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The Benefits of Dating Apps

Dating has changed drastically over time, from calling and keeping company, going steady, dating to marry, and hooking up. Each of these forms of dating was unique to its time and currently, while there is an increase in more people hooking up, many still consider traditional dating to be important. With the development of technology and social media, online dating has become more prominent and has shifted greatly from websites to mobile apps. Today, dating apps are beneficial because they are easy and convenient to use, they allow the user to be specific for what type of person they are looking for and they can be more personal and allow the user to open up behind the comfort of a screen, among other factors.

For a long time, those who used dating websites or applications were deemed ‘desperate’ by others for not being able to find a partner like everyone else. A common perception, also, has been that Tinder and other dating apps are only focused on casual hookups and sex. While this may be true for some users, it is not the same for everyone as many do still look for long-term relationships and friendships when they are swiping. All in all, the reason for why a person is on a dating app can be very significant in how their success and overall experience will be. In their study, *Swiping for the right reasons: Approach and avoidance goals are associated with actual and perceived dating success on Tinder*, Julieta Strugo and Amy Muise research on how one’s approach and avoidance goals affect their experience on Tinder. Strugo and Muise (2019) defined approach goals as “motivation to pursue positive outcomes in a relationship, such as growth and intimacy” while avoidance goals are defined as “motivation to avoid negative outcomes in a relationship, such as rejection and embarrassment” (p. 94). Through survey results, Strugo and Muise found that those participants with higher approach goals had more success on Tinder, started more conversations and had more second dates with other users while

the opposite was true for those users with higher avoidance goals. The motivations and goals for the user going into Tinder directly impacted their success on the app and how beneficial it was for them. It is up to the user how much they are willing to pursue potential opportunities or avoid risks in their online dating process and how that will impact their experience.

Aside from motivations, many use dating apps for the accessibility they offer. Users already carry their phone everywhere they go, so the ‘dating’ goes everywhere as well. In their piece, *From swiping to casual sex and/or committed relationships: Exploring the experiences of Tinder users*, Elisabeth Timmermans and Cedric Courtois speak on different aspects of dating apps that make it easy for the user. Because of their mobility, dating apps can be opened and used in a variety of locations which makes it easier to meet people from all over, instead of one’s hometown. Secondly, the notifications on mobile dating apps alert “users to new messages and/or matches, even when the application is not open, thereby accelerating the tempo of interactions and allowing for more immediacy” (Timmermans and Courtois 2017, p. 60). Also, due to the apps having access to the user’s geographic information, it allows for showing potential partners that are close by if one is at a party or bar, which could lead to a spontaneous meeting in that moment if both are using the app. Additionally, Timmermans and Courtois acknowledge that a lot of apps allow the user to speak to many potential partners at a time which opens the user’s options and allows them to not feel limited to one person, especially in the beginning of the dating process. This can be helpful in expanding their social circle and in giving them the time and the ability to form connections in their own timeframe.

For many, using dating applications may be worrisome because they fear the safety of going through online dating. This fear is valid, as most apps use the user’s geographic location to connect them to potential partners in their area. Pamela Anne Quiroz in her piece, *From Finding*

the Perfect Love Online to Satellite Dating and 'Loving-the-one-You're Near': A Look at Grindr, Skout, Plenty of Fish, Meet Moi, Zoosk and Assisted Serendipity, goes into the various security measures dating apps have for their users. Apps like Tinder, Skout and MeetMoi show how far away a user is based on mile distance. Additionally, Quiroz (2013) states that "Assisted Serendipity simply notifies the user when the 'scales of love tip' in his or her favor, that is, when the male to female ratio in one's favorite bars, clubs, coffee shops or restaurants, shift to optimize meeting a member of the opposite (or same) sex" (p. 183). Assisted Serendipity is different in how it makes the user do more of the work in finding someone when it shows the ratio of potential partners in a specific area. Most other dating apps though, will display various user's that are in a close vicinity from wherever they open the app. Even then though, it will never show the exact location of a user as it is up to the user herself or himself to share that information if they wish. These applications are safe in how they present potential partners that are nearby so users can feel secure in using them.

Online dating is also an effective way for someone to find a specific person that follows the criteria they want. Grindr is an app specifically targeted for men while Tinder allows the user to set their preferences for gender, age, and distance. Many apps will have an adult and teen community so people who are close in age can communicate with each other. There are dating apps for every little thing someone could want, no matter how big or small. Although many think of dating apps as existing for romantic purposes, there are also many who use it for business. In *Business with benefits: How Tinder and other dating apps double as career boosters*, Paula Froelich shows dating apps in a new light, in one that could potentially help one's business. In the piece, Froelich (2014) speaks on the story of Sarah Kunst who matched with a man on Tinder but instead of pursuing something romantically, Kunst "has introduced her male friend to some

investment prospects while he has connected her to several other funds- a mutually beneficial relationship”. Many others use their dating profiles to promote their comedy shows or club events, as it is an easy way to connect to a variety of people. Of course, most who are on Tinder and Hinge are looking for a potential partner but perhaps if their match and them do not work out in a romantic way, there is the possibility they could connect on a professional level.

