

“When Harry Met Sally (via Dating App)”: An Affective Approach to the Techno-Social World of Turkey’s Heterosexual Online Dating

by

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Koç University

Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

This is to certify that I have examined this copy of a doctoral dissertation by

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To my dear cat Topik, who always tried to attract my attention and wanted me to play with her while I was working on my dissertation. She was both the greatest distractor and the most excellent motivator during my Ph.D.



ABSTRACT

“When Harry Met Sally (via Dating App)”: An Affective Approach to the Techno-social World of Turkey’s Heterosexual Online Dating

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This thesis aims to understand the heterosexual online dating world in Turkey and explain why people use dating technologies, how they use them and choose their potential partners. The relevant literature is predominantly quantitative, focuses on Anglo-American contexts, and generates similar arguments. However, this thesis suggests an affective turn, both theoretically and methodologically, to show different stories. To that end, it uses walkthrough, video interviews, and re-enactment techniques to examine social, cultural, technological, and affective factors influencing individuals’ uses, preferences, motivations, expectations, and actions. The findings demonstrate that structural and material changes in life conditions, changes in norms regarding dating culture, technological design and aesthetics, appification, one’s intersectional background, as well as affects, such as mood, sensation, and boredom, influence users’ motivations, preferences, and activities. Based on the data from interviews with 40 heterosexual individuals, this thesis draws a portrait beyond the marketization discourse that dating platforms have brought economic logic into dating and structured it as a market. By introducing the concept of affect, it encourages more than binary perspectives, such as love-sex, beauty-status, technology-culture, and industry-practice, dominant in the heterosexual online dating literature.

ÖZETÇE

**“Harry Sally ile (Uygulamadan) Tanışınca”:
Türkiye’nin Heteroseksüel Çevrimiçi Flört Dünyasının Teknososyal
Dünyasına Duygulanımsal Bir Yaklaşım
Gözde Cöbek
Sosyoloji, Doktora
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Bu tez, Türkiye’deki heteroseksüel çevrimiçi flört dünyasını anlamayı ve insanların neden flört teknolojilerini kullandıklarını, nasıl kullandıklarını ve potansiyel partnerleri nasıl seçtiklerini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Konuyla ilgili literatür; ağırlıklı olarak niceliksel çalışmalardan oluşmakta, Anglo-Amerikan bağlamlara odaklanmakta ve benzer argümanlar üretmektedir. Bu tez, farklı hikâyelerin olduğunu göstermek için hem teorik hem de metodolojik olarak duygulanımsal dönüşü önermektedir. Bu amaçla; bireylerin kullanımını, tercihlerini, motivasyonlarını, beklentilerini ve eylemlerini etkileyen toplumsal, kültürel, teknolojik ve duygulanımsal faktörleri incelemek adına walkthrough, video mülakat ve yeniden canlandırma tekniklerini kullanmaktadır. Çıkan bulgular; yaşam koşullarındaki yapısal ve materyal değişikliklerin, flört kültürüne ilişkin normlardaki değişimin, teknolojik dizayn ve estetiğin, uygulamalaşmanın, bireyin keşisimsel geçmişinin ve mod, hislenme ve can sıkıntısı gibi duygulanımların kişilerin motivasyonlarını, tercihlerini ve hareketlerini etkilediğine işaret etmektedir. 40 heteroseksüel bireyle yapılan mülakatlara dayanan bu tez; flört platformlarının ekonomik mantığı flört dünyasına getirip flörtü markete dönüştürdüğünü savunan piyasalaşma söyleminin ötesinde bir portre çizmektedir. Bu tez, duygulanım kavramını sunarak, aşk-seks, güzellik-statü, teknoloji-kültür ve endüstri-pratik gibi heteroseksüel çevrimiçi flört literatürüne hâkim olan ikili perspektiflerin ötesine geçmeyi teşvik ediyor.

