Implications of dating applications on users’ relationships, self-esteem, and safety

Why are millions of people swiping: Implications of dating applications on users’ relationships, self-esteem, and safety.

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Online dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and Coffee Meets Bagel are becoming more prevalent in the realm of dating especially among young adults. These apps also create some negative effects on the users and those around them including relationship conflicts, self-esteem arguments, and the matter of personal safety. Online social dating apps have positive and negative impacts shaping and changing the way dating and relationships are viewed within our society.

Using online dating apps has created a new technologically convenient way to meet new people for a multitude of reasons. In a recent study it was found that 42% of users were searching for a long-term relationship, while 34% reported that they were on the dating app seeking short-term sexual encounters (Flug, 2016). Typically, dating app users aging from 18 to 25 use these relationships to help shape one's own identity. These social dating apps have grown into a billion-dollar industry. Today, nearly 2 billion people use a type of social dating app, but most are geared towards young adults. There are over 2,500 U.S. online dating services right now and target varying personalities. For example, Match appeals to the general public, Christian Mingle attracts more specific users, and Just Farmers is based on a certain demographic (Flug, 2016). People using these services have the option to choose which service suits their specific preference and can create potential relationships with someone with similar preferences.

Online dating apps may cause strain on monogamous relationships if one of the partners is on a dating app where a substantial portion of the users are seeking short-term sexual encounters. More than half of online users do meet in person and half of those lead to an intimate relationship. It is estimated that 66% of users have gone on at least one date with another user, yet only 23% say they have met a spouse or long-term relationship through online dating sites (Smith and Duggan, 2013). From this study, it was concluded that many people on dating apps
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such as Tinder, Bumble, etc. may be on the app in search for short-term sexual relationships, however, there are other reasons behind why people are use dating apps.

Many people, male and female alike, download dating apps and create profiles to fuel their self-esteem. This recent development in the online dating world has created a huge impact on users’ self-esteem. Many people have experienced large decreases in self-esteem because of their experiences on dating apps, while others have seen their self-esteem flourish. According to Why Swipe Right? Women’s Motivation for Using Mobile Dating Applications such as Tinder one of the primary reasons women use dating apps is for self-esteem reasons (Huggins and Tanner, 2018). Many people may receive a great deal of gratification from their experience with dating apps. When people put themselves out into the social media world and receive affirmation from their peers their self-esteem immediately inflates. Self-esteem is a “positive or negative attitude toward the self” (Tanner and Huggins, 2018). This affirmation is based on the user’s initial expectation for the dating app. Men specifically have been found to use dating apps to increase their confidence levels whereas women were specifically searching for affirmation on their physical appearance (Tanner and Huggins, 2018). The primary user group has been identified as those with lower self-esteem (Tanner and Huggins, 2018). These people are searching to turn this around. It is crucial for users to have a positive experience in dating apps because they have average expectations that can easily be met or exceeded (Vries 2016). Those with low self-esteem typically do benefit from dating apps because they begin using the app with low expectations; however, if they do not receive any affirmation self-esteem can simply continue to spiral down negatively.
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Because of Tinder’s heavy reliance on images to help create connections between users, “physical appearance attributes are likely to be key evaluative factors” when it comes to getting a match with another user (Strubel and Petrie, 2017, p. 34-38). Those who use Tinder are aware that they are being assessed by others based on the way that they portray themselves in their images. They may start to analyze themselves in order to give the appearance of the best version possible that fits in with what is socially acceptable and flattering (Strubel and Petrie, 2017).

