



**HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO  
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI**

## **Swiping Right on Inequality – Tinder as a Means of Biopower**

Verna Ala-Olla, Vilja Antikainen, Ella Liimatainen, Anju Marjamaa & Maisa Mikkola

**Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki  
Master's Programme in Global Politics and Communication**

## **Abstract**

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence are transforming the ways people interact with each other, including dating patterns. This research paper looks into the topic of social inequality maintained and reproduced by dating applications, with a specific focus on Tinder. We will utilise Michel Foucault's theory of biopower in examining the ways in which biopower is exercised through Tinder. This power is inherently intertwined with the algorithmic logic based on big data collection and a habit-forming application design. We will attempt to find answers to the following questions: 1) How is Foucauldian biopower exercised through Tinder? and 2) How does Tinder as a political technology reproduce inequality?

In this research paper, we argue that Tinder functions as a means of Foucauldian biopower that maintains and reproduces social inequality in various ways by harnessing users' sexualities for profit-seeking data collection. Tinder's algorithm gamifies partner seeking and at the same time, it perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces heteronormative norms. Additionally, Tinder's technical flaws are argued to be reflections of internal racism reproducing racial discrimination, and its premium features favour wealthy users, reinforcing economic inequality. Being downloaded over 430 million times, Tinder has power to influence the dating culture, which is why its algorithm matters.

**Key words:** algorithms, biopower, dating applications, inequality, Tinder

# 1 Introduction

The ongoing digital revolution is transforming all aspects of human life, including dating and romantic and sexual relationships (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2017, 272). Technological development has freed sexuality from its relationship to reproduction and created possibilities for the “pure relationship” that is based on emotional and sexual equality (Giddens 1992, 2). Technological change, along with individualism and consumerism, has made love “liquid”, a type of entertainment (Bauman 2003, viii–xii, 65). In 2010s, companies found a niche in the market for dating apps: algorithms could make dating easier, funnier and independent of time and place. Thus, dating applications have gained authority in the intimate sphere, Tinder in the forefront with over 430 million downloads since its launch (Elad 2023).

According to Michel Foucault (2010, 103), we are living in the era of biopower: the political technologies through which the body is subjugated and the lives of the population are controlled and shaped have immensely increased. Dating applications can be understood as an example of these political technologies. Being the most popular dating application, Tinder has power to maintain and reproduce values and attitudes: its usage has become a cultural practice that operates within a societal and cultural context (Krüger and Spild 2020, 1395–1396).

In this research paper, we will argue that Tinder, among other dating applications, can be understood as a means of Foucauldian biopower that reproduces social inequality, as opposed to striving for the “pure relationship”. We will examine how Tinder maintains and reproduces amatonormativity, gender norms, hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, white normativity and middle-class norms, thus reproducing inequality. Chapters two and three will lay out the theoretical framework for our paper: Chapter two will discuss Foucault’s concepts of biopower, biopolitics, normalisation and political technologies and conceptualise dating applications as technologies of the self. Chapter three will focus on Tinder’s addictive game-like captivity and

its data collection as a means of biopower. In chapter four, questions are addressed regarding how Tinder creates and sustains gender and sexual minority discrimination as well as hookup culture. In chapter five, the topic of racial discrimination in the context of Tinder will be examined: does the application produce racial discrimination, and how does it connect to biopower? Chapter six will explore economic inequality in online dating, focusing on how Tinder's paid features can lead to wealth-based disparities. Lastly, we will summarize and discuss the findings of this paper.

## **Bibliography**

- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2003. *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge; Malden: Polity Press.
- Elad, Barry. 2023. "Tinder Statistics – By Users, Demographic, Match Rate, Country, Usage and Social Media Traffic." *Enterprise Apps Today*, last modified May 1, 2023. <https://www.enterpriseappstoday.com/stats/tinder-statistics.html>.
- Foucault, Michel. 2010 [1998]. *Seksuaalisuuden historia: tiedontahto, nautintojen käyttö, huoli itsestä* [Histoire de la sexualité : la volonté de savoir], trans. Kaisa Sivenius. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hobbs, Mitchell, Owen, Stephen and Gerber, Livia. 2017. "Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy." *Journal of Sociology* 53 (2): 271–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316662718>.
- Krüger, Steffen ja Ane Charlotte, Spilde. 2020. "Judging books by their covers–Tinder interface, usage and sociocultural implications." *Information, Communication & Society* 23 (10): 1395-1410.

## 2 Data-Driven Dating as Biopolitics – A Foucauldian Approach to Dating Applications

*Maisa Mikkola*

Michel Foucault states that the human body is inherently political, as it can be controlled in multiple ways by those in power. The control over the body is not necessarily direct and violent subjugation, but it can also be more indirect and subtle. (Foucault 2005, 39–40.) Foucault argues that in modern Western societies, this control is increasingly exercised in the latter way (Foucault 2010, 102–103). He also states that power is inextricably intertwined with knowledge and calls this interconnection *power/knowledge*: knowledge (re)produces power, and power (re)produces knowledge (Alhanen 2007, 133; Foucault 2010, 76–78). In this chapter, I will first introduce Foucault’s key ideas on the relations between power, knowledge and the human body and life. After that, I will conceptualise dating applications as political technologies driven by the neoliberal political economy of contemporary societies.

### 2.1 Biopower, Biopolitics, Normalisation and Political Technologies

Foucault (2010, 99–101) states that power in modern Western societies is power over life, as opposed to sovereign power that was historically based on the right to kill. Power over life has two basic forms: One of them, disciplinary power, focuses on the human body as a machine of which the capabilities can be optimised and the forces utilised. The other form of power focuses on the body as the basis of biological processes, such as reproduction, birth and death. This *biopower* is exercised through regulatory controls that constitute the *biopolitics* of the population. (Foucault 2010, 102.) Both forms of power are exercised by the contemporary sovereign, that is, the *modern state* (Foucault 2010, 99–102; Helén 2016, 128–129).

There is no consensus among scholars about the precise meaning of and relation between Foucault’s concepts of biopower and biopolitics (Helén 2016, 40; Kristensen 2013, 2; Rabinow

and Rose 2006, 197). However, it is understood here that biopolitics comprises of political aims, strategies and contestations through which biopower is exercised (Foucault 2010, 105; Helén 2016, 41; Rabinow and Rose 2006, 196–197). In other words, biopolitics means intervening in biological, psychological or social aspects of human life (Helén 2016, 87). This is done by gathering information and gaining knowledge about human life by using various technologies. As mentioned above, knowledge is foundational for biopolitics and the overall control over life. (Foucault 2010, 102–103; Helén 2016, 89.) Constantly evolving technologies render it possible to expand the amount, scale and particularity of information gathered, which makes biopolitics more effective and all-encompassing. Therefore, Foucault (2005, 40) calls them *political technologies*.