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Chapter 1

FROM MATRIMONIAL AGENCIES TO DATING TECHNOLOGIES: A HISTORY OF THE SEARCH FOR INTIMACY

A man I have known since childhood found a job in the U.S. and decided to leave Turkey in the 1990s – in his late 20s. It was a bitter pill to swallow for his mother, who had not wished her son to go away that far from home. He left the country, promising his mother to visit. He did visit home – occasionally. During those visits, his mother found a few women as marriage prospects and introduced them to him. The mother's goal was, first and foremost, to get him to return home rather than to marry him to the perfect mate. He did not plan to marry one of those women and to come back, but he, as a good son, dated them not to upset his mother. She continued this routine – finding potential wives and showing them to her son during his visits – until the day he came home with his girlfriend. The mother eventually acknowledged that her son would not marry one of the girls she introduced and return home. Hence, she gave up her plan although her son had broken up with his girlfriend. Years passed, and he came with another woman – the one. They were planning to get married; thus he introduced her to the whole family, including his grandmother, uncles, aunt, cousins, etc., and took his family to the U.S. to meet the girlfriend's family. They eventually got married in the U.S. They have been happily living together since then. When I asked them how the two had met, they told me “eHarmony.” Launched in 2000, it is a dating platform where members complete a proprietary questionnaire about their characteristics, beliefs, values, interests, desires, and skills and match with each other according to the compatibility score, calculated by the algorithm, that rests on commonality and matches the members accordingly (“eHarmony,” 2022).

Their story is not unique – anymore. Today, over 323 million people worldwide use dating technologies to find a short or long-term partner (Curry, 2022). It seems that not only earlier dating technologies like matchmaking services, as the mother's effort in the story, but also meeting new people in physical settings have been replaced by contemporary dating technologies such as eHarmony. Since the middle of the 2010s, I have been hearing, watching,

and reading more and more about Tinder, OkCupid, or Bumble dates, stories of online dating failures and successes, the profiles on these platforms, etc., not only from my close circle but also from various media materials such as magazine articles, TV or platform series, movies, etc. Why do individuals prefer dating technologies to meet someone? How do they choose their potential partners? How and why has meeting new people shifted from a practice that occurred in physical settings to a practice mediated by dating apps? How do dating platforms affect dating cultures and practices? These are important research questions not only because online dating is a popular way to meet potential partners but also because it is a mirror of contemporary society, the time we live in, and the future of social ties (Bergström, 2022, pp. 2-3). This research aims to understand Turkey's heterosexual online dating landscape – why heterosexual individuals prefer dating technologies to find a short or long-term mate, how they choose their partners, more broadly, how these technologies influence Turkey's dating culture and practices. However, before the research, I will first and foremost talk about dating and its historical journey – its emergence and earlier forms.

1.1 Dating as a Modern Concept

Dating is a product of modernity as the concept rests on the personal partner choice. As a process of initiating an intimate relationship between two individuals, dating is an exercise of choice, which is “the defining cultural hallmark of modernity” (Illouz, 2012, p. 19). The conditions that lead the idea of dating to emerge are the very conditions of modernity: secularization, individualization, and urbanization, which all refer to detachment from the family and the community (Illouz, 1997). Until modernity, marriages were the sole form of initiating an intimate relationship, and they were first and foremost economic contracts arranged by families (Giddens, 1992, p. 38). They were taken very seriously mainly because “a woman's property went to her husband upon marriage” (Illouz, 2012, p. 33). Parents might reject prospective husbands because of their low socio-economic status (MacDonald, 1983, p. 94). In other words, in the pre-modern era, choice was shaped by the close interaction between the self, the family, and the community (Illouz, 2012, p. 90). In contrast, in the modern era, lives, or biographies in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's words, were removed from external control, and became open and dependent on individual decision-making (1995, p. 5). They were transformed into “choice biography” (Beck, 1992).¹ The difference of the modern era

¹ However, familial control did not disappear immediately. However, freedom of choosing one's mate was at first a right of men. Women would have to struggle for their right to choose in politics and love. What is more,

from its counterpart in terms of intimacy was “the disembedding of individual romantic choices from the moral and social fabric of the group” (Illouz, 2012, p. 41).