“Over time, this self-promotion and impression management, particularly when not validated (e.g., swiped left), may only worsen levels of self-objectification and body disparagement, and lower self-esteem” (Strubel and Petrie, 2017, p. 34-38). Men and women who used apps such as Tinder “reported less satisfaction with their faces and bodies, more shame about their bodies, greater likelihood of monitoring their appearance and viewing themselves from an external perspective, stronger internalization of societal appearance ideals, and more frequent comparisons about appearance than nonusers” (Strubel and Petrie, 2017, p. 34-38). The effects of dating apps on the human psyche have been shown to cause lower levels of self-esteem in men who used Tinder as opposed to those who avoided creating a Tinder account (Strubel and Petrie, 2017). Dating apps are capable of transferring pressures from society and messages about looks and appearance subconsciously through the users themselves, which leads to a higher risk of low self-esteem about one’s body, and has been shown in some users to create self-body shaming and objectification, a desire to lose weight, and even levels of anxiety (Strubel and Petrie, 2017). The system in which users seek out relationships through the app is flawed on the basis that it can keep users from relationships by creating an atmosphere capable of lowering one’s self-esteem.
Throughout this paper, the positives and negatives of various viewpoints have been explained, but one aspect is often forgotten and can be the most imperative. Safety. When these apps are downloaded, people are often greeted by some great people, but sometimes there are fake or unstable individuals who should not be involved with this form of communication. The risks for safety on tinder can be mentally and physically negative. Another safety concern that most people would think of automatically is that one can never guarantee a hundred percent that someone is who they claim to be. Statistics show that there are, “40 million people looking for love via social networking sites” (Mike, 2017). With this many dating app users the chances of being catfished is fairly high. Many people have seen or heard of the show Catfish. Research concluded from this show revealed that 73% of people had used photos of someone else and 69% of people had used somebody else’s name and presented it as their own (Mike, 2017). On top of all of this, another big con of the safety on dating sites can turn to mental and self-esteem issues. As discussed previously, people become so prone to using dating apps that meeting people in person almost seems to be a terrifying thought. These dating apps lead people to low self-esteem, anxiety, and/or depression. Along with this, it can also lead to addiction. Studies show that, “Men are 97% more likely to feel addicted to dating apps than women, but 54% of women felt more burned out by the process” (Marateck, 2018). After people have spent some time on these dating apps it eventually led to the mental health issues. “As a result, to how the apps work and what they require of its users, people who are on it after a while may begin to feel depersonalized and disposable.” (Marateck) The burned out and disposable feeling can come from the never ending swiping that the apps, Tinder and Bumble both have. The mental health issues that these dating apps can cause is a big safety concern. People will also begin to use the dating apps as a safety net in order to avoid meeting people in person such as a bar, or a club.
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The negatives tend to be apparent and very clear, but the positives of safety within dating apps can be difficult to indicate. One of the most interesting cases and functions that the application *Bumble* utilizes is the initiation of the female for conversation. While this seems like a miniscule detail, it makes the participants aware of whom they are communicating with and gives them time to decide whether they will pursue any action. This function eliminates the sense of urgency to pursue any further communication with somebody on this app, giving women more control. Another app that has certain safety features is *Tinder*, another similar dating app to *Bumble and* is very much the same thing except anybody can message first. One feature it has is the ability to cancel any encounter at any time. This is great for people who feel uncomfortable at any point during a conversation. Also, there is no way for people to know your last name unless you explicitly mention it. All personal data is kept private and will not be displayed on your account. When it comes to safety, it is always important to know that the main person who can protect yourself is, in fact, yourself. Certain functions are great and help a lot, but only each person knows their preferences. That’s where age range management comes into play. This gives you the ability to decide what ages you wish to speak to and see on your page. Most people do not want somebody outside of their age range to be able to view their profile, so this function can help create a sense of trust with the companies. While there are not many safety features, there are still enough to help the user protect their personal identity and choose who they wish to talk to. Applications can certainly improve on safety features, but the ground we have now is a good place to start. Within the next few years, more apps going toward a safer approach and using more resources to make sure their users are not unsafe or fake.

**Conclusion**
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Within the online dating community, social dating apps have positive and negative impacts shaping and changing the way dating and relationships are viewed within our society. Whether it is dealing with relationships with others, self-esteem, or safety, we are moving in a direction that is based on digital and social media platforms such as Tinder or Bumble. Understanding all of these outcomes and possibilities we are more suited to avoid any negative aspects on these platforms. The online dating world is growing and changing our day-to-day lives, so it is important to be open to changing with the world.
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References


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