Foucault (1988, 18) distinguishes four types of political technologies: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of the self. Several researchers have conceptualised social media platforms as *technologies of the self* (e.g., Bakardjieva and Gaden 2011; Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2017). Technologies of the self allow individuals to facilitate the transformation and construction of themselves to attain a certain state of being (Foucault 1988, 18; Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2017, 277). In the neoliberal era of constant demand for self-improvement, social media platforms, including dating applications, provide unprecedented possibilities for care for the self, that is, the continuous aim to become the so-called best version of oneself (Bakardjieva and Gaden 2011, 403–405; Foucault 2010, 316).

According to Foucault (2010, 103), political technologies maintain and (re)produce social segregation and hierarchisation. The (re)production of social inequality is closely linked to social norms. A *norm* or *normal* is understood here as a scale that indicates how valuable a given characteristic is and determines what is desirable and what is not (Helén 2016, 95). Prevailing norms include, for example, masculinity, heterosexuality, whiteness, middle-

classiness, ableness and romantic love and marriage. *Normalisation*, for its part, means subjecting human life to normality. Human subjects are normalised through political technologies: information seeking enables the measurement of individuals against norms and their categorisation according to the standards of normality. (Helén 2016, 102; Mendieta 2014b, 317.) In some cases, normalisation also denotes disciplining the subject to normal development. However, exercising biopower requires a certain amount of deviance or abnormality to justify the existence and maintenance of norms. (Mendieta 2014b, 317.)

## **2.2 Dating Applications as Political Technologies**

Foucault states that biopolitics is an essential part of capitalist development: the accumulation of capital would not be possible without the adjustment of demographic phenomena to economic processes (Foucault 2010, 15, 103; Mendieta 2014a, 37). Thus, biopolitics cannot be understood outside the framework of neoliberal political economy (Oksala 2013, 328–329). Foucault emphasises – albeit perhaps rather inexplicitly – the role of the state in carrying out biopolitics, as it imposes political-economic practices (Kelly 2014, 477; Oksala 2013, 323–324, 329). However, in the era of datafication, power/knowledge is increasingly in the hands of big corporations that own, for instance, the dominant social media platforms (Mejias and Couldry 2019, 2). Datafication means “the transformation of human life into data through processes of quantification, and the generation of different kinds of value from data”. It involves harnessing individuals’ lives to serve the corporate interests of digital giants. (Mejias and Couldry 2019, 3.)

The neoliberal logic determines, for example, the ways in which sexuality is controlled in modern societies. According to Foucault, sexuality is one of the key aspects of biopolitics, as it is considered “the index of a society’s strength”. Hence, the control over sexuality is vital for the overall control over both the lives of individual subjects and the population. (Foucault 2010,

103, 107.) Currently in the Global North, the control over sexuality is manifested in all political-economic practices related to the challenges of finding and keeping a partner, the postponement of parenthood, decreasing birth and fertility rates as well as the consequences of and means to prepare for population ageing.

Tinder and other dating applications have been able to commercialise some of the challenges described above. While dating applications seem to help users to constitute the romantic and sexual life of their dreams, the logic of dating applications as technologies of the self is rooted in the practices of self-perfection and self-commodification (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2011, 280). On one hand, dating applications can function as empowering technologies permitting users to pursue the kind of self they desire, for instance, attractive or sexually active. On the other hand, getting matches and thus being able to meet those normative standards – often related to and measured by appearance – give pleasure to users and constitute them as valuable, whereas the opposite situation constitutes them as deviant (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2011, 277–278). Hence, there is a constant process of normalisation under way.

Dating applications can also be understood as political technologies in a broader sense. In order to pursue their commercial interests, dating applications aim to maintain and increase the number of users. Thus, the name of the game is that some but not all users find a long-term relationship. This is in line with the fact that people have various reasons for using dating applications. For example, a half of Tinder users are not looking for a dating partner. (Vera Cruz et al. 2023, 607.) However, the logic of dating applications requires maintaining and reproducing amatonormativity, that is, the perception of romantic love and marriage as the norm (Brake 2012, 81). Hence, users remain inherently subjected to the structures of power/knowledge (Bakardjieva and Gaden 2011, 401–403).

The ultimate purpose of dating applications is to accumulate capital by transforming users' romantic and sexual relationships and, eventually, the processes of starting a family. In this sense, dating applications like Tinder may have an ability to intervene, at least in the long term, in the exercise of biopower through the logic of capitalist accumulation. This raises a question about whether corporations find it more profitable to reflect and augment or challenge prevailing norms, which will be addressed in more detail in the next chapters.

## Bibliography

- Alhanen, Kai. 2007. Käytännöt ja ajattelu Michel Foucault'n filosofiassa [Practices and Thinking in Michel Foucault's Philosophy]. The University of Helsinki. Doctoral Thesis.
- Bakardjieva, Maria and Gaden, Georgia. 2011. "Web 2.0 Technologies of the Self." *Philosophy & Technology* 25 (3): 399–413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-011-0032-9>.
- Brake, Elizabeth. 2012. *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, 16–49. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, Michel. 2005 [1980]. *Tarkkailla ja rangaista [Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison]*, trans. Eevi Nivanka. Helsinki: Otava.
- Foucault, Michel. 2010 [1998]. *Seksuaalisuuden historia: tiedontahto, nautintojen käyttö, huoli itsestä [Histoire de la sexualité : la volonté de savoir]*, trans. Kaisa Sivenius. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Helén, Ilpo. 2016. *Elämän politiikat: Yhteiskuntatutkimus Foucault'n jälkeen [The Politics of Life: Social Research After Foucault]*. Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto.
- Hobbs, Mitchell, Owen, Stephen and Gerber, Livia. 2017. "Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy." *Journal of Sociology* 53 (2): 271–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316662718>.

