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The Hidden Cost of Free Dating Apps

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Abstract

Dating applications (“apps”) have changed how people meet, interact, and form relationships with others. Location-based Real-time Dating Applications (LBRTDAs) are immensely popular among the rising generations (March, Grieve, Marrington, & Jonason, 2017; Sevi, Aral, & Eskenazi, 2018; Smith, 2018). However, the popularity of LBRTDAs masks a more adverse side; their frequent use may destroy the self-worth of users (James, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2017). LBRTDAs have essentially designed a virtual world that allows users to “shop” for their next partner (James, 2015). With this mindset, users often prefer engaging in casual sex rather than long-term relationships (James, 2015; Naff, 2017). As users pursue casual sex, they may experience health risks, including unplanned pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (Bhattacharya, 2015; David & Cambre 2016; Sevi et al., 2017). Although not all people recognize that a decline in marriage is a bad thing, those who wish to marry in life should reassess their use of social media, because LBRTDAs’ associated “hook-up” culture has also been linked to decreased marriage rates among young adults (Naff, 2017). Furthermore, users typically experience lower self-worth, because these apps tend to elicit constant comparison (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Males, in particular, experience lower self-esteem and self-worth when using LBRTDAs (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Therefore, although popular; such dating apps have many negative and unintended consequences associated with their frequent use, which may impact users’ ability to form successful long-term relationships.

Keywords: Tinder, dating applications, marriage, hooking up, online dating

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Tinder and other similar Location-based Real-time Dating Applications (LBRTDAs) are thought to mass-produce love, dating, and sex in stunning proportions. Since its inception in 2012, Tinder has accumulated over 10 million daily users, resulting in over 20 billion Tinder “matches” or mutually swiped photos (March, Grieve, Marrington, & Jonason, 2017; Sevi, Aral, & Eskenazi, 2017; Smith, 2018). According to Smith (2018), these matches have led to as many as 1.5 million dates every week. Such statistics are more impactful when one considers the world population of 7 billion people. Furthermore, Tinder is the second most-downloaded free application (“app”) on smartphones, indicating LBRTDAs’ rising popularity, particularly among young adults (Griffin, Canevello, & McAnulty, 2018). It is important to note that sometimes LBRTDAs are referred to as Geo-Social-Networking Applications or (GSNAs), but these two acronyms are basically the same thing, for matters of consistency and clarity the acronym LBRTDA will be used throughout the paper. In addition to their global popularity, LBRTDAs also simplify the process of finding a partner by reducing it to “virtual shopping” (James, 2015). The success of LBRTDAs may streamline meeting a partner, but its more harmful side reveals a disproportionate emphasis on quantity rather than quality of relationships.

Additionally, LBRTDAs have a location component that finds users in a preset age range who are nearby. Knowing the proximity of matches encourages people to meet other users in person (Ward, 2017), thus the integration of location-based software into LBRTDAs has made them a “game changer” for dating (James, 2015). Not only are LBRTDA users more likely to meet proximate users, but they do so faster than those using traditional dating platforms, including *Match.com* (James, 2015). Specifically, LBRTDAs’ location component has been one of the key factors in facilitating “hooking up” (casual sex), dating, and romantic encounters (involving casual sex) among users. However, before exploring the current implications of Tinder and other LBRTDAs on relationships, it is important to define hooking up as sexual penetration with no perceived obligation to commitment (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016).

Additionally, the goal of hooking up is to have intercourse with the greatest number of partners (Naff, 2017). Therefore, non-committal and casual sex with as many partners as possible will be the definition associated with hooking up when exploring the impact of Tinder on relationships in this literature review.

After selecting a proximate distance, LBRTDA users are then presented photos on which to “swipe” right (indicating interest) or left (indicating rejection). The act of swiping, among other features, has important implications because swiping, is impulsive. This impulsivity may act as a moderator of sex and swiping because impulsivity is a predictor of sociosexuality (the desire for casual sex) (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016). According to Ward (2017), after swiping, if two people have mutually selected each other, then they are a match which allows them to begin chatting to express interest. This process has generated over 15 million matches daily on Tinder alone (Bhattacharya, 2015). Some LBRTDAs also show a common-friend feature, which builds conversations and trust among matches (Green, Turner, & Logan, 2018). Another appeal of these applications is their spontaneity (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Not only are they spontaneous, but users can chat and swipe 24 hours a day, heightening users’ satisfaction, because the unlimited access allows for increased usage and chatting. Young adults, comprising 82% of all Tinder users, report high approval of these apps (James, 2015). Due to the large user- base and high satisfaction of LBRTDAs, implications for future relationships and sexual encounters are enormous (Timmermans & DeCawule, 2017). According to James (2015), LBRTDAs’ increasing popularity has ensured that a growing number of romantic needs will likely be met in the future. Thus, it is important to consider Tinder’s impact on future relationships, because the effects are only expected to compound, going forward.

