my client, just clammed up and was rude to her for no reason other than the fact that he "didn't find her attractive". Yikes.

In the end, I quit because I didn't get paid enough to have to converse with these people. It made me realize that money does change things, privilege does change who you are and how you interact with people, and your income and economical class does affect your outlook on life and how you treat people. The point of this short short chapter is to point out that, technology does keep people together, and no matter how much money you have, or if you're paying THOUSANDS of dollars to find a mate, people are still going to be shitty, to you, and to everyone else. SO WHY BOTHER? << Also why I shouldn't be a matchmaker.

This experience definitely changed my mind about wanting a sugar daddy. Haha.

Some things have changed in my personal life too. I am no longer speaking with Tony. We decided to part ways once I truly realized he would never be who I needed him to be, even just as a friend. I am still in contact with Stephen. He is still traveling for work, and we have kept in touch through it all. He will be back, ready to settle down in August, so we will see what happens with that. I had been out meeting new people not on the apps. It was actually really nice to just meet someone organically and something actually come out of it. It was casual, but we made a good connection. That is over because he had some personal

issues he needed to work out, ones I didn't want to be a part of... you know because it was casual. But it was fun while it lasted.

So yes, technology is keeping us connected in ways we could have never imagined, in ways we never thought we would need it to. I mean, clearly people thought of video conferencing etc. because they were invented, but no one thought that it would keep us connected on such a wide scale, during a pandemic, except for Bill Gates.

Reference

Research Questionnaire:

This is a questionnaire for a thesis about dating apps and dating in the age of technology. It is for research purposes and I will be sharing some stories in my thesis. This thesis will be published in the University of Vermont archives, so by filling out this questionnaire, you are giving permission to publish your stories. When providing a name, please choose a name different from your real one, as all names in this thesis will be changed, however other questions about age/race etc. will need to be true. Please be as open and honest as you'd like while answering these questions. I may not use all or any of the information you have provided, but I appreciate your time in answering and helping me out!

1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation
2. What dating apps have you used
3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?
4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.
5. Do you have a favorite app?
6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app?
 - a. If so, how did that come to be?
 - b. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?
 - c. How was the date?
 - d. Did you see them again?
7. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

8. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?
9. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?
10. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?
11. What is your best dating app story (this can be as detailed as you'd like)?
12. What is your worst dating app story?
13. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

Participant Answers to Questionnaire (Names have been changed for anonymity)

Questionnaire Answers:

1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

Natalie, 30, W, F, Straight

2. What dating apps have you used

Okcupid

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

I began when I was 20. As a single mom finishing my bachelors and bartending at night to make ends meet, I wanted to meet someone without paying.

4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

Friends, companionship, boyfriend

5. Do you have a favorite app?

Nothing to compare to.

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app?

I did! I met 2 guys in person after

If so, how did that come to be?

The first guy was really nice. PhD biochem student at NCSU. But a bit too intense for me.

The second guy became my husband 😊

7. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?

As long as it was in public. But my third date with my husband. I was paranoid af he would want some with us hanging out at his apartment (New Years Eve 6 years ago). I texted him before explaining that he would not be getting it so don't even try.

8. How was the date?

The first date was amazing. We went to the Yard House and World of Beer. Talked for hours.

9. Did you see them again?

Clearly 😊

10. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

The first step was easy. Block the guys with the dick pics. Then I just started narrowing it down the ones who weren't suggesting perverted nonsense and wanted to actually have a conversation. I narrowed it down to 4 out of maybe 50. 😂

11. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

It's amazing if you don't have time to connect but isn't something to expect immediate results from. But there are a lot of really nice people online for various reasons.

12. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

After my experience I probably became more sexist towards men. Lol. I showed my husband some of the examples and it absolutely dumbfounded him the way some people would act.

14. What is your best dating app story? (this can be as detailed as you'd like)

Met this minor league ball player online. Gave him my number but stopped talking once he sent THAT pic. Evan and I were on a date one night when I got this text from that guy saying "how much he missed me and how sexy I am. Let's meet, etc". Turned out the dipshit created a group text and sent it to at least 2 dozen women not realizing we would all see one another in the text. Clearly the guy has more balls than brains.

16. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

Yes but would just warn them to not take it too seriously and when that right person comes along, it'll be vastly different than the previous interactions.

