

Mobile dating: Romance is just a swipe away

Tinders' Romantic and sexual interactions



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ABSTRACT

It has become reality that relationships formed in cyberspace are actualized in the flesh. Due to the popular mobile dating app *Tinder*, the negative stigma of online dating seems to be gone. The app is bringing the geographical and physical attraction element back into online dating, reducing the stigma of online dating. The focus is on answering this question: How does physical and social nearness in Tinder shape romantic and sexual interactions? First the novelty of Tinder in the discourse of online dating is described. Secondly, the phenomenon of online dating was analysed through a theoretical framework of physical and social 'nearness'. Next, an empirical and textual analysis of the affordances of the app is presented to show which elements of the app shape the romantic and sexual relationships and how. The MDA-Framework was used to identify and explain elements of physical and social nearness present in the Tinder app. As the social use of Tinder and the nature its interactions were still quite unclear, a discourse analysis was necessary. Through this exploring analysis, this paper tries to provide insight into the elements that caused a new dimension in the discourse of online dating. Combining the results both analysis, it can be concluded that Tinder optimally uses elements to create high levels of both physical and social nearness. The elements of proximity and mobility lead to serendipitous meet-ups. Physical proximity is important for the probability of these encounters. By only allowing mutually interested users to communicate, interactions are more likely to evolve into real-life interactions. Furthermore, the nature of these online interactions is shaped by the easy-to-use and visual interface of Tinder. Because the app is playful, fast and focused on physical attraction, the interactions tend to unfold the same according to most widely accessible media. This research also shows that the popularity of Tinder can be attributed to its focus on its elements of nearness, resembling the real-life experience. It can be argued that with these elements, Tinder is able to come closer to the basic human desires than other online dating platforms. The app has therefore created a new dimension in the discourse of online dating, reducing its negative stigma and becoming interesting to a new, broader and younger audience.

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1 SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN TINDER: AN INTRODUCTION

So, a lady walks into a bar...Wait, scratch that. A lady takes out her phone. With a left swipe of her finger she dismisses Alex, 25 and Robert, 48. She swipes right when a photo of James, 24, pops up. It's a match. James had swiped right too. They chat, and make plans to meet. They're only three miles apart, after all.¹

An evolution has taken place in the once stigma-ridden world of cyber dating. Formerly, online dating platforms were seen as places where old, desperate and under-averagely attractive single people advertised themselves in order to find love.² Where once this medium to find real love was seen as an awkward way of advertising oneself, it has now become an acceptable way into the dating world.^{3 4} In the past couple of years the millennial generation have accepted mobile dating platforms as a common way to find love.⁵ It has become reality that relationships formed in cyberspace are actualized in the flesh.⁶

So far computer mediated relating (CMR) has reduced the role of physical attributes and proximity, thus promoting erotic connections that stem from emotional intimacy rather than lustful attraction.⁷ However, mobile dating app Tinder is connecting people with others in their geographic proximity based on mutual physical attraction. This makes it an interesting subject to research. The app is bringing the geographical and visual element back into online dating. This study examines how romantic and sexual relationships in Tinder are shaped through elements of social and physical nearness. This paper focuses on answering this main question: How does physical and social nearness in Tinder shape romantic and sexual interactions?

¹ Ortutay, Barbara. "Love me Tinder." *Mercury News*, May 20, 2014.

² Smith, Aaron, and Maeve Duggan. "Online dating & relationships." *Pew Internet & American Life Project* (2013).

³ Spira, Julie. "Experts and Researchers Say Online Dating Has Lost Its Stigma." *The Blog*, December 2, 2012.

⁴ Smith and Duggan. "Online dating & relationships."

⁵ Baxter, Holly and Cashmore, Peter. "Tinder: the shallowest dating app ever?" *The Guardian*, November 23, 2013.

⁶ Jones, Steve. 1997. *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. London ; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications: 135.

⁷ Cooper, Alvin, and Sportolari, Leda. "Romance in cyberspace: Understanding online attraction." *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy* 22, no. 1 (1997): 7-14.

First, a brief description of the current academic discourse of online dating is presented. The work of theorists will be used to describe the characteristics of online dating services. Next, arguments will be provided that new media are changing the current environment of online dating. This study will argue that new media can also use important traditional factors that influence in the development of a relationship.

Secondly, the phenomenon of online dating is analysed through the theoretical framework of physical and social 'nearness' as introduced by Media Researcher Michiel de Lange in relation to Mobile Location Based apps.⁸ In this chapter, the relevant views of sociologists and psychologists on the influence of nearness on interactions will be discussed. Although social nearness is an important element in online dating as a whole, the element of physical nearness has been almost absent in most online dating platforms. However, it is present in Tinder. The nearness element has offered a new perspective on not only the possibilities within online dating, but also the changing interaction with potential mates.

Next, it is necessary to explain how nearness is incorporated into Tinder. This leads to the first sub-question: what are the affordances of Tinder and how do these shape social interactions? The MDA-framework⁹, developed by game designers and professors Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek, will be used to do a textual analysis of the affordances of the app to answer the first sub-question. The method can help determine which nearness elements in the app shape its interactions and influence its users. A critical note is that the MDA-framework is developed to understand and analyse games. Therefore the method of analysis will be specifically modified to identify the nearness elements of the app that shape romantic or sexual interactions without disregarding the playful elements in the app. Tinder adds a playful element to its amorous interactions, influencing the development of its interactions. Furthermore, the MDA-analysis offers a limited view on the social use of the app, offering mostly speculations on how the app can be used, and how it is most likely used. To make these claims more reliable, a discourse analysis is necessary.