- Kelly, Mark. 2014. "State." In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, 477–481. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139022309.083>.
- Kristensen, Kasper. 2013. "Michel Foucault on Bio-Power and Biopolitics." The University of Helsinki. Master's Thesis. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:hulib-201703272375>.
- Mejias, Ulises A. and Couldry, Nick. 2019. "Datafication." *Internet Policy Review* 8 (4): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1428>.
- Mendieta, Eduardo. 2014a. "Biopolitics." In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, 37–43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139022309.009>.
- Mendieta, Eduardo. 2014b. "Biopower." In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, 44–50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139022309.010>.
- Oksala, Johanna. 2013. "From Biopower to Governmentality." In *A Companion to Foucault*, edited by Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary and Jana Sawicki, 320–336. Malden: J. Wiley.
- Rabinow, Paul and Rose, Nikolas. 2006. "Biopower Today." *BioSocieties* 1 (2): 195–217. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1745855206040014>.
- Vera Cruz, Germano, Aboujaoude, Elias, Rochat, Lucien, Bianchi-Demichelli, Francesco and Khazaal, Yasser. 2023. "Finding Intimacy Online: A Machine Learning Analysis of Predictors of Success." *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking* 26 (8): 604–612. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2022.0367>.

### **3 Hooked by Swiping – The Logic Behind Tinder**

*Ella Liimatainen*

In this chapter, I will first look at Tinder’s captivity and the application’s addictive tendency as ways in which Foucault’s biopower is exercised through Tinder. This chapter will explain the process of collecting and keeping loyal users on the application and look at it from the point of view of Tinder directly benefitting off of the control and personalisation. The second section brings up the aspect of data collection and privacy protection on Tinder and how biopower is directly related to the collection of data. Specifically, I will look at algorithmic colonization (Wang 2022) and discuss it in relation to biopower and the outcome of Tinder gaining wealth and power by collecting digital data.

#### **3.1 Captivating Users on Tinder**

Tinder’s habit of captivating its users is an act of biopower: by continuous swiping and the hope of finding a relationship, users become addicted to using the application. To better understand Tinder’s captivity, we must first look at how the application works. Signing up for a Tinder account is simple: users create a profile that consists of one or more photos, with an open text field where they can write freely about themselves and include links to their other social media accounts. In Tinder settings, users specify gender preferences, age range and a distance radius they are seeking their match from. (Abel et al. 2022, 2836–2837.) After setting up an account, users are met with a card “deck” of potential matches, and they can instantly swipe right to say yes or reject the profile by swiping left. If both parties swipe right on each other, they get a match and are free to start a conversation. (Abel et al. 2022, 2837.) These are the free features of the application, but over time, Tinder has developed other, more addicting special features behind a paywall, which is a topic we will return to in chapter six of this research paper.

This way, Tinder can start to feel like a game, rather than a platform to look for a relationship, and the addictiveness of the game tempts people to return to the application. In an interview conducted by the *Time Magazine*, the founders of Tinder, Sean Rad and Justin Mateen, explicitly state that Tinder was created in hopes of the application turning into a game that the users would want to play even if they were not looking for a date (Stampler 2004). Indeed, Tinder's profit structure seeks to make users hooked by swiping: the goal is to keep paying customers rather than aiming at creating meaningful connections that would result in users leaving the application after finding a relationship (Abel et al. 2022, 2844). Commercial platforms are inherently designed to attract a large and active user base in hopes of further development and economic value (Courtois and Timmermas 2018, 1).

According to Foucault, biopower is essential in creating capitalist development. Foucault claims that demographic phenomena, in our case, building romantic and sexual relationships and starting a family, has to adjust to economic processes. (Foucault 2010, 103.) By collecting specific user information, Tinder uses biopower by personalising the experience for each person, making sure that they continue to use the platform. At the same time, Tinder itself continues to gain economic benefit out of harnessing hopes and feelings and relying on the addictiveness of the card deck game. This way, the human body is subjected to control, and the relationships between people become secondary tools for gaining power.

### **3.2 Data Collection as a Means of Biopower**

The fact that Tinder collects vast amounts of data of its users might be partially acknowledged: we give Tinder access to personal information by sharing information about ourselves, such as our gender, sexual orientation and what we do for work. What many users might not realize is that Tinder also keeps track of every little interaction. This covers details about private conversations, every match made in the application, and if linked to the application, also things

such as Facebook likes and friends (Duportail 2017). According to Abel et al. (. 2022, 2838), the operation and transparency of algorithms differ between social media platforms, and they may evolve over time. When it comes to Tinder, there are varying degrees of algorithmic awareness among its users who all respond in accordance to their own perceptions (Abel et al. 2022, 2844). However, it is important to note that studies suggest that algorithms are practically invisible to users (Courtois and Timmermas 2018, 1). Research carried out specifically among Tinder users highlights a problematic lack of algorithmic awareness (Abel et al. 2022).

From this point of view, the concept of algorithmic colonization is important. An algorithm itself can vaguely be defined as a set of steps followed towards solving a particular problem or to accomplish a defined outcome (Wang 2022, 5). The concept has expanded to also cover the process of social decision-making used by automated machines (Wang 2022, 5). Hao Wang (2022) defines algorithmic colonization as a concept based on the perception that once the users agree to a data license agreement, the data extracted about human life is not in the possession of those who generated it but instead of those who created the application (Wang 2022, 15). So, by providing the data about ourselves, we engage in the process of transferring information and generating power to different data collectors.

Collection of digital data creates power, and it is becoming an essential element in producing, in addition to power, knowledge and wealth (Prainsack 2020, 444). Algorithmic colonization is essentially where Foucault's biopower comes in. As earlier explained in chapter two of this paper, biopower does not have to be direct exploitation of the human body, but instead, the act can be very subtle (Foucault 2005, 39–40). Tinder acts subtly by captivating its users and at the same time, controlling their user experience through collecting information and gaining more power and wealth. Tinder's privacy policy states that "you should not expect that your personal information, chats, or other communications will always remain secure" (Duportail 2017).

Since algorithms are invisible, users continue to lack understanding of the control they subject themselves to.

An interesting point of view from the aspect of biopower is that because of applications like Tinder, information does not need to be intentionally collected the same way as before. Instead, people willingly give out information about themselves, even if they do not completely understand the control hidden within. According to Barbara Prainsack (2020, 444), we should come up with solutions to ensure that digital data is not only used for increasing power and profits, but we should, above all, invest in the political economy of digital data so that the data collected contributes to justice and well-being of people and societies. It is, however, difficult to dismantle these power structures because biopower directed towards the users of the application is subtle. Agreeing on the same terms other users are also subjected to is way easier than boycotting popular applications like Tinder because boycotting would require getting access to the same platforms everyone else is already on. This itself is an evident example of power digital data collecting can have over us: we more or less subconsciously agree to the control of our data in exchange for goods and services.