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1. Carrie, 21, white, female, she/her, straight
2. tinder, hinge, seeking.com and bumble
3. meeting people is difficult in college when you're not going to the bars constantly!! also it's pretty entertaining. my high school bf broke up with me 3 weeks into my freshman year, and I downloaded tinder a few months after. I've had it on (and off) ever since 2015.
4. Anything between hookups and dating. It's rare to find someone who matches what I'd like in a potential partner on a dating app, but it has happened.
5. Bumble because of its 'turn the tables' approach, but the swiping approach still irks me.
6. Oh most definitely!
It slowly arises from conversation, and I'd prefer to not talk to people for decades over text if there's the chance to meet in person.
7. Usually - the first few times I was very nervous about how people change their online personas for personal gain.
8. First time I ever used tinder it was definitely a weird experience - I was still getting my footing and the date turned into a sleepover which turned into a once-in-a-while hookup.
9. Yes. a few times
10. Oh good lord. I swipe left for dead animals (fish included), guns, unnecessary shirtless photos, misogyny (sarcastic or not), and SO much more. I swipe right for gingers (most of

the time), people with intellectual/cultural jokes or tidbits on their profile, and just general nice guys. I have remarkably high standards but I'm not sure how to articulate them.

11. People are very different from how they come across online and you can't actually know if you like a person until you meet them.

12. Yes!! I met a wonderful guy and we dated for 6 months - LDR, but we're still friends.

Met on bumble, lived 300 miles away (he was visiting Burly for a short period) and met 1 month later when he drove 300 miles to meet me 😊

14. Probably that ^. there are other good ones but not as wholesome...

15. Christ. One guy slept with me a few times, it was meh, and then he messaged my roommate (actually a subletter I was only living with for 3 months) who had the body of a Barbie and asked her out for drinks and explicitly asked her to not tell me. THEN she rejected him, he ping-ponged back to me in search of attention, I shut him down and asked him to not speak to me ever again. He ping-ponged BACK to Barbie, said 'Maud and I aren't speaking anymore' as if that would be some kind of endearing quality which would turn his luck... thankfully she was an OG roomie and we talked shit for a while about him.

16. Be weary! Trust your instincts! People only put what they choose to show on the internet - and it's usually not the whole story.

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1. Preferred name (Becca) Age (32) Race (white), Ethnicity (Italian-Irish I think), Gender (female), Pronouns, Sexual Orientation (hetero)

2. What dating apps have you used - mostly OKC, bumble, hinge

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps? Don't have a lot of time outside of work to date,

also looking to expand outside of my social circle

4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc. dates not hookups

5. Do you have a favorite app? Hinge

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app? Yes

If so, how did that come to be? I messaged him after we matched through the app and asked him out

7. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person? Nope

8. How was the date? Went great. We went to boxcar and got wasted!

9. Did you see them again? Yes

10. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? Tbh mostly looks is what grabs your attention but I'm also looking for someone in a similar or older age group who looks like they have a job/career and can spell or has a sense of humor.

What makes you swipe left or right?

11. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites? That it's fun and entertaining and actually works pretty Well

12. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences? Not really

13. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app? Yes I currently am

14. What is your best dating app story? (this can be as detailed as you'd like) i don't really have an entertaining one

15. What is your worst dating app story? Got catfished by a dude who looked nothing like his pics

16. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them? Yes

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1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

1. Blair, 27, White, Caucasian, Female, She/Her, Straighter

2. What dating apps have you used

2. OK Cupid and Bumble

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

3. I was older than most of my cohort when I started dating and I felt comfortable

“meeting” people online slowly and talking to people on it since I was too nervous to do it in person.

4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

4. Dating, specifically long term dating

5. Do you have a favorite app?

I liked the idea of Bumble the most before using it because I got to talk to the male first and I could choose who to talk to. I used OK Cupid first and there were many messages of guys who I was not interested in that said really uncomfortable things to me. So I swore after that if I were single again that I would only use Bumble!

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app?

If so, how did that come to be?

6. Yes, I met up with a couple people on OK Cupid and I only dated them for a couple

weeks or so. I met up with one person from Bumble and that date went well and we dated for a year.

7. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?