Mobile dating apps are beneficial also in how they allow someone to become comfortable with themselves and in turn with others. When someone meets a potential partner in person, they are hundreds of things that could go wrong or first impressions that may not go as planned. In their work on *Free to be me: The relationship between the true self, rejection sensitivity, and use of online dating sites*, Margaret A Hance, Ginette Blackhart, and Megan Dew discuss how dating apps allow a user to be as much of themselves as they choose to be, if they are comfortable to do so right away or if they want to wait before they reveal who they are. The authors state, “users of online dating sites and apps are able to choose which aspects of themselves they present to others, both when creating their online dating profiles and when communicating with prospective romantic partners through online dating sites or apps” (Hance, Blackhart, and Dew 2018, p. 422). Although some may take this negatively, the same type of reservations goes for when meeting someone in person. It takes time for someone to be comfortable in showing their whole selves and their personality. When speaking to someone in person, there are a lot of body and nonverbal cues that go into a conversation and can impact how a connection is formed. In *Cyber Dating in the Age of Mobile Apps: Understanding Motives, Attitudes, and Characteristics of Users*, Katherine Bryant and Pavica Sheldon emphasize how much easier it is to talk to someone through a screen in the early stages of a relationship than face-to face. They state, “lack of nonverbal cues in online and mobile dating means that users most communicate in private

messaging and emailing at a deeper level, and perhaps disclose more information than they would in face-to-face interactions” (Bryant and Sheldon 2017, p. 10). Since it is in the user's hands how fast or slow they wish to progress with their various matches, they are then allowed to reveal themselves at the rate they wish to.

Another benefit to an online dating connection is in how users can open up and build trust with potential partners in a calm atmosphere. Users have the control of deciding when to initiate conversations, if they want to continue speaking to a potential partner and when and if they want to meet with a fellow user. There is no pressure that one will be ambushed at work or at school because most commonly, the potential partners on their dating app do not have that information and their communication will be restricted to the app only. In the piece *Liquid love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy*, Mitchell Hobbs, Stephen Owen, and Livia Gerber emphasize this control that users have in the online dating process. As a result of online surveys and in-depth interviews, it was found that “66% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘mobile dating apps allow me to control my romantic and/or sexual encounters’” (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber 2016, p. 279). Along with this control of deciding at what pace the relationship progresses; users can be straightforward about what they are looking for in a way that is not as accepted in in-person dating. In their study, Hobbs et al interviewed Alice, a thirty-four-year-old single mother who specifically used Tinder for sex. On her profile, Alice emphasized she was looking for sex, with no further commitments and it allowed for her to have those encounters in the time she was free. Other users may be direct in stating they are looking for a long-term relationship while others are simply wanting new people to hang out with in a platonic way. Opposers of using dating apps may believe that using these platforms will decrease people's desire to want to be in a serious monogamous relationship but that is not the

case. From Hobbs et al (2016) survey results, “72% said that they were just as inclined to seek a monogamous relationship since using these apps. Moreover, a further 14% said that they were *more* inclined to seek a monogamous relationship since using these apps” (p. 276). Regardless of what it is the user is looking for, they can be straightforward and direct in their expectations without judgement which is not usually the case when people meet in the traditional fashion.

On a more individual level, using dating apps can be an empowering experience for many. Whether it be from the number of matches they receive or simply in the conversations and dates the user goes on, there is a sense of validation in knowing someone is interested in you. As stated in the study above when interviewing Alice, Hobbs et al focused additionally on how dating apps can be a form of social validation and can be a positive effect on self-esteem. In getting over a painful breakup, Alice used Tinder for sex but “felt like I was in complete control of everything and I just wish more women could experience that and not feel bad about themselves and their bodies...I got my power back” (Hobbs et al. 2016, p. 277). In a society that often allows for male sexual expression but in a way limits women’s sexuality, dating apps can be a tool to get that control and power back. Although Hobbs et al and Alice could see that people would think of the validation from dating apps as superficial, the same goes for meeting someone in person. If one finds someone else attractive at a coffee shop or at the club, they will approach them and start a conversation, in the same way that would occur on Tinder or another app. Many could also use the dating apps to get their self-esteem up and encourage them to perhaps get out there in public places and have the courage to approach someone they find attractive.

Dating has changed in many ways over time and it is time to accept dating apps for all the benefits they bring to meeting potential partners. Whether it be in changing someone’s approach

to dating in the first place, meeting new people in a platonic or romantic way, to empowering a user in their search for romantic or sexual pleasure, dating apps have something to offer to every user. The ease of finding someone from anywhere one chooses to unlock their phone and then having the accessibility to control the pace of those connections is unmatched when it comes to traditional dating. While using Tinder and the like may not be for everyone, this latest type of matchmaking should be embraced as a new era of dating that takes the control back in relationships among a busy and modern world.

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