

# ‘Tinderizing’ Young Men: Branding, Masculinity and Mobile Dating



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# Theoretical Departures: Young People and Masculinity

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## **1<sup>st</sup> Masculinity Studies is obsessed with men**

- Masculinity as a relational concept
- Masculinity has lost its gender

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Masculinity is often universal and trans-historical**

- Irrespective of social, cultural and economic positioning
- Masculinity becomes an irreducible minimum

## **3<sup>rd</sup> New ways of thinking about masculinity**

- Use of existing theories and concepts
- Re-engage with the local contexts

# Young Men, Masculinity and Tinder

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- Exploring the impact of new dating practices on men and masculinity
  - Online dating / Holiday romances / Speed dating / Car park sex / Mobile Dating
  - 20 Young men aged 18-24 (+ 2 aged 36 /38); Qualitative Interviews (M/F)
  - White English / Heterosexually identified / Range of classes

## 1. Short Introduction to Tinder

## 2. Tinder and its affordances

- How Tinder is reinforcing traditional patriarchal gender relations?  
Objectification / Commodification
- How Tinder is challenging and problematizing traditional masculinities?  
Self-sabotage and effortless achievement / Personal Branding / Deception

# About Tinder



The people we meet change our lives. A friend, a date, a romance, or even a chance encounter can change someone's life forever. Tinder empowers users around the world to create new connections that otherwise might never have been possible. We build products that bring people together.

“We never intended it to be a dating platform. It's a social discovery platform, facilitating an introduction between two people.”

1.4B Swipes      26m matches per day      10b+ total matches      196 countries

- Tinder launched 2012 - For Android and Apple Mobile Platforms
- Global Positioning System (GPS)
- No explicit algorithms: Pictures / 240 character bio = Match

**Tinder makes users less likely to commit to relationships, experts warn;**

**Whatever happened to romance? Australia is the top Tinder-using country in the world with one in six signing up for a hook-up**

## **THE DAWN OF THE DATING APOCALYPSE**

**A THIRD OF ALL TINDER USERS ARE MARRIED, RESEARCH REVEALS**

**Young adults swipe right on Tinder but is it just a game?**

## Affordances: Four Characteristics of Tinder Use

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- ◆ **Spatial Blurring:** Collapse of temporal and spatial divisions

- Integration of dating in every day routines

**Darren:** It causes you to get a little bit lazy sometimes, whereas in the past when you go to date someone you would have to go out and meet somebody, whereas now you can date someone without even leaving your room. It's all about, what you might call convenience.

**Int:** *Why do you think that is?*

**Darren:** I think it's just the convenience of having it there, it is like when you shopping when you go around supermarkets and that, and now they have started to deliver and that, and Internet dating has gone on something similar to that you can get it wherever you are.

## Affordances: Four Characteristics of Tinder Use

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- ◆ **Proximity and the democratization of dating:** Social levelling
  - Potential Matches not limited to a fixed point
- ◆ **Multi-modal Dating:** Simultaneous forms of dating
  - An intensification of dating within particular spaces
- ◆ **Accelerated Elongated Dating:** The emergence of the 'Tinder Date'
  - Stretching out immediacy

# Tinder and 'The Same Old Story': Gendered Inequality

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Hakim (2011: 119): (M)en's judgments of women's sexual attractiveness are focused narrowly on women's bodies, faces and sex appeal. They can ignore more extraneous details on income and status, and usually do. This is the main reason why men display high consistency in their ratings of female attractiveness.

1. Homosociality and Objectification
2. Gamification
3. Measuring Attractiveness
4. Consumption and the Body



# Homosociality and Objectification

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- Tinder as a Homosocial Practice

- Tinder facilitates the performance of masculinity

**Phillip:** Er.... It's quite common for guys in relationships to be crowded around the single guy and his Tinder account and having fun. Helping him write messages which are very...not what they would normally send.

**Int:** *What do you mean by that?*

**Phillip:** Jokes or...lots of Tinder conversations are just jokes and being a bit silly and a bit, puns. Or they're incredibly rude...in the bad way.

**Int:** *What do you mean by "rude in the bad way"?*

**Phillip:** It's quite common to have a group of, sadly lad culture guys or lad culture girls group around and go say some profanity like "your arse is really hot" and crap like that. Really objectifying and insulting.

- Girl Watching: "...in particular, girl watching works as a dramatic performance played to other men, a means by which a certain types of masculinity is produced and heterosexual desire displayed". (Quinn, 2002: 394)

## Tinder and the 'Dating Game'

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- Gamification: The Game Metaphor

Francis: And I think a lot of game apps get boring quite quickly as well. So, Tinder is constantly refreshing, and you've got new people on there, new faces. So, it feels more like a game to pass the time than anything else, I think. I don't expect to get anything out of it.

- Hendricks (2012) work on seduction communities / play / fun / informal

- Players, Scoring, Winning – women as conquests

Clifton: He was on Tinder quite a lot and I remember, even though he wasn't speaking to some of them, if he got someone who was really hot who matched with him...if you were at a party or something, he'd be like, oh yeah, I got a match with this girl like the other day and it's like, you know, look at this, I *did* this.