7. Yes, especially being a woman. I definitely brought pepper spray and told people where I was!

8. How was the date?

8. The three first dates that I had, I met at coffee shops. All three dates went well, but I felt too anxious on them so I wanted to have a second date to feel more comfortable and see if there were sparks.

9. Did you see them again?

9. I saw all three again.

10. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

10. Definitely important to see them as possibly being attractive although that is hard to do unless you meet in person in my opinion. I also look to see if we have any common interests or if they appear to be humorous- as that is really important to me.

11. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

11. It honestly helped me to have more confidence to talk with people I meet in person more as it gave me a foundation of dating and knowing what that looks like as online dating was the first form of dating I really had.

12. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

12. I do not think that I connect different because of my app experiences.

13. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?

13. I have! Right after I used OKCupid I met someone in person who was my downstairs neighbor and we hit it off more than the people I met online. I dated him for three years and

then when we broke up, I went on bumble and met someone I dated for a year.

14. What is your best dating app story? (this can be as detailed as you'd like)

14. Ugh I don't really have one. The three people I met all seemed normal on our dates and we vibed on them.

15. What is your worst dating app story?

15. see above- All of mine were perfectly typical of 1st dates with just getting more info to see if it makes sense to continue exploring dating.

16. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

16. I would recommend specific ones, yes. It really did help me get out of my comfort zone and be more confident meeting people in person as well!

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1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

Lauren, 26, White, Caucasian, Female, She/her, Heterosexual

2. What dating apps have you used

Tinder, Bumble, Match, Okcupid

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

I was looking for a relationship and it's difficult to meet people in person anymore. I have met partners at work but that never works out well. If you meet people through mutual friends, sometimes that can be tricky. Apps are quick and easy to use.

4. What are you looking for while on apps?

Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

Dates, monogamous relationships.

5. Do you have a favorite app?

Okcupid was probably my favorite because people take it a bit more seriously but not as serious as Match/Eharmony.

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app? If so, how did that come to be?

Yes. Usually after exchanging numbers and talking a bit more in depth.

7. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?

Very. But not because of safety (though maybe I should have been). I was nervous that they wouldn't think I was as attractive or interesting in person.

8. How was the date?

Most of my dates were awful and awkward.

9. Did you see them again?

Typically, no.

10. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

Are they attractive? Do they have quality pictures? Are they witty/funny (show some personality)? I stay away from guys that are crude in their bios or seem judgmental.

11. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

I have learned that most people use these apps when they are feeling insecure or lonely, myself included. There is a lot of research that shows you should NOT get on these apps when you are feeling lonely, because you are craving a real connection that you won't get from the apps. Then in turn you feel lonelier. I have learned that I mostly used them for validation, which is why I never got much out of them.

12. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

I think my app experiences have caused me to feel more grateful and appreciative of in-person real, authentic connections.

13. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?
No.

14. What is your best dating app story? (this can be as detailed as you'd like)

Once when I was in California I met up with a guy that was very secretive about his career. After a few drinks he admitted that he tours with Green Day and is the drum tech for Tre Cool. We ended up having a second date on Green Day's yacht which was super cool.

15. What is your worst dating app story?

I once went on a date with a guy that had lied about everything on his profile. Throughout the first date he slowly started admitting things. His name wasn't Chad, he was still married, he had four kids, he wasn't really 29 he was 31 (who would lie like that). It was awful and caused a lot of distrust.

16. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

To be honest, if you was casual sex and/or something casual and fun, go for it. The apps are great for instant gratification and if you aren't looking for anything serious it will probably satisfy that for you.

1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

John, 31, Caucasian, Irish/Syrian, Male, He/Him, Straight

2. What dating apps have you used

OkCupid, Tinder, Plenty of Fish, Bumble

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

I despise small talk and find meeting new people harder than striking up a conversation with somebody with at least 1 known shared interest. Also fuck meeting people in bars.

4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

Hookups/short term partners/long term partners

5. Do you have a favorite app?

Bumble seems to work best for somebody my age.

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app?

Yes, many many times, since 2010ish.

If so, how did that come to be?

Usually a few messages and then ask to meetup, then we exchange phone numbers.

7. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?

Not really.

8. How was the date?

I've had good and bad.

9. Did you see them again?

A very small percentage of my online dates lead to second dates, but the ones that do usually lead to something more serious. Maybe I'm picky.

10. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

Shared values > Shared interests; Attractiveness; No snapchat filters. No cliches like "living life to the fullest." No wet mops who "like music and movies."

11. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

Meeting new people is exhausting. Everybody is odd in their own way. Dates that have some non-overwhelming distraction are great (e.g. no movies, but museums are awesome)

12. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

No.

13. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?

Yes.

14. What is your best dating app story? (this can be as detailed as you'd like)

I met my partner of 3 years... we were both just looking for a hookup.

15. What is your worst dating app story?

I met a woman in LA who 1. Refused to eat in front of me; 2. Brought up politics immediately and then called me an idiot; 3. Called me afterwards to say she didn't like me but I was a good kisser so would I like to fuck once and never see her again?

16. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

Definitely. It's really not a big deal. The app is the equivalent to catching somebody's eyes from across the room and saying Hi. The rest is still on you.

**

1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

Amir, 29, Arab/Black, American, male, straight

2. What dating apps have you used?

Tinder, OKcupid

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

I made a tinder account as I moved here for school and wanted to meet new people and enjoy the night life.

4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

All the above including committed relationships, as I'm a hopeless romance

5. Do you have a favorite app?

Tinder, easier to use.

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app? Yes, quite a few

a. If so, how did that come to be? Usually we exchange a few jokes back and forth, check the vibe, and I might give her my number. Usually we met at a bar if it's the evening, or a park in the day for a walk.

b. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person? Not really, Burlington is safe. I usually like to talk on the phone or facetime before we meet to check the vibe.

c. How was the date? Some great, some HORRIBLE

d. Did you see them again? Few yes, many no

7. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

babygirl better be thicc'r than a snicker

Usually POC women are my preference. They're few and far between here

8. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

Peoples apartments are disgusting.

People usually want more from you than they tell you. Everyone on online dating has an agenda.

9. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

Most definitely. Burlington is a small place, and someone you might have had a short encounter with will probably know the next person you seriously date. That can make things aWkwArD.

10. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?

Yes, I'd say my most meaningful relationships started from online apps.

11. What is your best dating app story (this can be as detailed as you'd like)?

My best dating app story was a few years back. I met a ferocious feline on tinder and we both had the intention of having nothing but a one-time encounter. We were both fresh out of a relationship and wanted to get our minds off things. Misery loves company, you could say. No dinner, no movie, we met right at my front door.

Things turned steamy quickly, knowing very little about each other. It was incredible.

Afterwards, we sat back and let the awkward conversation fly. We ended up realizing we both had met the next best friendship of our lives. We shared many common interests, and the vibes were right. We ended up staying up the whole night just hanging out as friends playing video games and making dumplings from scratch.

She's one of my best friends today. We are separated by several states, but we always make time for our friendship. Best online dating experience ever.

12. What is your worst dating app story?

So I went on a date with a girl I met on Tinder. We decided to meet up one evening at a bar. We were having a great time we were vibing really well. One drink turned into another, and another, and another, and before you knew we were both stumbling

on the Dance Floor. We were having a great time dancing together and everything was going really well. She then leans in close to me and gives me a big kiss. She Whispers in my ear that she needs to use the restroom. I tell her okay and I'll wait for her at the bar. She grabs me by my wrist and pulls me into the bathroom with her, which is a one person only bathroom, not one with multiple stalls. She locks the door, and the music is so loud I can't even hear her even in the bathroom. She tells me she wants to get weird. Before you know it she pulls out some unknown white substance, on the toilet seat, snorts it off of the toilet seat. "Want some?", she says. I tried to hide myself from visually gagging the best I could, but she quickly got the idea that I wasn't too interested. Can't get much worse right? She then grabs a random lost drink that she found on the sink basin, and start to drink out of it. "I'm not going to leave a good vodka Sprite behind", she says. We leave the bathroom together and she asked me if I'd like to come back to her place and get to know each other better. No... No... I walked home alone, threw up, and went straight to sleep. Worst date ever.

13. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

Not if your heart is weak and you're not ready to swim with some f*cking alligators. Otherwise, Hell yeah.

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Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

Robert, 29, white, caucasian, male, he/him, straight

What dating apps have you used

Tinder and Bumble

1. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

Thought it would be a simple and easy way to meet people without having to go to bars. Also it cuts some of the bullshit as you both know you're at least physically attracted to one another.

1. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

Mostly dates but sometimes hookups.

1. Do you have a favorite app?

No i used to used them both equally.

1. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app?

Yes

a. If so, how did that come to be?

I would typically start a conversation and over the course of a few days, if there seemed to be mutual interest, i would eventually ask if she would like to meet.

- a. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?

Sure i was but i am a shy person. it never really prevented me from meeting up with people though.

- a. How was the date?

Some are better than others. id say mostly positive. sometimes its clear there isn't much connection but thats ok, at least we tried.

- a. Did you see them again?

If there was mutual interest i would. id say about half the time there would be a second date

1. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

Initially it is a physical attraction, then i would read their bio and see if there seemed to be some shared interests.

1. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

It is very important to be genuine and honest if you really want to have success. often times people see right through falsehood and if you aren't honest how can you hope to find whatever it is that you are looking for. Be you and be truthful.

1. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

Im not really sure. ultimately meeting people is just that, meeting people. I will say that i have met some really great people on dating apps.

1. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?

Yes a few times

1. What is your best dating app story (this can be as detailed as you'd like)?

Id say that i have been lucky enough to meet some great people on dating apps. Im glad that i got to meet the people i did.

1. What is your worst dating app story?

We matched chatted for a few days then decided to meet up. We met at around midday for a coffee and she proceeded to tell me she just got off work and she had been working most of the previous night. She was so tired she was falling asleep on the date. I had to create ALL the conversation and it was tough. She only gave me one word answers and in the end i just said, "maybe you should go home and go to sleep. I walked her home and said goodbye and thats

it. Not a horrible date and im sure she was nice. It wasn't her fault but we should have scheduled it for when she was rested.

1. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

I would with the condition that they have realistic expectations and can be honest. I think they are a good alternative to trying to pick people up at bars or concerts. People are busy and it can be difficult to meet people after college.

**

1. Preferred name, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Pronouns, Sexual Orientation

- James, 27, Multiracial, American, Male, Him/His, Heterosexual

2. What dating apps have you used

- Tinder, Feeld

3. Why did you decide to use dating apps?

- At first there was an excitement surrounding the idea of trying a new way to participate in the dating world. Also, there was this odd underlying pressure that if you were to enter the dating world in this day-and-age you would be more successful and it would be “easier” if you conformed to using Dating Apps.

4. What are you looking for while on apps? Friends, hookups, dates, etc.

- When I first started using Tinder I was open to any form of connection whether it was friends, friends with benefits, dating, hookups, etc. I was just excited to experience it after having been in a 4-year relationship. At different points in my life as I would download the app, delete it and repeat, I realized that I was narrowing what I wanted/was looking for to more so being friends, friends with benefits or purely dating. And after having participated in hookups, as the idea of what I wanted became more clear, they weren't really something that resonated with me.

5. Do you have a favorite app?

- I've only successfully used Tinder. Feeld was used both while I was partnered and single, but fell to the wayside as the community on the app was small given my location.

6. Have you actually met up with anyone from an app?

- Yes, I've met a handful of people through Tinder. Each experience came with it's own set of feelings and emotions.

a. If so, how did that come to be?

- Given my short stints on dating apps, typically a month at a time spaced out with months/years between uses, each time I'd connect with someone and end up meeting it was through a good amount of texting before committing to meeting up. This allowed for getting a better idea of what someone was like, basically getting a read to see if we would work well.

b. Were you hesitant about meeting someone you didn't know in person?

- I was very hesitant about meeting each person. It's very clear to me now why I have a hard time with dating apps, but before when I was a new participant the idea of getting a read from someone over the internet versus in person is drastically different. There's a huge facade online, everyones trying to show a perfect version of themselves (which makes sense), but even the level and type of communication is inconsistent or manufactured. There's little to zero sincerity with the vast majority. And to find that sincerity takes a lot of sifting through profiles and luck. My hesitation when meeting one of these matches was that this online facade would crumble in-person and I could potentially end up meeting someone with a completely different persona than the person I was texting with. Our personalities could clash, they could be rude or insensitive, etc.

c. How was the date?