The popularity and design appeal of LBRTDAs have also allowed them to alter relationships and adult sexuality worldwide. Tinder is thought to have altered sex around the globe by popularizing non-committal and casual sex or hooking up (Naff, 2017). As a result, relationships have suffered, because casual sex provides none of the psychological and physical benefits associated

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with sex in a committed relationship (Vrangalova & Ong, 2014). The location component facilitates this common mindset because it speeds up dating, maximizing the potential number of dates in a minimum amount of time.

Despite the numerical success and visual appeal of LBRTDAs, their implications on long-term and successful relationships are enormous, because they tend to increase hooking up and may lower self-worth. Hooking up is an important expression of adult sexuality, but it carries many risk factors such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and unplanned pregnancy (Griffin et al., 2018). Tinder and its associated hook up culture may enhance these risks because of user's lower condom use (Green et al., 2018). These risk factors, along with the design features of LBRTDAs such as swiping and photographic presentation, are linked to the overall lower self-worth of Tinder users (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Therefore, LBRTDAs, while popular, appear to impact dating and relationships for the worse. Although millions of matches are made daily as users swipe right on Tinder (which can lead to the formation of successful relationships), regular engagement with this and other LBRTDAs should be universally minimized, because such usage has been associated with increased incidence of hooking up, in addition to reports of decreased self-worth, both of which may negatively impact the success of long-term relationships and marriage.

Adverse Side Effects

The designs and features of Tinder and other LBRTDAs have popularized casual sex because they make finding a partner easy and fun. However, despite its popularity, casual sex may impair key aspects of future relationships such as trust. Globally, casual sex with a Tinder match has become so popular it is often called "the Tinder effect" (Naff, 2017). The Tinder effect has negatively impacted relationships by connecting people, thereby creating opportunities for sexual encounters outside of long-term relationships (James, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2017). Furthermore,

Baker and Maner (2008) found that men took more sexual risks with attractive partners (as cited in Sevi et al., 2018). Therefore, sociosexuality, or the desire to engage in casual sex, is likely higher among users, because users are often presented photogenic and attractive people. Additionally, impulsive swiping on attractive people may increase sexual interest, because greater impulsivity is linked to higher sociosexuality (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016). The pairing of impulsive swiping and attractive photographs has culminated in approximately one-fourth of Tinder users engaging in a one-night stand with another user (see Figure 1) (Griffin et al., 2018; Sumter, Vandenberg, & Ligtenberg, 2017). As the designs of LBRTDAs continue to encourage young adults to engage in casual sex, long-term romantic relationships will likely continue to be negatively impacted (Sumter et al., 2017). Typically, it appears that users focus on finding photogenic partners for casual sex to the detriment of other important qualities necessary for successful long-term relationships.

Furthermore, LBRTDAs negatively impact relationships, because they have created a world where sex is not constrained to a few long-term partners. In fact, LBRTDAs tend to strip away the components of time and emotion commonly found in long-term relationships, in order to focus on the sex (Allison & Riseman, 2017). Without vital emotional connections found in long-term relationships, LBRTDA users suffer, compensating by having more partners to make up for deeper connections (Griffin et al., 2018). Just 10 or 15 years ago, according to Naff (2017), most people met locally and only took home one or two partners. Now, LBRTDAs, such as Tinder, allow people to have intercourse with whomever is interested, making hooking up more socially acceptable (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016). In fact, David and Cambre (2016) suggested Tinder has done to sex what McDonalds did to food. In the past, people valued marriage; now they seem to want less commitment and more options, leading to frequent, risky, and meaningless sexual encounters.