The second sub-question focuses on the discursive element of Tinder: What is said on the social use of Tinder in the popular culture? It is necessary to find out how the app is being used and which elements shape interactions in order to give a valid answer

⁸ de Lange, Michiel. 2009. From Always on to Always There: Locative Media as Playful Technologies. In *Digital Cityscapes: Merging Digital and Urban Playspaces*, ed. Adriana de Souza e Silva and Daniel M. Sutko. New York: Peter Lang: 14.

⁹ Hunicke, Robin, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek. "MDA: A formal approach to game design and game research." In *Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI*, pp. 04-04. 2004.

to the main question. The method used for this question can be considered as a form of a discourse analysis. First, it is important to determine how Tinder presents the app itself. Secondly, the social use will be described in the opinions in popular culture. Wikipedia describes popular culture as “the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, memes, images, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture”¹⁰, which is, in this case, the Western culture of the 21st century. This collection of ideas implicitly shines through in the everyday lives of the society: in newspaper and magazine articles, blogs and reviews. These views together describe how Tinder shapes its romantic and sexual interactions using elements of nearness according to its users, critics and the company Tinder itself.

Through the mentioned methodology, this paper describes how Tinder uses elements of nearness to shape romantic and sexual interactions. This study will investigate how Tinder enhances the role of physical attributes but maintains elements of nearness, similarity and mutual self-disclosure. This research hopes to contribute to the debate on online dating in discussing the influence of social nearness and proximity when present in online dating. The playful nature will also prove to influence the interactions made. This research cannot generalize what kind of interactions the users desire. However, it can show what kind of interactions are created through Tinder and how and what this means in the field of online dating.

2 INTERACTIONS IN THE DISCOURSE OF ONLINE DATING

Theorists have so far assumed that the novelty of social media automatically radicalizes human interaction. This problematic assumption is not based on the reality of everyday life. Social media have undoubtedly impacted former communication practices. Preconceived notions of social media, such as seeing social media as a new form of communication, are now challenged by the emergence of social dating apps, which identify social media simply as a new technological tool through which people communicate. This means that even though these technologies can make interactions easier and more convenient, the intention behind the interactions seems more or less the same. Moreover, the nature of dating apps implies that the virtual connections will eventually be translated into real-life connections with people they otherwise would not have met.¹¹

¹⁰ "Popular Culture," accessed July 29th, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_culture

¹¹ John Lisi, "Does Tinder Transform Dating Culture?" *Pop Matters*, November 4, 2013.9 <http://www.popmatters.com/column/176062-does-tinder-transform-dating-culture/> (Accessed April 23, 2014)

Alvin Cooper and Leda Sportolari released a report for the Journal of Sex Education and Therapy claiming that the negative assumption that online dating promotes emotionally disconnected or superficially erotic contacts is false. According to their research, the structure and process of online dating can lead to positive interpersonal connections, including healthy romantic relationships. So far they have seen that the role of physical attributes in the development of attraction has been reduced by computer mediated relating (CMR). Instead, CMR enhances other factors such as nearness, rapport and similarity, and mutual self-disclosure, thus promoting erotic connections that stem from emotional intimacy rather than lustful attraction.¹² The scholars argue that CMR does not ever start with physical attraction: "Clearly, as the technology stands now, CMR does not start off or develop due to attraction based on physical attributes."¹³ This makes Tinder an interesting subject to study because the contact can only be initiated through a basis of physical attraction. This study will investigate how Tinder enhances the role of physical attributes but maintains important online dating elements of nearness, similarity and mutual self-disclosure. This study will argue that Tinder's interface and navigation eliminate most of the rejection, creating a safe base to start flirting, more so than in other online dating platforms.

3 'NEARNESS' IN MOBILE DATING

The Internet allows different ways of developing initial attraction. Proximity and familiarity can foster attraction.¹⁴ Both of these elements can be explained by the term 'nearness'. Media researcher De Lange describes nearness in two dimensions: physical and social. Physical nearness occurs when one's body is nearby in the physical world. Mobile technologies and geographic information have made this notion problematic because people can feel close to one another by knowing the other person is in close proximity. It is harder to grasp the definition of social nearness, however it is created when online parties feel close to each other, when they physically are not.¹⁵ Arguments

¹² Cooper and Sportolari. "Romance in cyberspace", 7-14.

¹³ Cooper and Sportolari. "Romance in cyberspace", 8.

¹⁴ Cooper and Sportolari. "Romance in cyberspace", 9.

¹⁵ Latané, Bibb, James H. Liu, Andrzej Nowak, Michael Bonevento, and Long Zheng. "Distance matters: Physical space and social impact." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 21, no. 8 (1995): 795-805.

will be presented showing the importance of physical and social nearness in dating. Both elements are important in the creation and forming of a relationship.¹⁶

3.1 Physical Nearness in Mobile Dating

Physical nearness or proximity is important in the shaping of relationships; we are more likely to develop a relationship with someone who is physically close to us for several reasons. Sociological research by Bossard¹⁷ as far back as 1932 to Ramsøy¹⁸ in 1966 found a significant correlation between proximity and love; people were more likely to get married the closer they lived, studied or worked to each other. A reason for this might be that physical proximity reduces costs of interaction; less effort is required to turn virtual meetings into real ones. Being physically 'near' to someone is therefore important in the development of a potential relationship.¹⁹

Communications professor Joshua Meyrowitz, who is known for his research on the effects of mass media, argues that the importance of time and physical space is weakened or utterly destroyed by information and communication technologies.²⁰ This can be due to the fact that physical nearness in conventional dating is barely existent in online dating as it is assumed that social relations formerly based on physical proximity and face-to-face interactions do not need a physical space and time anymore.