The idea of freedom of choice, which provided individuals more control over their lives and, more specifically, “a right to personal intimate freedom with regard to partner selection” (Frank et al., 2013, p. 4), immigration, that also caused a detachment from the family and the community, and the print technology paved the way for the emergence of first mediums or technologies of mate choice, namely matrimonial agencies, personal advertisements, and matchmakers. Although the matrimonial press and personal ads are as old as print (Cocks, 2015), they became a specific feature of journalism in the mid-nineteenth century (Cocks, 2013; Phegley, 2013). The London Journal, for instance, included forums for matrimonial advertising in the 1850s and paved the way for the emergence of papers devoted merely to marital advertising and matchmaking services, such as the Matrimonial News (1870-95), the Matrimonial Record (1882-90), the Matrimonial Herald (1884-95), the Matrimonial Post (1898-1905), and the Matrimonial Chronicle (1890-93) (Phegley, 2013, p. 132). Moreover, while matrimonial agencies such as the Grand Matrimonial Intercourse Institution were a feature of the eighteenth century (Cocks, 2015, p. 20), matchmakers were utilized by numerous religious communities during the major immigration waves beginning in the late 19th century (Steinfurst & Moran, 1989, p. 129). Reinforcing the detachment from the family, the neighborhood, and the community, these nineteenth-century technologies generated earlier forms of dating carrying the intention to marry.

Dating as we know it emerged in the early twentieth century. Unlike the earlier forms, it did not necessarily carry the intention to marry but meant the process where two people get to know each other and initiate an intimate relationship (Waller, 1937). It might or might not lead to courtship and, ultimately, to marriage. The emergence of this form of dating is primarily associated with three significant developments: women’s gaining access to the public sphere, the consumer culture that contributed to the sexualization of women, the later of men, the eroticization of romantic love, and the sexual liberation movement. As more women gained access to work, education, and the public sphere, men and women began to encounter more in ordinary settings such as schools, universities, workplaces, cafés, restaurants, etc., without any family interference (Bogle, 2008, pp. 13-14). From the 1920s through the mid-1960s, dating permeated college campuses (Bailey, 1988). In the mid-twentieth century, it took more sexual forms that derived from the consumer culture and the

arranged marriages or arranged dates, as in the case of my friend, still continue today in many cultural settings (e.g., Ansari & Klinenberg, 2015; Cocks, 2015).

sexual liberation movement.

Putting desire at the center of subjectivity and using sexuality as a sort of generalized metaphor for desire, the consumer culture contributed to the sexualization of women and men. They became sexual beings through the cult of beauty and fitness promoted by the cultural industries (Featherstone, 1983). The cosmetic industry, along with the movie industry, advertising, and women's as well as men's magazines were putting forth the body, foregrounding the face, eroticizing the flesh, and turning sexual attractiveness into one of the main cultural criteria for choosing a mate (Illouz, 2012, pp. 43-45). However, sexuality was not only a market issue but also a political one. Second-wave feminism reconceptualized sexuality as political and sexual pleasure as "a way of affirming women's access to full equality with men, as free and equal subjects," while the LGBTI+ movement amplified this process associating sexuality with political rights (Illouz, 2012, p. 46). Both movements produced two important results. First, intimacy became redefined beyond heteronormative terms. Hence, it is no coincidence that "a discourse of intimacy" became part of the American culture in the 1960s and 70s (Frank et al., 2013, p. 3). Second, choosing one's mate became closely related to knowing the person in depth, as both a character and sexually, having sexual experiences before marriage, and one's sexual discovery of oneself became the norm. Such an environment bred the term hookup. Although it has stuck to Tinder since its inception, hookup was first used as a slang term by college students in the mid-1980s (Bogle, 2008, p. 7). It was later defined as when two people "get together for a physical encounter and don't necessarily expect anything further" (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001, p. 4). Hookup first referred to a culture based on casual sexual encounters on American college campuses, as Wade portrays:

Hookup culture has descended upon college campuses like a fog. It's thickest on Greek row, where students hope to find wild parties, hot bodies, and easy sex. It's dense, too, in the large off-campus houses known for dirty bathrooms and high-octane drinks. It gathers and dissipates in student dorms, filling the halls as students pre-party and primp on weekend nights. ... The fog of hookup culture isn't confined, though, to where students live and party. ... On mornings after big parties and games, it hovers over the bright non-sexy dining halls, where students nurse hangovers over brunch and tell their stories from the previous night. ... Hookup culture is an occupying force, coercive and omnipresent. ... Campuses of all kinds are in this fog. ... A woman at Tulane puts it succinctly: "Hookup culture," she says, "it's college." (2017, p.)