## **Bibliography**

- Abel, Christie, Pei, Lucy, Larson, Ian R., Salazar Olgado, Benedict and Turner, Benedict J. 2022. "Tinder Will Know You Are A 6': Users' Perceptions of Algorithms on Tinder." ScholarSpace. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/79685>.
- Courtois, Cédric and Timmermans, Elisabeth. 2018. "Cracking the Tinder Code: An Experience Sampling Approach to the Dynamics and Impact of Platform Governing Algorithms." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 23 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmx001>.
- Duportail, Judith. 2017. "I Asked Tinder for My Data. It Sent Me 800 Pages of My Deepest, Darkest Secrets." *The Guardian*, last modified September 26, 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/sep/26/tinder-personal-data-dating-app-messages-hacked-sold>.

Prainsack, Barbara. 2020. “The Political Economy of Digital Data: Introduction to the Special Issue.” *Policy Studies* 41 (5): 439–446. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2020.1723519>.

Stampler, Laura. 2014. “Inside Tinder: Meet the Guys Who Turned Dating Into an Addiction.” *Time Magazine*, last modified February 6, 2014. <https://time.com/4837/tinder-meet-the-guys-who-turned-dating-into-an-addiction/>.

Wang, Hao. 2022. “Algorithmic Colonization: Automating Love and Trust in the Age of Big Data.” *UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)*. <https://hdl.handle.net/11245.1/8ff2fdb8-90b1-445c-9afe-cda0dbd39dd8>.

## **4 Tinder Reproducing Gender Inequality**

*Anju Marjamaa*

Gender equality has not been fully achieved anywhere in the world (UN Women 2022), and as one might guess, it has not been achieved in online environments either, including Tinder. Tinder research supports the view that dating applications are conducive to rearticulating existing hierarchies of gender (Christensen 2021, 435). Interaction between men and women on Tinder includes historically familiar behaviour patterns that can hinder women's empowerment and gender equality (Lopes and Fogel 2017, 1). Furthermore, Tinder has been criticised in public discourse for sidelining non-heterosexuals. This chapter delves into these issues while reflecting on Foucault's theory of biopower.

### **4.1 Objectification of Women and Gender-Based Violence on Tinder**

Tinder stimulates objectification of women (Lee 2019, 9; Lopes and Fogel 2017, 1). Treating women as objects is evident in, for example, a sexual double standard for women: they are essentially forced into the mold of a "cool girl", expected to be attractive, but at the same time, they can be criticised either for a) excessive shallowness in conforming to beauty norms or b) "uncoolness" when they deviate from it. This closely aligns with today's prevalent misogyny. (Lee 2019, 9.) As a technology of the self, Tinder particularly guides women in shaping themselves according to certain norms. It can be argued that Tinder exhibits a manifestation of normalisation: people's lives are subjected to normality and normalised using political technologies (see Helén 2016, 102; Mendieta 2014b, 317). I contend that on Tinder, individuals are measured and categorised against norms.

Tinder is also a place for toxic masculinity which involves devaluing women and even arbitrary violence (Lee 2019, 1). The distance provided by virtual platforms can further exacerbate gender inequality and lower the threshold for expressing opinions (Lopes and Fogel 2017, 1).

At its worst, this can manifest as online violence, such as women receiving lewd “pick up” lines and face men’s intrusive behaviour on Tinder (Gillet 2019, 8, 189).

#### **4.2 Tinder’s Promoted Hookup Culture Controls Women**

(Hetero)sexual scripts on Tinder have been studied, and unfortunately, gender inequality is rewritten into Tinder users’ sexual and romantic interactions (Christensen 2021, 435). An example of the reflection of gender structures in virtual platforms is the hookup culture. Swiping on Tinder is deeply connected to casual sex (Gillet 2019, 43). Feminist scholars have highlighted that in the hookup culture, women are sexualised, judged and consumed by men (e.g., Hess & Flores, 2018; according to Lee 2019, 1). Casual sex as a cultural phenomenon carries many gender stereotypes (Duguay 2018, 130; according to Gillet 2019, 43). The hookup culture is based on patriarchal fantasies and even pornography in which women are essentially trapped in a submissive, sexualised status, leaving them in a more vulnerable position (Lee 2019, 1–3). According to Foucault, gender and sexuality play a key role in biopolitics. From these ideas, a question arises about whether prevailing power structures enable the hookup culture. It is also meaningful to consider how such a culture, on the other hand, maintains and reproduces existing power structures.

#### **4.3 Tinder as a Heteronormative Platform**

Tinder has been criticised in public discourse as a heteronormative application that does not adequately consider sexual minorities. However, Tinder has introduced various features to improve the situation (O’Brien 2019). Several studies have identified widespread violence against minorities, such as non-white homosexuals, in mobile applications (Lee 2019, 9). In addition to sexual minorities, gender minorities have also experienced mistreatment. For example, non-binary individuals have encountered (hetero)sexist interactions with white men online (Christensen 2021, 446). Tinder’s heteronormativity and operational logic can have

negative consequences for gender equality. For example, Tinder re-enforces the traditional gender system of heterosexuality, such as the objectification of women (Lee 2019, 9), as previously mentioned.

In his work *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault addresses sexuality and power. According to him, sexuality is a power relationship that regulates and controls individuals and society. This can also be observed on Tinder where it appears that heterosexual individuals have more privileges, encounter less harassment and have a wider range of choices. It can be argued that deviating from heterosexuality does not fit into Tinder's norm. While normalisation is evident on Tinder and fitting into the norm is beneficial for Tinder users, it may also be meaningful that not everyone fits into Tinder's norm. This is because exercising biopower requires a certain amount of deviance to justify the existing norms (Mendieta 2014, 317).

Tinder is one of the most popular applications among young heterosexual adults (Christensen 2021, 432) and most used by heterosexual customers (Mac Kee 2016, 1). Therefore, it may not be surprising that Tinder is primarily focused on heterosexuality (Duguay 2017). Since Tinder is a profit-seeking business, focusing on heterosexuals is not at odds with the market logic. On the other hand, it is known that Tinder also has numerous non-heterosexual users. In fact, gay men are the most active users of dating applications (Rosenfeld 2018). This raises the question of why there are not as many of them on Tinder: is it because they do not conform to Tinder's norm?

Foucault discusses the normalisation of sexuality which means that society has sought to shape and regulate individuals' sexual behaviour and identities in accordance with normative expectations. For example, sexuality has been controlled and regulated by society in various ways at different times, serving as a tool of power (see, e.g., Foucault 1976). In this sense, Tinder can be considered a technology that regulates people's sexuality. For instance, if non-

heterosexual individuals are at risk of receiving inappropriate messages on Tinder, they may be excluded from the platform.