Impact on Health

Tinder's hook-up culture is also associated with a high risk of sexually transmitted disease. Every year, in the United States, over 10 million young adults (the age group most likely to use LBRTDAs), are diagnosed with STIs (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [ODPHP], 2018). STIs produce numerous health problems once contracted such as, infertility, organ damage, fetal harm, cancer, and death (ODPHP, 2018). Additionally, STIs cost the government of the United States over 16 billion dollars annually (ODPHP, 2018). The high cost of STIs also makes understanding the link between LBRTDAs and STIs critical in order to mitigate the most adverse effects of these dating apps. It is well established that as Tinder use has increased, so has the occurrence of STIs (Bhattacharya, 2015). Government officials hold LBRTDAs responsible, because they connect sexually active people, thereby increasing hook-ups (Bhattacharya, 2015). For example, in England, scientists investigated six syphilis outbreaks in 2012, and Tinder was found to be the primary source of each outbreak (David & Cambre, 2016). LBRTDAs have also been linked to increases in chlamydia and multidrug-resistant gonorrhea globally (Bhattacharya, 2015). According to Bhattacharya (2015), LBRTDA users were 40% more likely to test positive for gonorrhea. They were also at greater risk for contracting Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (Vrangalova & Ong, 2014). Additionally, according to Griffin et al. (2018) people on LBRTDAs took more risks and had more partners than non-users, which is one reason why LBRTDAs may play a vital role in connecting STI victims with their sexual partners. Thus, relationships may be likely to suffer in the future, due to the negative effects of STIs.

Hooking up with someone on Tinder also affects the health of users, because built-in features, such as common Facebook friends, may increase peer pressure for sex. The Facebook-friends feature of Tinder allows users to see if they have Facebook friends in common, creating trust, which may expedite casual sex (Green et al., 2018). However, when sleeping with someone who had Facebook friends in common, college students reported being less likely to discuss

sexual testing for disease or use condoms because of the backlash effect (social consequences for behaving counter-stereotypically), to their identity among peers (Green et al., 2018). A lack of condom use, and sexual testing may also explain the link between STIs and casual sex from LBRTDAs (Shapiro et al., 2017). Thus, the common Facebook- friends feature of LBRTDAs contributed heavily to the spread of STIs, because the early formation of trust often resulted in risky and unprotected sex (Green et al., 2018). Once contracted, STIs may impede future long-term relationships due to their aforementioned costly treatment and long-term impact on health.

Effects on Marriage

Hooking up as a result of LBRTDAs has also impacted future relationships by contributing to the demise of marriage. Marriage often idealized by many older adults as the long-term relationship and has numerous benefits: married people live longer, have better mental health, experience higher levels of happiness, and enjoy greater economic success (Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Yet, currently, marriage is on the decline; for the first time, unmarried Americans outnumber married Americans (Naff, 2017). LBRTDAs have contributed to this decline, because they provide constant access to sex, which, according to David and Cambre (2016), disrupted Western intimacy and traditional family closeness in their sample. Additionally, LBRTDAs also impact marriage because, compared to the general population, fewer than 20% of users are looking for relationships (Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016; Griffin et al., 2018). Instead, LBRTDA users replace the positive benefits of marriage with the negative consequences of hook-ups (Naff, 2017). Such practices are one reason why scientists are concerned about the detrimental effect of LBRTDAs on long-term future relationships such as marriage (Griffin et al., 2018). As more people have joined LBRTDA s, long-term relationships like marriage have declined because the commitment of marriage has become unappealing (Naff, 2017). However, as marriage declines, young adults may experience less economic opportunity and shorter, less-fulfilled lives.

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Design features of LBRTDAs also tend to target young adults' sexual exploration which may adversely impact marriage and long-term relationships. Emerging adults are typically interested in sexual exploration, and LBRTDAs provide access to casual sex without long-term commitment (Green et al., 2018; Sevi et al., 2017). Therefore, the concept of marriage may be difficult for some LBRTDA users, because LBRTDAs were designed to present users with a variety of choices, inhibiting settling down (James, 2015). As a result, when Tinder users were not validated through matches and messages, they simply looked for other options (Strubel & Petrie, 2017; Sumter et al., 2017). Such a pattern inhibits the formation of deep and meaningful relationships. Naff (2017) suggested that LBRTDAs have contributed to the revolutionary decline of marriage, making them culturally influential in today's world (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). LBRTDA's quantitative approach typically impedes marriage, because it changes how young adults explore sexuality and may make marriage's commitment unappealing.