However, recent work also argues that physical places and local context can still be important in interactions.²¹ The mobile phone helps to create a sense of nearness with other people.²² Mobile phones contribute to a "sense of place" by being tied to physical places.²³ Tinder is tied to a physical place by only allowing users to find people within close proximity. The app can therefore be used to plan meetings or last minute

16 Mahfouz, Ahmed Y., Andreas G. Philaretou, and Antonis Theocharous. "Virtual social interactions: Evolutionary, social psychological and technological perspectives." *Computers in Human Behaviour* 24, no. 6 (2008): 3019.

17 Bossard, James HS. "Residential propinquity as a factor in marriage selection." *American Journal of Sociology* (1932): 219-224.

18 Ramsøy, Natalie Rogoff. "Assortative mating and the structure of cities." *American Sociological Review* (1966): 773-786.

19 de Lange. "Locative Media as Playful Technologies", 15.

20 Meyrowitz, Joshua. "No sense of place: the impact of electronic media on social behavior." New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1985): 308

21 Nyíri, Krystóf J. (2005). *A sense of place: the global and the local in mobilecommunication* (1st English ed.). Vienna: Passagen Verlag: 160.

22 de Lange. "Locative Media as Playful Technologies", 14.

23 Nyíri, Krystóf J. "A sense of place."

arrangements, and thus can be considered as a prelude to actual face-to-face encounters.²⁴ In the probability of these encounters, physical place can be considered an important factor.

3.2 Social Nearness in Mobile Dating

Physical proximity or nearness is not the only factor that is important in finding a prospective dating partner. 'Social nearness' also constitutes as an important factor in interpersonal attraction, compensating the absence of physical proximity.²⁵ Physical proximity itself does help in creating a higher level of social nearness. This has to do with 'co-presence'. "It is possible to feel the presence of someone even while she is physically absent. Virtual or imagined nearness is thus achieved when the online parties feel close to each other, even when they physically are not. This happens when both prospective partners coordinate by being online at the same time and message each other, this increases exposure and attraction.²⁶ "This virtual nearness tends to increase the frequency of contact between prospective online daters, and by extension, the degree of their exposure to one another."²⁷ According to Bornstein, the more exposure there is, the more likely users of the app will experience positive interactions.^{28 29} Traditionally, we are accustomed to first meet someone, and then get to know them; in virtual communities we get to know someone before we actually meet them.³⁰ This allows social nearness before physical nearness is achieved.

3.3 Concluding: Physical and Social Nearness in Mobile Dating

Physical Proximity has proven itself to be an important factor in the development of a relationship. The digital nature of the Tinder app requires less effort for two people to communicate and develop a relationship, creating a sense of social nearness. Therefore

²⁴ Ling, R., & Yttri, B. (2002). Hyper-coordination via mobile phones in Norway. In J. E. Katz & M. A. Aakhus (Eds.), *Perpetual contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 139.

²⁵ Mahfouz, Philaretou, and Theocharous. "Virtual social interactions", 3019.

²⁶ Latané, Liu, Nowak, Bonevento, and Zheng. "Distance matters", 795-805.

²⁷ Mahfouz, Philaretou, and Theocharous. "Virtual social interactions", 3019.

²⁸ Bornstein, Robert F. "Exposure and affect: Overview and meta-analysis of research, 1968-1987." *Psychological bulletin* 106, no. 2 (1989): 265-289.

²⁹ Schmitt, Bernd H. *Customer experience management: a revolutionary approach to connecting with your customers*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

³⁰ Rheingold, Howard. *The virtual community: Finding connection in a computerized world*. Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc., 1993: 65.

it can also be argued that place is not that important anymore as these people can now interact, communicate and flirt in a digital space. However, physical proximity can also attribute to a sense of social nearness. Furthermore, the intention behind the interaction in mobile dating is suggested to turn these interactions into real relationships and for this process, physical proximity can be of the utmost importance. However, a critical note should be made that this intention might not be that absolute when it goes for modern mobile dating apps like Tinder. Physical proximity makes serendipitous meet-ups easier but it must not be assumed that every interaction turns into a physical encounter. It is especially interesting to look at this element when one looks at Tinder, because it focuses on the basic physical attraction and shallow exchange of personal information.

This makes it necessary to analyse how nearness is entangled into the structure and design of the mobile app Tinder. This leads to an empirical and textual analysis of the affordances of the app, to see which elements of the app shape the social interactions and how.

4 THE MECHANICS, DYNAMICS AND AESTHETICS OF TINDER

This chapter will be used to answer the first sub-question: what are the affordances of Tinder and how do these shape social interactions? Interactions through coded subsystems like Tinder create complex, dynamic and often unpredictable behaviour.³¹ To answer this question, the MDA framework is used to decompose and study the Tinders' interactions. Even though the method was created to analyse games, it still provides a thorough enough analysis of the app while preserving the roles of both the designer and user. However, the focus of the MDA is still designer-focused and leaves only a little room for the users' experience. Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek state that the model helps to understand games as a dynamic system which allows designers to control undesired outcomes by channeling desired behaviour.³² This study takes issue with this notion, especially because Tinder is not a linear game with one end goal. Users can have different intentions to use Tinder and can decide to use it for different reasons. Some users just use it to do a fun night of 'swiping' with their friends, while others use the chat function to reject someone in a funny way.³³ For this, a discourse analysis is necessary. The method helps to determine how the app itself controls its interactions,

³¹ Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. *"MDA: A formal approach"*, 4.

³² Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. *"MDA: A formal approach"*,

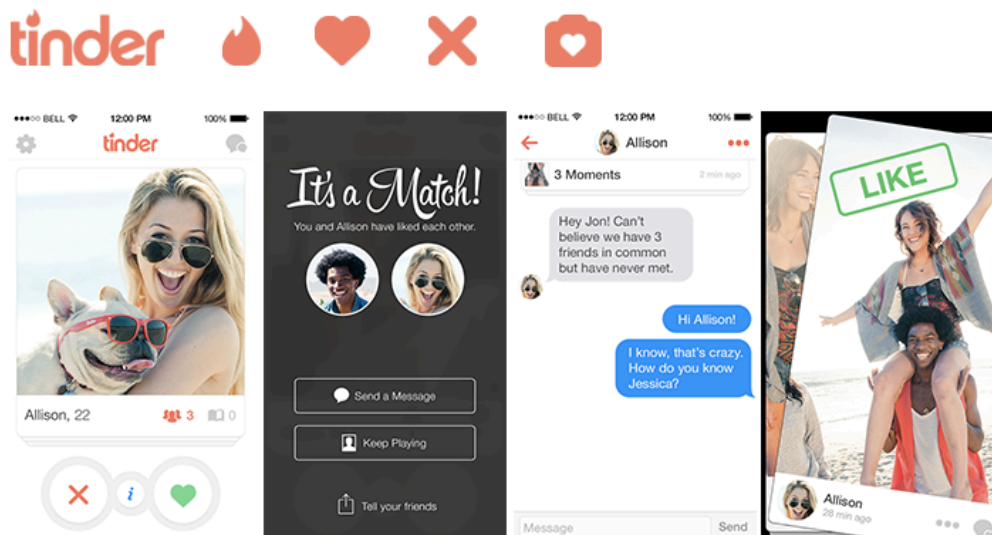
³³ Facebook Inc. "Tinder Tafereelen" Accessed on August 4th, 2014.

the influence of its users and the possibilities users have to form relationships. On the downside, predicting the behaviour of its users through this model can still be a speculative. The MDA framework breaks games down into three distinct components and their design counterparts: Rules (Mechanics), System (Dynamics) and 'Fun' (Aesthetics).³⁴ Throughout the analysis, it will be described how elements of the app lead to physical and social nearness. A ludic analysis, executed by using the app, will help identify all the components involving elements of nearness.

4.1 Mechanics – The Developers' Point of View

Mechanics are the base components of the application. These consist of rules, algorithms and data structures and representations that are forcibly accepted by its users.³⁵ First, it needs to be determined how Tinder controls its content and usage. A user can log in using their Facebook account. Tinder will automatically use all the information provided by Facebook. The settings section of the app requires the user to state their sex, whether they are looking for men or women, in what age category, and in what physical proximity radius. The user can decide on the search radius starting at 1 kilometre up to 100 kilometres. Tinder displays the physical proximity to potential partners by stating the number of kilometres between the user and the profile he or she is checking out.

Image 1: The interface of Tinder³⁶



³⁴ Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. "MDA: A formal approach", 4.

³⁵ Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. "MDA: A formal approach", 4.

³⁶ Press kit Tinder, <http://www.gotinder.com/press>, June 10, 2014

The interface of Tinder is also quite clear to its users (*Image 1*). You can only swipe right (like) or left (dislike) once for each profile. A heart represents a 'like' and a cross represents a 'dislike'. The app only shows its users who liked them back, as there will be no notifications stating the people who have rejected them. Only when users show their interest in one another, they are matched, and then they can start a conversation. Recently Tinder has added a new photo feature to its app called 'Moments'. "A user can click on a camera icon at the top of their 'Matches' tab to take a photo that will be shared with all potential suitors. The photo will cease to exist 24 hours after the photo has been sent."³⁷ People can also draw, caption, and put filters on the briefly available photos.

4.2 Dynamics – The Bridge Between Developer and User

The dynamics can be discovered when the app is being used, as the dynamics are the processes and behaviours that arise when you actually use the app. In an interview on the website of Gamasutra, LeBlanc says dynamics are about predicting and explaining: "The player is part of the system too, so some of our understanding of game dynamics has to be an understanding of human dynamics."³⁸ Therefore literature will support the statements made in this sub-chapter. Mahfouz, Philaretou and Theocharous have done an exploratory investigation into online dating from an evolutionary, psychological, and technological perspective. They define the virtual nearness experience in terms of the following: sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and collaborative or social identification.³⁹ Through a ludic analysis of the app, the sensory, emotional and cognitive experiences are best identifiable and therefore elaborated on.

4.2.1. Sensory

Tinder can be considered a sensory online dating experience because it is appealing to virtual daters by including the senses.⁴⁰⁴¹ The user can only pull six pictures from their Facebook. The main focus of Tinder is on physical attraction, the initial phase of attraction in offline dating. The interface of Tinder gives its users the possibility to showcase their best photos. This gives users the opportunity to manipulate their

37 Stampler, Laura. "Tinder's New Photo Feature Is A Lot Like Snapchat" Time, June 5, 2014.

38 Nutt. "GDC: Game Design Workshop"

39 Schmitt, Bernd H. "Experiential marketing: How to get customers to sense, feel, think, act and relate to your company and brand." New York. 1999.