#### **4.4 Preventing Tinder from Reinforcing Gender Inequality?**

Sexist patterns in virtual environments require solutions to transform this environment into a source of empowerment and equality. In the best case, dating applications could be an extension of the sexual revolution, but this is only possible when mutual respect and egalitarian rights are emphasised (Lopes and Fogel 2017, 1, 8–9). It might also be good to question the fact that at the core of Tinder’s operational logic lies normalisation: favouring attractive individuals who conform to Tinder’s norms. Tinder should pay attention to making its platform less appearance-centric because the emphasis on appearance on Tinder reinforces the gender system and may even fuel online misogyny (see Lee 2019, 9). Tinder should also focus on providing a positive experience for women (Lopes and Fogel 2017, 9). A good step would be to subvert the shopping-style experience that has been shown to promote violence when seeing others as objects (see Lee 2019, 1).

While in this chapter, I focused on women’s perspectives on gender inequality, it is important to remember that, for example, toxic masculinity and heteronormative scripts are problematic from men’s perspective as well: they can restrict and dictate how men should behave. There are also other problematic factors for men on Tinder. For example, it has been reported that only those who conform to Tinder’s norm, meaning the most attractive individuals in the area, receive many matches, while those with fewer matches must often purchase additional visibility or more likes (see, e.g., Butler 2020). This way, normalisation also constrains men, and biopower is used to increase Tinder’s financial profits (compare Foucault 2010, 15, 103; Mendieta 2014, 37).

## Bibliography

- Butler, Gavin. 2020. "Straight Middle-Aged Men Are Being Charged More to Use Tinder Plus." *Vice News*, last modified August 13, 2020. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/akzang/straight-middle-aged-men-are-being-charged-more-to-use-tinder-plus>.
- Christensen, MacKenzie 2021. "'Tindersluts' and 'Tinderellas': Examining the Digital Affordances Shaping the (Hetero)Sexual Scripts of Young Women on Tinder." *Sociological Perspectives* 64 (3): 432–449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121420950756>.
- Foucault, Michel. 2010 [1998]. *Seksuaalisuuden historia: tiedontahto, nautintojen käyttö, huoli itsestä* [Histoire de la sexualité : la volonté de savoir], trans. Kaisa Sivenius. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Gillett, Rosalie. 2019. Intimate intrusions online: Studying the normalisation of abuse in dating apps, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 69 2018: 212-219, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.04.005>.
- Helén, Ilpo. 2016. *Elämän politiikat: Yhteiskuntatutkimus Foucault'n jälkeen* [The Politics of Life: Social Research After Foucault]. Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto.
- Lee, Jin. 2019. "Mediated Superficiality and Misogyny Through Cool on Tinder." *Social Media + Society* 5 (3): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119872949>.
- Lopes, Milena Ribeiro and Vogel, Car. 2017. "Women's Perspective on Using Tinder: A User Study of Gender Dynamics in a Mobile Device Application." In *SIGDOC '17 Proceedings of the 35th ACM International Conference on the Design of Communication*, 1–10. New York: ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3121113.3121220>.
- MacKee, Freddy. 2016. "Social Media in Gay London: Tinder as an Alternative to Hook-Up Apps." *Social Media + Society*, 2 (3): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116662186>.
- Mendieta, Eduardo. 2014. "Biopower." In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale: 44–50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139022309.010>.

Rosenfeld, Michael. 2018. "Are Tinder and Dating Apps Changing Dating and Mating in the USA?" In *Families and Technology. National Symposium on Family Issues*, edited by Jennifer Van Hook, Susan M. McHale and Valarie King. Cham: Springer.

O'Brien, Sara Ashley. 2019. "How Tinder Is Trying to Be More Inclusive for Everyone." *CNN*, last modified June 4, 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/04/tech/tinder-glaad-sexual-orientation/index.html>.

Un Women. 2022. "Press Release: Achieving Full Gender Equality Is Still Centuries Away, Warns the United Nations in a New Report." Last Modified September 7, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2022/09/press-release-achieving-full-gender-equality-is-still-centuries-away-warns-the-united-nations-in-a-new-report>.

## 5 Tinder Reproducing Racial Discrimination

*Verna Ala-Olla*

Tinder states that it is not “a place for hate” (Tinder n.d.). In this chapter, I will change course from this remark by exploring racial discrimination and racism on the application. As the definitions of concepts like racism is subjected to contestation (see, Doane 2006). Beginning with an overview on the guiding concepts, I will delineate which terms I am using. This is followed by a section seeking an answer to the question: does Tinder reproduce racial discrimination? Finally, I will connect the topic to the Foucauldian framework of biopower.

### 5.1 Racism and Racial Discrimination

From a Foucauldian standpoint, two key developments in European racial discourse can be distinguished. In Foucault’s “openly biological transformation” race shifts to a biological notion where physical features start to be emphasized, whereas the second development is defined by race transforming into a category used as “a tool”. (McWhorter 2010, 64–69.) Essentially, the new racial discourse enables the State to maintain “the purity of the race” (Foucault 2003, 81 according to McWhorter 2010, 69). To do so, race implies normalisation in which the normal is distinguished from the abnormal that is seen to threaten the life of the population (McWhorter 2010, 76–78). Hence, exclusionary practices reflecting what Foucault terms as “internal racism” defend the population from the abnormal (Su Rasmussen 2011, 38); racism is described as “a biopolitical mechanism” and “a governmental technology” (ibid., 41).

Simultaneously, Doane distinguishes between definitions focusing on racism as an individual attitude or behaviour and those perceiving the phenomenon from an institutional point of view as “systemic and institutional practices”. The latter perspective deems social institutions responsible for the discrimination and prejudiced attitudes occurring on the individual level. (Doane 2006, 267–268.) The Foucauldian account of racism takes this point even further. It is

argued to also perceive those anti-racist strategies that target societal structures as ineffective (Su Rasmussen 2011, 47). Either way, from the structural racism perspective (see, Doane 2006), one can deduct Tinder carrying responsibility in what happens on its platform and in guiding its users.

Finally, referring to racism alone is insufficient for this paper, which is why I will also utilise the term racial discrimination – a kind of hypernym for racism. It refers to treating a person differently based on their “perceived racial identity” (Matthew 2017, 895). Racist discrimination, on the other hand, presupposes a racist mindset on behalf of the one acting in a discriminatory way (ibid., 907). However, it is important to note that the typology does not imply that racial discrimination, as opposed to racist discrimination, would be somehow less wrongful (ibid., 909). Lastly, undoubtedly many acts that reproduce racial inequality are inherently racist, and speaking solely in terms of racial discrimination, too, is misleading.