## Measuring Attractiveness

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- Illouz (2012) The intellectualization of dating
  - Measureable attributes that leads to ranking

**Int:** *And what makes you swipe left?*

**Francis:**....if someone is not my taste say...

**Int:** *What does that mean?*

**Francis:** Well what's not my type? Errmmmm.... Ah fuck it I will be brutally honest, maybe overweight, not keeping themselves as tidy, just not sexually attractive to me you know.

**Int:** *So the image is quite important?*

**Francis:** Yes massively, the image is really important. Just jump in if you want more detail.

**Int:** *So what kind of photos do you like to see of a woman?*

**Francis:** Laughs... Yeah sure it's nice to see girls in bikinis, errmmI've got this thing about girls taking selfies, and that if this girl is got six selfies on there it is like a massive red flag for me because they are so like self-involved, so like if a girly smiling and she is with one or two friends, just a nice smile generally it goes a long way.

- Dating as a visual experience – encoding gendered values

## Consumption and the Body

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- Dating as shopping – dates as commodities

**Liam:** As in shopping, if you're talking about grocery shopping, I guess you have a list of things that you always buy and you really enjoy. I think that's the long-term relationship. And there's things which you pick up and try once and you'd be like, oh, it's so grim, I'll never buy that again.

**Int:** *There was something you said earlier about shopping....and Tinder....*

**Darren:** I think that's what tinder is about, tinder is about shopping, people browse...

**Int:** But what made you think that?

**Darren:** It is the similarities, people browse, you browse through tinder, you browse through shops for clothes or whatever you like, you going shop with your own preference, you going to tinder knowing what preferences you have, there is just far too many similarities....

# Challenging Traditional Masculinity: Exacerbating Vulnerability

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- ✱ Holland et (1994) Men's relationship with women creates vulnerability
  - Hegemonic cultural ideals / emotional dependence / real desire and bodies
  - Relationships they 'lay open the possibility of failure' 143.
  - Strategies to avoid vulnerability

1. Self-Sabotage

2. Effortless Achievement

3. The importance of the 'ordinary guy'

4. The problem with deception

# Self-Sabotage

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Francis:....to be fair, I usually swipe left on girls that I think are too hot for me.

Interviewer: Really? Why is that?

Francis: I don't know. I think I like the satisfaction of rejecting them before they can reject me. I just like maybe something subconscious. I'm just like, "Oh, hell. They'll never match with me. Why would I try?" It's like it doesn't matter. It's like approaching a girl in a bar, I'll be like, "That girl's too hot, I won't...I can't talk to her." Or like the whole kind of if I did match her, I wouldn't know what to say. That thought as well, because I don't speak to anyone that I match really anyway, which is yeah, odd psychologically.

Interviewer: Really?

Francis: Yeah. I think like sometimes it's just that she's clearly...she's just too hot. And you see that girls with loads of money as well. And you're just like well, no. I can't get that.

## Self-Sabotage and Femininity

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- Young men, identity and projection
  - High value of women / low value of themselves
  - Perception of particular forms of femininity
  - Self-selecting themselves out of dating
- Pascoe (2010) Boys would avoid rejection through the use of text messages

“The control over presentation of self afforded by new media helps to manage a profoundly unmasculine display of vulnerability by teenage boys often required by the process of flirting and getting to know someone.” Pascoe (2011: 17)
- Kobarov (2009: 57-58) ‘Rather than risk being rejected for genuinely trying to attract women, young men might adopt a defensive self-sabotaging position’.

# Effortless Achievement

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- Jackson and Dempster (2009) Effortless Achievement

**Todd:** Well it is done auto really because when you log into tinder and it connects to Facebook they just put six random photos up there, so I didn't bother to change it, so I just left it because they put some kind of random picture, the first picture that you will see...

- Self protection strategy
- A means of appealing to an authentic masculinity

- Participants – Explanations of (lack of) matches

**Leo:** 'In terms of pictures there are about four or something, I didn't put too much effort into my profile really, because I am not good-looking anyway (laughs), it is just pictures, Facebook isn't it?'



## Profile Pictures and Body Anxiety

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- ◀ The shift from what is done with the body, to what is done on the body
  - Masculinity made through commodified aesthetics
- ◀ Participants recognised the importance of the profile picture
  - Sports activities, with friends, restaurants with food, not body parts
- ◀ Young men – The importance of a brand promise
  - ‘decent lad’, ‘not being a dick’, ‘genuine lad’, ‘that I am not an idiot or a dozer’
  - Tension between ordinary and unique
  - The emergence of a reflexive reflexivity

## Reflexive Reflexivity

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**Francis:** Yeah. I know these were...I selected the ones from Facebook. But they were just things I was tagged in initially. I did change it quite regularly.

**Int:** Changed the photos more regularly?

**Francis:** Yeah. To try and see what kind of photos got more matches. So, I found I got more matches if I was wearing a suit. And then, I think I did have a couple of group photos and I got less matches then. I got more matches when there was a picture of me smiling. Yes. I kind of just stuck with these ones....