40 Schmitt. "Experiential marketing"

41 Schmitt. Customer experience management.

projected level of physical attractiveness and appeal.⁴² Mahfouz, Philaretou and Theocharous even argue that interactive user interfaces with high-quality photographic images have made the digital space acceptable to meet potential romantic partners. Tinders' well-designed software in combination with enthusiastic online daters can therefore result in a high-quality sensory immersion.⁴³

4.2.2 Emotional

The emotional online dating experience is shown in the method of the online dating platform of placing its virtual daters in a certain mood, encouraging them to respond in a certain emotional way and appealing to their personal feelings.⁴⁴

Tinder always starts with the physical attraction between two people. Once two people have both shown their interest they are considered a match and then the interaction can start. That way, Tinder only facilitates communication between mutually interested users. This is its greatest advantage over real-life confrontations. In conventional dating, the person who tries to flirt or approach a person can be rejected. In online dating this rejection might be less apparent and personal but still present. In Tinder, the rejection is absent, as the users are not faced with this information.

Sociology professor Ted Huston investigated whether or not the level of acceptance had influence on the choice to flirt or date the opposite sex. His findings showed that rejection is an important factor in the decision to flirt or not.⁴⁵ According to professor Patricia Wallace, who focuses on the role of internet in society, online daters are more likely to initiate and sustain online romantic relationships with online daters who not only appeal to them, but who also respond to their romantic invitations.⁴⁶ This is what Tinder cleverly implements in their structure. The rejection is not apparent, as only acceptance is shown. This provides a great base in the search for love, romance or sex, because flirting through Tinder is a lot less risky than when one is physically near. Whitty and Carr examined how flirting offline can be transferred to an Internet setting. They argue that cyberspace must be seen as a potentially more playful and safer space

⁴² Mahfouz, Philaretou, and Theocharous. "Virtual social interactions", 3017.

⁴³ Whitton, Mary C. "Making virtual environments compelling." *Communications of the ACM* 46, no. 7 (2003): 40-47.

⁴⁴ Schmitt. *Customer experience management*.

⁴⁵ Huston, Ted L. "Ambiguity of acceptance, social desirability, and dating choice." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 9.1 (1973): 32-42.

⁴⁶ Wallace, Patricia. *The psychology of the Internet*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

than the offline world when it comes to flirting and developing relationships. It can be liberating for people who are anxious about forming relationships offline.⁴⁷

However, to reach a high level of virtual nearness, prospective dating partners still need to be online at the same time in order to exchange messages.⁴⁸ The app shows the last time a person was online in hours or days. The mobile aspect of tinder is makes this a lot easier as people carry their phones on them all the time. It can be concluded that an emotional response towards Tinder, such as its navigation enjoyment and convenience, are of outmost importance for its users.⁴⁹

4.2.3. Cognitive

Tinder also provides a cognitive experience through its rich online interactions. It engages online daters in a provocative method by stimulating curiosity for other online daters and interactions with them.⁵⁰ By ignoring rejection, Tinder creates a safe basis to start a conversation. Users know that they are physically near to another user through common interests, mutual friends on Facebook, but also hobbies, music, local restaurants and places both users like. These similarities can lead to a feeling of social nearness as well. Similarity is very important in the shaping of a relationship.⁵¹By showing mutual friends and interests, Tinder tries to lower the boundaries for users to initiate a conversation with a match. It gives them something to talk about and makes it directly more personal.

4.3 Aesthetics – The Users’ Point of View

Aesthetics are the desirable emotional responses evoked in the user when triggered by dynamics. There are several reasons for a mobile dater to use Tinder. “Tinder’s really doing something that has been the Holy Grail for online dating: it becomes fun,” says Mark Brooks, a consultant to the Internet dating industry.⁵² Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek

⁴⁷ Whitty, Monica T., and Adrian N. Carr. "Cyberspace romance: The psychology of online relationships." (2010).

⁴⁸ Latané, Bibb, James H. Liu, Andrzej Nowak, Michael Bonevento, and Long Zheng. "Distance matters: Physical space and social impact." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 21, no. 8 (1995): 795-805.

⁴⁹ Agarwal, Ritu, and Viswanath Venkatesh. "Assessing a firm's web presence: a heuristic evaluation procedure for the measurement of usability." *Information Systems Research* 13, no. 2 (2002): 168-186.

⁵⁰ Schmitt. Customer experience management.

⁵¹ Cooper and Sportolari. "Romance in cyberspace", 7-14.

⁵² Lapowsky, Issie. "Tinder May Not Be Worth \$5B, But It's Way More Valuable Than You Think." *Wired*, April 11, 2014.

introduce eight kinds of fun in an attempt to encompass as to *why* we play games or use an app like Tinder:

1. Sensation- *Game as sense-pleasure*
2. Fantasy- *Game as make-believe*
3. Narrative- *Game as drama*
4. Challenge- *Game as obstacle course*
5. Fellowship- *Game as social framework*
6. Discovery- *Game as uncharted territory*
7. Expression- *Game as self-discovery*
8. Submission- *Game as pastime* ⁵³

The first kind of 'fun' that Tinder can generate is sensation. This happens when the player experiences something completely unfamiliar to them.⁵⁴ Tinder has made the process of meeting a total stranger for romantic purposes risk-free, exciting and mainstream.⁵⁵ Secondly, The main kind of fun Tinder creates can definitely be found in the fellowship category. "All of the social aspects of games; the ability for a game to function as a social framework. All the ways in which games facilitate human interaction" serves this category according to LeBlanc.⁵⁶ By encouraging interaction with other users, the app makes it easier to form social connections.⁵⁷ By allowing its users to see how physically close they are to one another, Tinder can induce spontaneity when it comes to meeting up, making it an important factor in the development of the online relationship. The app can also generate fun because its users feel the need to explore, therefore the category of discovery might also be relevant.⁵⁸ Except, the app does not only allow discovery within a game setting, as LeBlanc describes, but it helps the user meet new people in real life. The users of Tinder literally discover who is available and looking to date within physical proximity. The following category, expression, can also be a reason for online daters to use the app. The app is used as a "vehicle for expressing yourself".⁵⁹ Tinder users can upload up to 6 pictures of their

⁵³ Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. "MDA: A formal approach", 4.