## **5.2 Racialised Dating Preferences on Tinder**

Several studies on dating applications and race discuss the topic on the individual level, for instance, in the context of sexual racism. Referring to discrimination based on the perceptions of racial identity of one’s potential intimate partners (Callander, Newman and Holt 2015, 1991), it has been argued that among scholars, there appears to be consensus about dating applications as advancing it (Wu and Trottier 2022, 108). In fact, it has been suggested that there is a link between the design of Tinder with “racist, classist, sizeist and misogynistic swiping behaviour” (Berkowitz et al. 2021, 499). Furthermore, in the context of Tinder, some of its affordances are used to satisfy intraracial and interracial preferences (see, Tanner 2023, 11–12). For instance, users desiring to date inside their race rely on Tinder’s visual emphasis, that is, on photos and profile information, whilst swiping and sharing personal details to others (ibid., 8). Hence, Tinder can be used in racially discriminatory ways – whether racist or not.

### **5.3 The Technological Side of Tinder Reproducing Racism**

I will now focus more explicitly on the technical side of the application. Narr (2021) discusses Tinder's recommendation system of the time of his study as racially biased: the system disfavoured users not deemed attractive by the majority by ranking users according to the received right and left swipes (Narr 2021, 230–231). Lastly, attaining a Foucauldian understanding, Narr concludes that the logic of swiping together with the way it contributes to creating “a racial hierarchy of ‘attractiveness’” has led to a competition in which “minute differences” are augmented and the success depends increasingly on race (ibid., 231). However, Tinder explains (2022) that it no longer relies on the “Elo score” which Narr (2021) discusses. Thus, it can be argued that Tinder not utilising the system anymore is an attempt to decrease racism ingrained in its core logics.

Consequently, while Tinder does not have the so-called “ethnicity filter”, the matter does not stand without criticism. Absence of ethnicity filters has been argued to advance “compulsory interracial intimacy” (Zhou 2022). This derives from racial minority users being forced to interact with “users of other races who are unlikely to be sexually attracted to them”, whilst simultaneously their opportunity to connect with other minority users is weakened. As a consequence, it is argued that minority users refrain from the use of these applications. (Ibid., 1039.) In this vein, it is also important to note that intraracial dating intentions of minority users are argued to be “a necessary expression of self-protection and self-valorization”, instead of automatically racist (ibid., 1041). Thus, the absence of the filter on Tinder contributes to complicating finding a partner for racial minority users on the application.

While the absence of the filter does imply there being one means less to express racism (ibid., 1038), other ways still persist. For instance, minority users can be targets of verbal harassment via chatting or ghosting as a more subtle form of racial discrimination. While minority users

without interracial dating intentions can protect themselves by swiping left on racial majority users, what about those minority users open to dating interracially? To prevent harassment via its chatting function, Tinder utilises language detection. After AI detects hateful language, a user receives a message “Are you sure?”. (Tinder 2021.) However, the effectivity of the tool has been questioned, as it depends on the user (Gillett, Stardust and Burgess 2022, 6). Thus, a major defect is that regardless of its good intentions, Tinder allows the message to be sent. Ultimately, then, the aforementioned users do not have proactive nor realistic means to protect themselves from, say, racist hate speech; by entering a non-safe space, they take a risk when using Tinder.

To conclude, Tinder, with its subtle functions from the absence of the ethnicity filter to its moderation practices, ultimately complicates finding a partner by failing to provide a safe space for users representing racial minorities. Not only does the ethnicity-filterlessness of dating applications advance exclusion (see, Zhou 2022, 1039), but I have argued that also the AI-powered text detection of Tinder has the potential to do so, too. From the point of view of biopower, following Foucault’s concepts of normalisation and internal racism discussed earlier, it can be argued that Tinder exercises discriminatory and exclusionary practices like internal racism, which, importantly, is considered biopolitical (Su Rasmussen 2011, 40). I argue that the feature entailed in internal racism of separating worthy from unworthy life (see, Foucault 2003a, 255 according to Su Rasmussen 2011, 40) translates into Tinder – by indirectly isolating some users via the discussed practices – as Tinder perceiving and treating some users less worthy, as “the abnormal”.

## **Bibliography**

Berkowitz, Dana, Justine Tinkler, Alana Peck, and Lynnette Coto. 2021. “Tinder: A Game with Gendered Rules and Consequences.” *Social currents* 8 (5): 491–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294965211019486>.

- Callander, Denton, Christy E. Newman, and Martin Holt. 2015. "Is Sexual Racism Really Racism? Distinguishing Attitudes Toward Sexual Racism and Generic Racism Among Gay and Bisexual Men." *Archives of sexual behavior* 44 (7): 1991–2000. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0487-3>.
- Doane, Ashley. 2006. "What Is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics." *Critical sociology* 32 (2-3): 255–274. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916306777835303>.
- Gillett, Rosalie, Zahra Stardust, ja Jean Burgess. 2022. "Safety for Whom? Investigating How Platforms Frame and Perform Safety and Harm Interventions". *Social Media + Society* 8 (4): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221144315>.
- Matthew, D. C. 2017. "Racial Injustice, Racial Discrimination, and Racism: How Are They Related?" *Social theory and practice* 43 (4): 885–914. <https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract201711226>.
- McWhorter, Ladelle. 2010. "Racism and Biopower." In *On Race and Racism in America: Confessions in Philosophy*, edited by Roy Martinez, 55-85. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Narr, Gregory. 2021. "The Uncanny Swipe Drive: The Return of a Racist Mode of Algorithmic Thought on Dating Apps." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 22 (3): 219–236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2021.1961498>.
- Su Rasmussen, Kim. 2011. "Foucault's Genealogy of Racism." *Theory, culture & society* 28 (5): 34–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411410448>.
- Tanner, Maureen. 2023. "The actualisation of mobile dating application affordances to support racial digital dating intentions: the case of tinder." *Behaviour & Information Technology*: 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2023.2190417>.
- Tinder. N.d. "Community Guidelines." Accessed on the 29th of October 2023. <https://policies.tinder.com/community-guidelines/intl/en/>.
- Tinder. 2021. "Tinder Introduces Are You Sure?, an Industry-First Feature That is Stopping Harassment Before It Starts." Accessed on the 29th of October 2023.

<https://www.tinderpressroom.com/2021-05-20-Tinder-Introduces-Are-You-Sure-, -an-Industry-First-Feature-That-is-Stopping-Harassment-Before-It-Starts>.

Tinder. 2022. “Powering Tinder — The Method Behind Our Matching.” Accessed on the 29th of October. <https://www.tinderpressroom.com/powering-tinder-r-the-method-behind-our-matching/>.