- Of all the dates I went on, I would say half went surprisingly well. The other half were stiff, one-sided or very clearly a miss-match of personalities. The ones that went well, consisted of really good and effortless conversation, bonding over mutual interests, similar viewpoints and also clear physical attraction. To hone in on the best date, I would say this one held a surprising amount of very deep conversation and connection between our lives and what similarities we shared. We started our date getting food, laughing and chatting and then ended up going to my house and talking for 3 hours. We felt very connected on level of surreal familiarity having only just met.

d. Did you see them again?

- We did end up seeing each other again and after having another very good date we decided that friendship would be the best route for us because it felt as though we weren't meant to have a romantic relationship. Our conversations and how we bonded immediately felt so close to friendship right off the bat that the idea of dating felt wrong.

7. What is your process when selecting a partner on an app? What makes you swipe left or right?

- Realness. If I get to a profile and I can't get a sense of genuine personality from the bio or the photos, it's a pass. Also selfies... I cannot stand selfies. Alternatively, if I have a positive reaction to a profile it's because I can draw a sense of connection to them or get an idea of who they are or what they like based on the how/what they write in their bio or if their photos contain substance (i.e. doing activities, eating foods, genuine photo of themselves smiling, etc.).

8. What have you learned, if anything, from using dating apps/online dating sites?

- I've learned quite a bit about myself and how I relate to people by using dating apps. Most importantly I've learned that dating apps aren't for me, but also they make you feel emotionally and mentally miserable. There's a strain it puts on your mental health that you might not notice at first (because of the initial excitement from using the app), but that'll wear at you after a while. I remember my first time using Tinder I got very frustrated because I sat down and spend a solid hour swiping... I didn't swipe right once because I felt like I was being insincere and judging people based on a surface level (which feels wrong to me). After my third time around using Tinder, I realized that this is how it works and that's where you start. After you accept that you can move onto communicating with someone if they match with you. That in itself is not how I connect with people. I need a genuine, in-person interaction with someone to know if it's worth putting in all that mental and emotional energy to forming some type of relationship with them. Dating apps don't allow for that because there is the false sense of perfection displayed online and that's your first interaction with that person, a false presentation of self. I also learned that a lot of people feel a similar sense of disdain towards using the apps because of the inconsistencies connecting to people and the amount of negative interactions many have experienced while using dating apps.

9. Do you think you connect differently with romantic partners because of your app experiences?

- In my experience, I think if I were to compare how my romantic relationships differ between the ones through the app and the ones outside of using the app, there is a clear

difference that there is a more authentic romantic connection outside of using the app. For myself, I noticed that the foundation of the connection and relation to each person is built from a better starting point when not using a dating app. Post-dating app dating, given my new found realizations about myself and dating both online and offline, has greatly improved what matters to me and what real connection looks like and how I go about connecting with individuals.

10. Have you ever been in a committed relationship with someone you met off a dating app?

- No, I have not been in a committed relationship with someone through a dating app.

11. What is your best dating app story (this can be as detailed as you'd like)?

- Going back to parts C and D of question 6, the best date I went on was going to get tacos. Leading up to the date I wasn't particularly looking forward to it, but once conversation got rolling we had a great time. The questions and jokes never stopped. We shared many stories and had many similar life events we bonded over. After we finished eating we checked-in to see if we wanted to continue the date. The decision was unanimous and so we decided to go back to my house to continue our conversation. That lasted another 3 hours, which flew by. Our topics expanded into more personal things which we both felt supported while sharing (which was crazy only having met hour before) and we each made personal connections from our past that had not been made before. It was honestly a wild experience, almost as if we had somehow known each other previously or been friends for a long time. After we concluded our evening I remember saying for the next few days when I would catch myself just thinking, "Holy Shit, that was wild?! Who is this person?! How are we so connected?!" It was honestly, such a fantastic experience.

12. What is your worst dating app story?

- Hearing from friends about their worst dating app stories, I've realized mine have been pretty decent. The worst ones for me were just not really connecting conversationally and feeling like we didn't have much in common during the date. Typically after the date we stopped chatting and that was that. There never was any crazy drama or event. Typically just a date and then it was clear we didn't mesh well.

13. Would you recommend dating apps to someone who has never used them?

- I would first ask them what matters to them in terms of connection to someone and what they are looking for. Based on those answers I could better justify recommending dating apps or not. I would also share my experience if they would want to hear it. If I had to just recommend apps or not without getting an informed idea about how they connect to people, I probably would say, "Go try it." Just so they can make a decision for themselves.

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