⁵⁴ Abbott. "MDA Framework".

⁵⁵ Lapowsky. "Tinder May Not Be Worth \$5B"

⁵⁶ Nutt. "GDC: Game Design Workshop"

⁵⁷ Abbott. "MDA Framework".

⁵⁸ Abbott. "MDA Framework".

⁵⁹ Nutt. "GDC: Game Design Workshop"

preference, showing themselves to other 'singles' in the way they want to be presented. Tinder also allows its users to add a text to their profile, leaving another space for personal expression. The last relevant category submission is a reason why most mobile apps are used, also including Tinder. The app is simply used to have a pleasurable mindless pastime. Using the easy and visual yes-no interface can just be a nice joyful experience.⁶⁰

4.4 Concluding: Tinder According to the MDA Model

In this chapter an empirical and ludic analysis of the app was done to identify elements that shape the social interaction in the app. Physical nearness elements are explicitly present in the Tinder app, making it very likely for online daters to turn their online interactions into face-to-face meetings. The sense of social nearness is very much stimulated in the structure of Tinder by not showing any rejection from other users. This way, the app provides a safe basis for its users to form rich online interactions. By showing mutual friends and interests, users immediately have something to talk about, or to feel 'near' to the other. The primitive yet visually pleasing interface made the app easy and fun to use. The app provides a rich sensory, emotional and cognitive experience to its users.

The MDA-analysis offers a limited view on the social use of the app, only expressed in claims that may seem speculative. To make the claims in this chapter more reliable, a discourse analysis is necessary. This research now turns to a discursive analysis for answers.

5 THE DISCOURSE OF TINDER

This chapter tries to comprehend which elements of the app shape romantic and sexual interactions. Only the popular culture can provide an accurate insight into how nearness influences the social use of the app. This process is an attempt to answer the second sub-question: What is said on the social use of Tinder in the popular culture?

5.1 A Discourse Analysis on Tinder

The 'dispositif', as described by Schäfer, will be used as a framework. He sees this as a dynamic interaction between discourses, technologies and the social use of these technologies.⁶¹ In the first part of the analysis the focus will be on how Tinder as a

⁶⁰ Nutt. "GDC: Game Design Workshop"

⁶¹ Schäfer. *Bastard culture!*

company shapes the discourse and why. The second part of the analysis will be focused on the popular culture. This field of research will be considered as often heard opinions that are published through widely accessible media. Discourse analysis in text often highlights the multiple and conflicting ways in which people account for something.⁶² The positive and negative expectations and opinions in the media on Tinder and its interactions will be discussed in this part of the chapter.

5.2 Tinder by Tinder

Tinder was created because its founders saw that available platforms offering ways in meeting new people were boring, out dated and filled with barriers. By eliminating the normal process of risk and rejection, the three founders of Tinder are Justin Mateen, Sean Rad and iOS engineer Jonathan Badeen have tried “to eliminate the barriers involved in making new connections and strengthening existing ones. We believe in fun and familiar experiences that are designed to emulate and advance real world interactions.”⁶³ Tinder expected their app to be “extremely fun, natural, and would mimic our real world behaviours.”⁶⁴ Tinder sees their formula as a great success. According to Sean Rad, founder and CEO of Tinder, the app has done a great job in helping people form new relationships, reaching 2 billion matches in June 2014.⁶⁵

5.3 Interactions in Tinder as perceived by Tinder

Tinder is desperate to avoid being classified as a dating company, because these are seen as low-growth businesses, assuming that every successful match also leads to the loss of two customers. When the app turns into a social network, it will only become bigger the more people it connects. This mission put the founders of Tinder in a tricky position, as they still want to hype the app as an easy way to find love, but also send a message out that the app is more than just an easy way to find hook-ups.⁶⁶ When being interviewed, Rad explains that Tinder is not that shallow because, according to him, people judge each other more thoughtfully in the app than in real life. However, he does not deny it is all about physical appearance: “There’s a reason why it’s known as love at

⁶² Gough, Brendan, Majella McFadden, and Matthew McDonald. *Critical social psychology: An introduction*. 2013: 78

⁶³ “About,” last modified June 16, 2014, <http://www.gotinder.com/about>

⁶⁴ “Introducing Moments,” last modified June 5, 2014, <http://www.gotinder.com/blog>

⁶⁵ “Introducing Moments”

⁶⁶ Ayers. “Tinder: the app.”

first sight. It's not love after we've had a nice conversation and I've gone home to meet your family."⁶⁷ In an attempt to make Tinder safe and authentic to the real world experiences, its developers only allows users to log in with a Facebook account. According to Rad in an interview with Chris Ayers, it prevents the platform to become an alternative reality.⁶⁸

The newest feature 'Moments' is an attempt to turn the app more into a social sharing platform, rather than its 'hook-up app' stereotype. "We've done the meeting people well, now it's about giving unique and fun tools to people to connect with those matches," says Rad. By making the pictures only available for 24 hours, Tinders' developers hope to "take away that pressure of wanting to make it perfect and allow you to be more yourself."⁶⁹ By adding the new feature, Tinder hopes to prove it is about more than just dating, and that it can be seen as a social platform.⁷⁰ Rad sees Tinder now as an evolutionary method "to use social means meeting new people and strengthening the bonds that you have with existing relationships."⁷¹

Jonathan Badeen, another co-founder of Tinder, argues that: "on Tinder you're not being pursued by random people who you don't want to engage with,"⁷² suggesting that every contact is welcome to evolve into serious interaction. Badeen also hopes that the app starts facilitating connections with new people for all kinds of interactions. The company is exploring options for monetization to expand the service beyond connecting singles. One of these ways is providing services for couples who have met through the app in order to extend the app's usefulness and deleting the desire to delete the app once a relationship has been found.⁷³

5.4 Interactions in Tinder as Perceived by Popular Culture

Using a mobile phone, browsing through profiles of pretty men and women who are physically nearby seems a superficial approach to finding a mate for life in the age of the Internet. However, experts in the matter of online dating, including psychology

⁶⁷ Ayers. "Tinder: the app."