**Int:** That's really interesting...

**Francis:** I mean, like I've always liked suits. I've got a lot of suits.....And then, like the black and white picture I've got there. So, that one was I guess I looked a little bit more aggressive in that, I had like shorter hair and the lighting was good on my jaw. So, I looked a bit more angry, I guess. So that one got a lot of instant matches straightaway. So, yeah, I kept that one on for that reason that it was...I guess like that's the bad boy figure that people go for, I guess. Not that I am at all like that. Yeah, the pictures can show whatever sides people see I guess.

# The Fear of Deception

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**Phillip:** I quickly learnt the reason why girls have really close shots of their face or only parts of their face. I ran into a couple in clubs and they looked nothing like the photos on Tinder.

**Int:** How did that make you feel?

**Phillip:** Like I'd been lied to. You're on a dating app you should be honest and if you're not, then that's weird. If you're not going to be honest on the app are you going to be honest in person?

**Int:** Why do you think they were deceiving?

**Phillip:** Because they had self-esteem issues. There was nothing wrong with them at all. They were beautiful or they were intelligent, they just weren't the same girls I had matched and that upset me. If you're trusting me to be honest, I'm trusting you to be honest. I'm not going to date a liar.

**Int:** Do you think that they felt there was a certain expectation of how to look on Tinder that they had to meet?

**Phillip:** Or is that the way they actually see themselves? When I say different, I mean when they've photoshopped or had professional photographs done and you can tell they spent a while on it. There was one girl who looked about 8 stone in her photo and in person she was about 14 stone. She'd done bloody well to manipulate that much weight off.

# The Fear of Deception

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- Young Men's paranoia of being deceived by a match
  - Photos needed to match the reality
  - Men positioned themselves as honest and trustworthy
- Tannen (1998) 'female trickster'
  - Transgression of social cultural role via an indeterminate body
- Facebook Stalking - More information = reduce risk

**Joss:** I choose like, I can look at you; I can have like a good stalk and understand who you are. I can speak to you for a few days and if I want to meet you then like, it's an active choice. Whereas in a bar or a one-night stand, if you meet someone out, there's a lot you don't know about someone. A lot. So....

**Joss:** I think that's why Tinder is positive, if anything, is that people go on about... People see it like really negatively, but it's better than meeting someone in a bar or something like that. I think there's more of a connection at least. I mean, just anyone if you're out, you can catch anything...but, you know?

## The Fear of Deception

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- Deception challenges the authority of men to control
  - Embedded tension between being on Tinder and accepting potential deception
  - Men have a dependency on digital representations
  - Architecture of the app exacerbates the anxiety

“This sense of insecurity or fear of failure usually takes more benign, though still damaging, forms; the feeling of vulnerability precipitated for men on entering an emotionally significant relationship. Here the need for and dependence on another is posed most starkly, in direct contraction to the notions of self-sufficiency and independence central to hegemonic masculinity. It is almost as if to succeed in love one has to fail as a man”. Jefferson (1994: 12)

## Conclusion

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- ★ An emerging context for young men to engage in dating – new ways of initiation
- ★ The complexity of development of dating practices
  - Affordances configuring gendered relations
  - the re-iteration of gendered inequalities
  - the exacerbation of the vulnerability of masculinity and recuperative strategies
- ★ The importance of understanding Masculinity as relational
  - need to go beyond models of hegemony / homophobia and inclusiveness
  - we need to recognise interplays of age, race/ethnicity, disability
  - we need to reconnect with masculinity as a gendered phenomena

## Young People and Dating

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- ▶ Bailey (1989) From Calling to Dating
  - Calling located in the Family / Men would 'Call'
  - A shift to dating empowered men
- ▶ Clarke (1998) Emergence of Dating
  - Opening up of potential matches
  - Education / Dance Halls / Cinema
  - Women became autonomous and in control
- ▶ Kaufmann (2012) The emergence of Youth Culture
  - Dating created a generational split

# Tinder Research: Methodological Approach

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- Research Design

- 20 Young men aged 18-28 (+ 2 aged 36 /38)
- White English / Heterosexually identified / Range of classes
- Qualitative Interviews: Male and Female Interviewers

- Why Tinder?

- Average 6 matches (15/0)
- Were on Tinder for an average of 14 months
- Friends / long term relationships / Fun / Sex



## Commodification / Objectification of Women's Bodies

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- ▶ Illouz (2012) The intellectualization of dating
  - Measureable attributes that leads to ranking
  - Dating as shopping
- ▶ Dating as a visual experience – encoding gendered values
- ▶ Hakim (2011: 119): (M)en's judgments of women's sexual attractiveness are focused narrowly on women's bodies, faces and sex appeal. They can ignore more extraneous details on income and status, and usually do. This is the main reason why men display high consistency in their ratings of female attractiveness.
- ▶ Bauman (2003:65): 'no obligation to buy' promise and a 'return to shop if dissatisfied' guarantee on the front page.'