Wu, Shangwei, and Daniel Trottier 2022. “Dating Apps: A Literature Review.” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 46 (2): 91–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2022.2069046>.

Zhou, Zhiqiu Benson. 2022. “Compulsory Interracial Intimacy: Why Does Removing the Ethnicity Filter on Dating Apps Not Benefit Racial Minorities?” *Media, culture & society* 44 (5): 1034–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221104712>.

## **6 Tinder's Pay-to-Play – Reproducing Economic Inequality in Online Dating**

*Vilja Antikainen*

In this chapter, I will discuss economic inequality within the realm of online dating. Tinder offers various paid memberships that increase users' visibility and opportunities to find partners. While Tinder supposedly gives everyone an equal chance at love, the reality is that it can create disparities based on financial means. I argue that this stratifies individuals by socioeconomic status. I will begin by exploring paid membership options, including their costs and promised benefits. Next, I will look at relevant studies to analyse whether these paid features create unequal user experiences and outcomes. Finally, I will explore the connection between dating applications and economic inequality through Foucault's concept of biopower. Encouraging individuals to assess potential partners based on superficial traits may be interpreted as an exercise of biopower (see Narr 2022). The incorporation of paid functionalities intensifies this phenomenon, while introducing a financial aspect to the equation.

### **6.1 Premium Features and Exclusive Memberships**

As discussed earlier, Tinder has since its launch developed multiple premium features, including paid memberships and visibility boosts. At the time of writing, Tinder offers four different subscriptions with varying prices. There are three subscriptions available for everyone willing to pay for them: Tinder Plus, Gold, and Platinum, in ascending order of price and features. There are over ten add-ons in total, and the most common of them includes an unlimited number of likes, while with more expensive subscriptions one can, for example, message users before matching with them (Tinder n.d.). At the cheapest tier, one can acquire a membership for less than eight US dollars per month, but the price of a higher-tier subscription rises closer to 30 dollars (Joe 2023). Opting for an annual subscription reduces the monthly

cost, which may entice people to buy longer memberships at once. During the third quarter of 2023, Tinder had 75 million active users, with 10.4 million paying for a subscription (Iqbal 2023).

In addition to the available-for-all subscriptions, Tinder features an exclusive membership called Tinder Select. The dating application states on its website that it is available for less than one percent of users, all of whom must meet certain standards to be approved for membership. These requirements include completing the user's profile with detailed information and having multiple verified pictures. The method by which Tinder chooses members meeting the criteria remains unclear. This ambiguous way of utilising user information aligns with the power/knowledge dynamic introduced by Foucault (see Rouse 2005). However, Tinder Select users share at least one common factor, and that is money. According to Vasani (2023), the subscription costs 499 US dollars per month, placing it in a completely different price range than, for example, Tinder Platinum. The VIP membership promises the same as the lower tiers: visibility, possibilities to bypass the application's normal operating principles and better opportunities to match with "most sought-after profiles" (Tinder n.d.).

## **6.2 Tinder as an Extension of Socioeconomic Status**

It has been established that users with paid subscriptions get better chances of finding love, but does spending money produce better results? There is little research on whether paying for a Tinder – or any dating application – membership helps one succeed in forming a relationship. Furthermore, the goal of these applications is to generate revenue by exploiting people (compare Foucault 2008, 231–232). If users who have paid for an expensive subscription find each other and decide to start a relationship, the company loses two paying customers (Finkel et al. 2012, 49). Thus, it is more profitable to keep people single for a longer time, as noted earlier in the paper. Finkel et al. (ibid.) state that there are several reasons why finding a partner

through online dating may be complicated. These include difficulty in predicting real-world compatibility, overemphasis on easily assessable profile traits, viewing potential partners as commodities, an overwhelming number of choices and the devaluation of being contacted due to unlimited partner selections.

Nevertheless, the available data provide insights into the individuals who are more inclined to spend money on online dating. The results from an online dating survey conducted in 2022 show that among the users who have paid for a dating application or site, 45% belong to an upper-income household, 36% to middle-income and 28% to lower-income (Pew Research Center 2023, 9). It can be assumed that the majority of paying users have higher incomes on average, especially when talking about expensive memberships like Tinder Select. Since the application primarily offers those users other profiles that pay for better visibility, wealthy people are more likely to approach each other first. This embodies a Foucauldian biopower that influences and regulates dating choices on the platform, while also maintaining the norm of high income and the desirability of wealth in the dating context. Forming relationships within the same social class, while not inherently problematic, can on a large scale further divide different classes. Milanovic (2019, 19) states that assortative mating and, more precisely, homogamy increases income inequality.

Additionally, de Vries (2023, 30) suggests that the sale of visibility boosts and premium memberships may raise concerns about potential injustice based on socioeconomic factors. When paying users buy greater visibility on dating applications, they enhance their matchmaking opportunities at the expense of non-paying users, which reinforces economic inequality between the two groups. De Vries (ibid.) presents an ethical argument that justice requires companies not to hinder access to goods with a positive impact on well-being, such as intimate relationships. This extends to dating applications like Tinder where unrestricted

purchases for premium features could disadvantage those who cannot afford them, impacting the fairness and accessibility of relationships.

### **6.3 Capital Accumulation Through Biopower**

As characterised by Narr (2022, 73), Foucault's concept of biopower was historically linked to promoting the well-being of European populations while deeming certain others as less valuable, although the discrimination extended to white Europeans during Nazi Germany. Later, biopower transformed into a more modern form, where individuals, acting like entrepreneurs of their own lives, sought to increase their worth – or “human capital” – through selective dating practices (Foucault 2008, 228; Narr 2022, 73). This has continued in online dating where people are encouraged to strive for self-improvement and aim to enhance their chances of finding romance. Compatibility is now measured through personal information provided by users, algorithms and complex filtering tools. As users engage with these systems, their romantic preferences are shaped within this modern framework, inciting them to present themselves and evaluate others with a market-oriented mindset. (Heino et al. 2010, 428; Narr 2022, 73.)

This competition creates pressure for people, especially regarding visibility, as Narr's (2022, 77) research shows. Dating application users are concerned about how algorithms will treat them, leading to efforts to analyse the operating principles and modify their behaviour accordingly. Unfortunately, online dating's heavy reliance on superficial aspects, such as attractiveness, limits user attempts to manipulate algorithms to achieve success. Tinder has been accused of using the Elo score to boost the visibility of the most attractive profiles. Despite the claims about system changes discussed in the previous chapter, user doubts persist (Narr 2022, 77–78). The emphasis on valuing people's external aspects results in those who do not conform to societal norms being easily excluded from platforms like Tinder. Given that capital in its

many forms already accumulates for certain people (Milanovic 2019), Tinder’s wealth-and-appearance-based operating principle promotes it even further.