⁶⁸ Ayers. "Tinder: the app."

⁶⁹ Stampler. "Tinder's New Photo Feature."

⁷⁰ Stampler. "Tinder's New Photo Feature."

⁷¹ Stampler. "Tinder's New Photo Feature."

⁷² Ayers. "Tinder: the app."

⁷³ Hockenson, Lauren. "Tinder co-founder says company is aiming to monetize and wants to be a "meeting app". *GigaOm*, June 3, 2014.

professors and Internet psychologists, say that “dating apps based on looks and proximity, rather than personality, are closer to how we choose dates in the ‘real world’”.⁷⁴ Media Researcher John Lisi argues that Tinder mirrors older forms of dating in the intention behind the interaction, only providing the user with more options of who to date. By that, he argues that Tinder uses the most basic human desires.⁷⁵ The *Telegraph* argues that the quick process in Tinder is far more representative for real sexual chemistry than dating website which include personality analytics and mutual interest algorithms, because it pleases the appetite for immediacy of its users.⁷⁶ Tinder works fundamentally different than conventional online dating platforms.

According to Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, professor of business psychology at University College London, Tinder has managed to take two massive hurdles in the field of online dating. The first accomplishment is that Tinders’ users consider the app to be cool and are not ashamed of using it in front of their friends. According to Internet psychologist Graham Jones the mobile and playful character makes the app “a more sociable activity that you can use with friends down the pub rather than sitting at home on your laptop on a dating website.”⁷⁷ “Second, through eliminating time lags and distance, Tinder bridges the gap between digital and physical dating, enabling users to experience instant gratification.”⁷⁸ *Bloomberg Businessweek* agrees when they argue that Tinder is successful because its proximity element allows users to connect with people nearby, and if Tinder turns out unsuccessful for the night, people can still enjoy a night out with friends.⁷⁹

The perception of professor Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic’ on the psychological effects are particularly interesting to look at when one wants to determine how Tinder shapes social interactions. Chamorro-Premuzic starts by arguing that the process of dating has been gamified and sexualised by technology. The app itself is more arousing than the actual physical meetings: “the pretext is to hook-up, but the real pleasure is derived from the Tindering process.”⁸⁰ He then argues that digital eligibility almost

⁷⁴ Ayers. “Tinder: the app.”

⁷⁵ Lisi. “Does Tinder Transform Dating Culture?”

⁷⁶ Kent, Caroline. “Tinder review: a woman’s perspective”, September 19, 2013.

⁷⁷ Ayers. “Tinder: the app.”

⁷⁸ Chamorro-Premuzic, Tomas. “The Tinder effect: psychology of dating in the technosexual era” *The Guardian*, January 17, 2014.

⁷⁹ Summers, Nick. “Dating App Tinder Catches Fire”, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 5 September 2013.

⁸⁰ Chamorro-Premuzic. “The Tinder effect”

always exceeds physical eligibility. In a critical analysis on online dating, Finkel, Eastwich, Karney, Reis and Sprecher say that the amount of matches online might cause the users to be less committed to a long-term relationship. They further argue that: “communicating online can foster intimacy and affection between strangers, but it can also lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointment when potential partners meet in real life.”⁸¹ Chamorro-Premuzic makes the same argument. However, Finkel, Eastwich, Karney, Reis and Sprecher attribute this to the absence of physical chemistry, and Chamorro-Premuzic attributes it to how people manipulate their profiles.

The professor furthermore argues that Tinder facilitates people to fulfil their basic evolutionary and social needs, emulating the real-world dating habits more successfully than traditional online dating sites.⁸² He further elaborates: “Tinder is more linked to impulse and emotions and focuses on looks, which is more realistic, even if it is a bit lazier. It replicates the traditional version of dating more closely than Match.com or eHarmony as it allows for more serendipity.”⁸³ However, he also argues that this does not guarantee a successful long-term relationship.⁸⁴

Eli Epstein, who interviewed men about the motivation behind using Tinder, does not believe it can lead to romantic relationships. His conclusion was that men use it to “get laid”. He therefore claims that Tinder does not lead to actual dating, because it is not “associated with the expectations of commitment and a long-term relationship.”⁸⁵ A Melbourne teenager agrees and explains that Tinder is used by “teens to find other teens who are interested in getting physical with no emotional connection, it starts off with general chit-chat usually, and then it slips into talking purely about sex and physical stuff and then often they eventually arrange to meet up.”⁸⁶ The Mirror disagrees as they looked at over 200 profiles and only one mentioned sex on his profile. According to their research, most people wrote that they were looking to meet interesting people and have good conversations.⁸⁷ *The Australian* sees Tinder more as an addition to the dating

⁸¹ Finkel, Eli J., Paul W. Eastwick, Benjamin R. Karney, Harry T. Reis, and Susan Sprecher. "Online Dating A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 13, no. 1 (2012): 3-66.