Tinder and Lower Self-worth

Tinder is one of the most popular dating apps in the world, but its frequent use is negatively linked to lower self-worth, which may impede the formation of future relationships. Most Tinder users download LBRTDAs to boost their self-esteem, validate their sexual attractiveness, and satisfy their self-worth (Ranizi & Lutz, 2017; Sumter et al., 2017). However, David and Cmbre (2016) found just the opposite; Tinder uses tend to report lower satisfaction, with how their bodies and faces look (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). As users swipe, they fall into a "shopping" mentality, which encourages constant comparison and criticism (James, 2015; Strubel & Petrie, 2017). People also have lower satisfaction with their bodies, because LBRTDA users create their online identity around an idealized version of their body photographically in order to attract matches (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Usually, this process involves some strategic lying—about a job, income, height, or weight (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). As users lie about themselves, they typically create a schism between their authentic and perceived self, resulting in self-criticism that may further reduce self-worth (Strubel & Petrie,

2017). These lies may also greatly impede future relationships, because they encourage the formation of idealized perceptions of other users (DeVries, 2016). These idealized perceptions may be shattered upon meeting face to face, resulting in decreased self-esteem and confidence (DeVries, 2016). Therefore, the shopping mentality associated with LBRTDAs may impact future relationships by ultimately reducing trust in others, a key building block of relationships.

Males

While Tinder and LBRTDA users generally experience lower self-worth, males and females seem to be affected differently. Additionally, males make up 60% of all Tinder users, causing a numeric disparity, which results in fewer possible matches for males (Sevi et al., 2018). Males often have higher sociosexuality than women, leading them to derive more pleasure from and engage more frequently in casual sex (Sevi et al., 2018; Sumter et al., 2017). This population difference is mirrored by Tinder users; males tend to be more likely than females to use Tinder for hook-ups (see Figure 1) (Sevi et al., 2017; Sumter et al., 2017). Additionally, males frequently list hooking up as the top reason for using Tinder (Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016). In contrast, Griffin et al. (2018) found only 22% of female Tinder users wanted to hook up with a match. From an evolutionary perspective, this may occur because men and women have different roles in the sexual process (Abramova, Baumann, Krasnova, & Buxman, 2016). For example, males may face more competition when mating to the extent that they are less selective with their mates, so they may be less invested in their offspring (Abramova et al., 2016). However, stiff competition and inherent differences in sexual goals have left many male users frustrated (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016). Consequently, Tinder use is often linked to lower self-esteem among males (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Not only do males suffer lower self-worth, but future relationships may also suffer as well. The biological differences between male and female Tinder users are strengthened by social perceptions and attitudes, resulting in relationship barriers that may be difficult to overcome.

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Frequent Tinder use also negatively impacts the self-worth of male users by diminishing their self-esteem. Self-esteem, an important component of self-worth, is defined as the overlap between a one's present self and ideal self (Baker & Ireland, 2007). Strubel and Petrie (2017) found that only male Tinder users had significantly lower self-esteem than non-users of both genders. Tinder users also experienced lower self-esteem as a likely result of LBRTDAs (DeVries, 2016). Further, their self-esteem was thought to be impacted by others' perceived interest in their dating profile (DeVries, 2016). Additionally, when swiping right yields few matches, males' self-esteem may decrease, because the perceived interest in their profile may be low. Furthermore, when males had fewer matches, they experienced less frequent validation of their self-worth and their idealized self, which is commonly presented in the construction of a dating profile (Sumter et al., 2017; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). As a result of inconsistencies between their idealized self and present self, males on Tinder may therefore have lower self-esteem, an important component of self-worth.

Females

Similar to their male counterparts, female LBRTDA users tend to experience decreased self-worth with regular use; for example, in one study, women on Tinder experienced dissatisfaction with their body and face (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). They also compared themselves to others more frequently than non-users (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). As a result, females on Tinder were unduly harsh on themselves and often suffered high levels of eating disorders and psychological distress (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Such emotional duress makes handling the difficulties associated with long-term relationships in the future formidable.