## **Bibliography**

- Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., Karney, B. R., Reis, H. T., & Sprecher, S. 2012. “Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science.” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 13 (1): 3–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612436522>.
- Foucault, M, Arnold I Davidson, and Graham Burchell. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Heino, Rebecca D., Nicole B. Ellison, and Jennifer L. Gibbs. 2010. “Relationshopping: Investigating the Market Metaphor in Online Dating.” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27 (4): 427–447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510361614>.
- Iqbal, Mansoor. 2023. “Tinder Revenue and Usage Statistics (2023).” *Business of Apps*, August 21, 2023. <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tinder-statistics/>.
- Joe, Curtis. 2023. “Tinder subscription plans compared.” *Android Authority*, July 6, 2023. <https://www.androidauthority.com/tinder-plus-gold-platinum-3236244/>.
- Milanovic, Branko. 2019. *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System That Rules the World*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv25250qr>.
- Narr, Gregory. 2022. “The Coloniality of Desire: Revealing the Desire to Be Seen and Blind Spots Leveraged by Data Colonialism as AI Manipulates the Unconscious for Profitable Extraction on Dating Apps.” *Revista Fronteiras* 24 (3): 72–84. <https://doi.org/10.4013/fem.2022.242.07>.
- Pew Research Center. 2023. “From Looking for Love to Swiping the Field: Online Dating in the U.S.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/02/02/from-looking-for-love-to-swiping-the-field-online-dating-in-the-u-s/>.
- Rouse, Joseph. 2005. “Power/Knowledge.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, edited by Gary Gutting, 2nd ed., 95–122. Cambridge Companions to Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521840821.005>.

Tinder. N.d. “Tinder SELECT Membership”. Accessed October 25, 2023. <https://www.help.tinder.com/hc/en-us/articles/15408075254797-Tinder-SELECT-Membership>.

Tinder. N.d. “Tinder Subscriptions”. Accessed October 25, 2023. <https://www.help.tinder.com/hc/en-us/articles/115004487406-Tinder-Subscriptions>.

Vasani, Sheena. 2023. “Tinder Select is a \$499 per Month Plan for Tinder’s 1 Percent”. *The Verge*, September 25, 2023. <https://www.theverge.com/2023/9/25/23889285/tinder-select-match-group-dating-apps>.

de Vries, Bouke. 2023. “Selling Visibility-Boosts on Dating Apps: A Problematic Practice?” *Ethics and Information Technology* 25 (2): 30–30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-023-09704-y>.

## 7 Conclusion

In this research paper, we have argued that Tinder functions as a means of Foucauldian biopower by which user data is utilised to harness users' sexualities for profit-making and thus increasing the power/knowledge of digital giants. Chapter two showed that Foucault's concepts of biopower, biopolitics, normalisation and political technologies provide a useful framework for understanding how power operates in dating applications. Chapter three brought up the contribution of how Tinder functions: Tinder's captivating nature and the fact that Tinder practises extensive data collection subtly subject the human body to control.

Chapter four explored how Tinder's gamified, visually-driven logic perpetuates gender inequality by objectifying women, reinforces heteronormative norms and discriminates against sexual minorities. Chapter five argued that Tinder's technical defects are manifestations of internal racism, in that Tinder reproduces racial discrimination by failing to provide a safe space for racial minority users. Chapter six showed that Tinder's premium features improve users' visibility and approachability on the dating app, giving more power to those who can afford them and thus reinforcing economic inequality.

While dating applications have been recognised as technologies of the self, a further elaboration of the normalising and unequalising features of their logic is needed. The ways in which biopower and social inequality, including gender, racial and economic discrimination, intertwine on dating applications, should be further examined. Future research could, for example, explore the algorithmic logic of other dating applications as well as look into the position of users representing other minority groups, such as people with disabilities.

As the commercial algorithmic logic increasingly subjugates human life, the complex issues of data privacy need to be addressed. Some responses to the problem are on their way: the Digital Services Act and the Digital Market Act prepared by the European Union will set stricter

boundaries for companies operating in the digital sphere (European Parliament 2021). It remains to be seen what kind of impact the acts will have.

Hobbs, Owen and Gerber (2017, 276) ask whether Tinder is “tearing society apart”. As the dominant platform in online dating, Tinder has the potential to maintain and reproduce but also alter people’s dating patterns and perceptions of romantic and sexual relationships (Krüger and Spild 2020, 1395–1396). For now, however, traditional conceptions on dating and relationships are still extensively prevalent (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2017, 276). These include the predominant norms that exclude diverse groups of people and subject them to discrimination.

What remains unclear is whether the state forces dating applications to adapt to the unequalising tendencies of its biopolitics or whether the digital giants eagerly reinforce them for profit and thus prevent society from changing. The answer is probably both.

## Bibliography

- European Parliament. 2021. “EU Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act Explained.” Last modified August 24, 2023. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20211209STO19124/eu-digital-markets-act-and-digital-services-act-explained?&at\\_campaign=20234-Digital&at\\_medium=Google\\_Ads&at\\_platform=Search&at\\_creation=RSA&at\\_goal=TR\\_G&at\\_audience=digital%20markets%20act%20and%20digital%20services%20act&at\\_topic=DMA\\_DSA&at\\_location=FI&gclid=CjwKCAiA3aeqBhBzEiwAxFiOBpX0jBEkEbnmxM6CPDySvCojvHByryTOe-XvAG-ipeZ9j7tcwz5nuRoCNaQQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20211209STO19124/eu-digital-markets-act-and-digital-services-act-explained?&at_campaign=20234-Digital&at_medium=Google_Ads&at_platform=Search&at_creation=RSA&at_goal=TR_G&at_audience=digital%20markets%20act%20and%20digital%20services%20act&at_topic=DMA_DSA&at_location=FI&gclid=CjwKCAiA3aeqBhBzEiwAxFiOBpX0jBEkEbnmxM6CPDySvCojvHByryTOe-XvAG-ipeZ9j7tcwz5nuRoCNaQQAvD_BwE).
- Hobbs, Mitchell, Owen, Stephen and Gerber, Livia. 2017. “Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy.” *Journal of Sociology* 53 (2): 271–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316662718>.
- Krüger, Steffen and Spilde, Ane Charlotte. 2020. “Judging Books by Their Covers – Tinder Interface, Usage and Sociocultural Implications.” *Information, Communication & Society* 23 (10): 1395–1410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1572771>.