⁸² Chamorro-Premuzic. “The Tinder effect”

⁸³ Ayers. “Tinder: the app.”

⁸⁴ Chamorro-Premuzic. “The Tinder effect”

⁸⁵ Epstein, Eli. “Dating with Tinder: What It’s Really Like to Date with Hookup Apps.” March 11, 2013

⁸⁶ Doutré. “Tinder teens out for sex with strangers”

⁸⁷ Quilty-Harper, Conrad and Leach, Anna. “A third of men on Tinder will swipe right to anything” *Mirror*, May 2014.

system and especially praises the lack of rejection in the app.⁸⁸ Ann Friedman from *New York Magazine* also implicitly states that the app often leads to casual sex, and women accept the shallowness of the app just as men do.⁸⁹ Glenn Platt, professor of interactive media studies at Miami University, has a much more utopic view as he argues that Tinder can be liberating when compared to conventional dating. He says that the app equalizes gender power.⁹⁰

Tinder can be dangerous according to professor Anne Mitchell. She says that teenagers using apps to facilitate sex with strangers is unsafe, and that very young people are using it. The article further argues that Facebook accounts can be easily manipulated, which allows sexual predators to use Tinder as a way to meet vulnerable teenagers.⁹¹

5.5 Concluding: The Discourse of Tinder

In this discourse analysis it is clear that Tinder does not like to be seen as a quick hook-up app, although it is at the same time a big reason for its success. It can be argued that company's objective to eliminate social barriers to meet new people has taken away most of the awkward stigma on online dating. However, this has also resulted in shallow interactions. Both Tinder and widely accessible media conclude that the users tend to use the app to meet people quick without really having any expectations or committing, though both parties acknowledge that the app can also lead to more serious relationships.

6 CONCLUSION

A theoretical look on 'nearness' presented good arguments showing the importance of both physical and social nearness in dating. This led to an empirical and textual analysis of the app. This showed how Tinder cleverly uses physical proximity as a dominant feature of the app, making it easier for online daters to turn their online connections into real ones. The app provides a rich sensory, emotional and cognitive experience to its users creating a positive attitude towards the app and its users. By not showing rejection, the app provides a safe basis for its users to form rich online interactions, stimulating the sense of social nearness. Users of Tinder immediately have

⁸⁸ King, Simon. "Love me tinder... a swipe at romance", *The Australian*, May 31, 2014.

⁸⁹ Friedman, Ann. "How Tinder Solved Online Dating for Women" *New York Magazine*, October 10, 2013.

⁹⁰ Ortutay. "Love me Tinder."

⁹¹ Doutré. "Tinder teens out for sex with strangers"

something to talk about, or to feel 'near' to the other, because the app shows common interest and friends. The binary yet visually pleasing interface makes Tinder accessible and fun to use. Because of this playful character, people do not necessarily use it to find a romantic or sexual relationship. However its focus on physical appearance and the shallow base of a connection that is made could generate shallow interactions. The method helped understand Tinder as a dynamic system however, it is limited as the app cannot channel desired outcomes. As the MDA-analysis only lead to speculative claims on the social use of the app, a discourse analysis is necessary to provide supporting arguments.

From the discourse analysis it can be concluded how romantic and sexual relationships in Tinder are different and similar to the way individuals initiate, develop and maintain relationships formed in offline settings or other online dating platforms. Both its founders and media argue that Tinder was able to please basic human desires by focussing on physical attraction. Tinder's objective to lower social barriers has taken away some of the stigma on online dating. These lowered barriers have also resulted in users who consider the app as a game, creating more shallow interactions in the app itself. Tinder and popular culture conclude that the users tend to use the app to meet people quick without really having any commitments or expectations, although both parties acknowledge that the app can also lead to more serious relationships.

Combining the results both analysis, it can be concluded that Tinder optimally uses elements to create high levels of both physical and social nearness. Physical proximity is important for the probability of these encounters. By only allowing mutually interested users, interactions are more likely to evolve into serendipitous real-life interactions. These romantic and sexual interactions are shaped by Tinders' easy-to-use and visual interface. This research shows that the interactions of Tinder can be attributed to the focus on physical attraction and physical nearness, resembling the real-life experience. The fear of rejection people have in real life is not present in the app, therefore users tend to be more direct in their communication than in real life. With these results, this study has shown how Tinder enhances the role of physical attributes but maintains elements of nearness, similarity and mutual self-disclosure.

What does this research contribute to the debate on online dating? So far, online dating platforms focus most on finding the best match possible for someone based on similar interest, values and expectations in life. This research has shown that physical and social nearness are very important in the shaping of a relationship, even in online dating. Adding to that, it can be argued that Tinder's focus on physical attraction gives the online dater an even bigger motivation to meet up in real life. This study has shown

how Tinder's interface and navigation eliminates most of the rejection, creating a safe base to start flirting, more so than in other online dating platforms. Its playful nature was thought to make the app not suitable for finding a partner. However, this study has shown that the app can lead to both serious and shallow interactions. This research has not exposed the difference between Tinder interactions and interactions on these conventional online dating platforms. However, it has shown that a more shallow approach to online dating can be just as, if not more, successful than the deepened serious approach online dating is known for.

This research has not exposed the difference between Tinder intentions and intentions on conventional online dating platforms. This might be an interesting angle to look at when one wants to provide more insight into the discourse of online dating. Furthermore, the plans of Tinder to turn the app more into a social network can change the way Tinder shapes its interactions. With every new implementation, Tinder offers new material for future research.

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