Women also typically suffer lower self-worth as a result of the mental and physical health risks associated with casual sex from LBRTDAs. Females tend to have lower casual sex motivation than male users, making them less likely to hook-up (Sumter et al., 2017). So, when women do choose to engage in casual sex as a result of societal pressure, their self-worth often suffers because

of the shame-culture associated with casual sex for women. Vrangalova and Ong (2014) found that women experienced less satisfying sex, greater levels of regret, undesired emotional ties, and social stigmatization because of societal pressure to engage in casual sex. Similarly, Vrangalova and Ong (2014) and Weaver and Herold (2000) also found that women suffered higher emotional risks after casual sex than men; and they often felt empty, were used, and sometimes experienced physical harm. All of these negative experiences were thought to contribute to females' lower self-worth and higher internalization of societal ideals after using Tinder (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Additionally, women on Tinder have suffered from eating disorders, body image issues, and high levels of shame and fear (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). These issues have strongly influenced female Tinder users' lower self-worth, as well. LBRTDAs and their hook-up culture thus may damage future relationships by negatively impacting females' mental and physical health, which are important components of self-worth. Furthermore, perceived societal pressures have also tended to impede future relationships by contributing to an incongruity between expectations and desires among women.

Women on Tinder may also experience decreased self-worth as a result of inherent differences between males and females. When males objectify women by soliciting sex, women, who tend use Tinder as entertainment, may be frustrated, leading to lower self-worth (Carpenter & Mc Ewan, 2018; Sevi et al., 2018). Women may also feel frustrated because they are more uncomfortable with meeting people online than men (Sumter et al., 2017). To compensate for feeling uncomfortable, women with LBRTDAs may lie about their weight, which often leads to body shaming (Strubel & Petrie, 2017; Ward, 2017). Additionally, although Strubel and Petrie (2017) did not find a statistically significant difference between the self-esteem of female Tinder users and non-users, those effects may not appear until later. In fact, Vrangalova and Ong (2014) found that the negative effects of casual sex may emerge slower in women. Therefore, not only

may Tinder effect women's self-worth, but it may also impact self-esteem for longer periods of time than previously thought. As a result, the successful formation of long-term relationships may continue to be stymied for years to come, unless users are educated about the associated negative consequences.

Conclusion

Tinder and other LBRTDAs are extremely popular worldwide. They have completely revolutionized today's sexual culture, especially among young adults. LBRTDAs have popularized hooking up, which has been linked to fewer marriages, more STIs, and lower self-worth among users (ODPHP, 2018; Naff, 2017; Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Users may not perceive these negative impacts, because the designs of LBRTDAs convert the process of finding relationships into a game (James, 2015). Users swipe on photos, looking for attractive options, which tends to encourage the replacement of stable, long-term relationships, such as marriage, with multiple partners (Griffin et al., 2018). As a result, LBRTDA users appear to enjoy none of the perks of relationships except sex (Allison & Riseman, 2017). According to Bhattacharya (2015), when users participated in casual sex, they were more likely to contract STIs. These diseases may impede the formation of relationships, because they are costly emotionally, financially, and physically (ODPHP, 2018). Additionally, women tend to suffer after casual sex; they feel used, empty, and regretful (Vrangalova & Ong, 2014). Consequently, hook-up culture associated with LBRTDAs is thought to be detrimental to the future of marriage, because it encourages moving on, carries a high emotional and financial cost, and often leaves women feeling empty.

LBRTDAs also damage future long-term relationships, because their frequent use has been associated with lower self-worth; as Tinder users swipe, their self-worth may decrease with their experience of lower self-perception, lower body satisfaction, and higher rates of comparison (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). While both men and women suffer as a result of using Tinder, Men in particular also suffer from lower self-esteem, which is an important

component of self-worth (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Thus, while Tinder has a reputation for helping to create relationships, it may build barriers, such as lower self-worth, that prevent the formation of future stable and lasting relationships.

However, more research needs to be done to assess the impact of Tinder on long term future relationships. Due to Tinder's recent creation and the nature of the application currently there are only limited experiments and long-term studies on the direct impact of Tinder on relationships. Therefore, more research needs to be done because the popularity of these applications increases their potential to harm or possibly benefit long term relationships. Research should also consider how educating users about the adverse effect of hooking up might mitigate some of the worst effects of these applications, as LBRTDAs popularity makes boycotting these apps ineffective. While some of the problems are directly associated with actual features of the apps, such as the impulsivity link between sex and swiping, or the association between photographs and comparison, most of the problems stem from casual sex (Sevi et al., 2017). Therefore, additional research may reveal that if users are educated about the risks associated with casual sex from Tinder, then some of the negative effects may be reduced. It is therefore important that more research on this topic occurs, so that the possible future detrimental effects on marriage and other long-term relationships can be minimized.

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