Dating is more of a set of activities through which two people initiate a (romantic and sexual) intimate relationship whereas hookup is mainly a one-time physical thing. Despite differences, they are both practices of intimacy which not only performed in ordinary settings during the 20th century but were also mediated – just like in the 19th century. Earlier services such as matchmakers and personal advertisements continued to exist (Jagger, 1998; Steinfirst &

Moran, 1989)² while the Internet provided new ways to find a dating and/or hookup partner. One of the early computer matchmakings was the Scientific Marriage Foundation, founded by George W. Crane in 1957 (Joyce & Baker, 2008). Filling out forms, applicants would provide character references and photographs and interview a counselor of the foundation; an IBM sorting machine would process the data, and the applicants would be matched according to their compatibility calculated by the machine (“George W. Crane,” 2022, para. 5). However, the first computer dating was introduced with the bulletin board systems, mainly Dial Your Match and Matchmaker that went online in 1981 and 1986 respectively (Bergström, 2022, p. 30). As a technology that held great power in certain circles in the 1980s and early 1990s, BBSs allowed direct communication between computers via single-line systems (DeVoss, 2007, p. 19). Users of Dial Your Match and Matchmaker would fill out an online questionnaire, and an algorithm would compare all responses to find a compatible partner (Bergström, 2022, p. 31).

As Internet technology was rapidly developing, BBS technologies became archaic and replaced with dating websites. The first dating website was launched in 1995: Match.com. The concept was quickly embraced and imitated by similar websites across North America and Europe (Bergström, 2022, p. 34). However, online dating, based on computer technology, remained a marginal phenomenon until 2012, when Tinder was introduced. With smartphone technology, computer dating turned into mobile dating. The first dating app was Grindr, launched in 2009, targeting particularly gay men. It was soon imitated by similar apps such as Blindr in 2011, Tinder in 2012, and Happn in 2014 (Bergström, 2022, p. 36). Today, there are over 5000 dating technologies that match users with different operating systems, available in app stores (Brooks, 2021, para. 8). Using a dating technology is not an unusual but ordinary way to meet new people for romantic and/or sexual interests (Smith & Anderson, 2016).

Dating is a modern concept and practice deriving from the choice ideology. It has been not only practiced by individuals to find a partner but also mediated by agencies, matchmakers, via personal ads, BBSs, and dating websites and applications since the 19th century. Practices, norms, and rules regarding dating have changed throughout history, depending on technological developments and changing social, cultural, and political conditions. Nevertheless, the history I have described above is predominantly North American and European history of dating. These technologies of intimacy are adapted and understood differently in other cultural settings – like Turkey.

² Although its history goes back to at least the 19th century, personal ads or dating advertisements became popular and widely used in the last two decades of the 20th century when the number of singles was accelerating (Steinfurst & Moran, 1989).

1.2 Online Dating in Turkey

Like other European cultural settings, online dating culture and practices have emerged with cable internet technology in Turkey. The first Turkish dating website, *Siberalem* (Cyber World), was founded in the late 1990s. It played a significant role in the development of online dating in Turkey because its former employees had established other dating and marriage websites, such as *Pembe Panjur* (Pink Shutter) and *eCift* (e-Couple), in the following years (Sunam, 2017, p. 26). Despite Tinder's worldwide popularity, these websites continue to grow. For instance, while *Siberalem* has over 23 million subscribers since its foundation, *eCift* has the greatest number of subscribers (5 million), followed by *Pembe Panjur* (4,130,000 subscribers) and *Gönülden Sevenler* (Those who Love from the Heart) (2 million) (Sunam, 2017, pp. 154-157). In addition, these platforms are not localized versions of transnational companies such as Match.com, but they are founded by local entrepreneurs receiving national as well as international investment (Sunam, 2017, p. 137). In terms of dating apps, Tinder is the most downloaded dating app in Turkey, followed by OkCupid, Happn, and Bumble (similarweb, 2022). It is generally popular among young and heterosexual urbanites in Turkey, and it is used as a multipurpose platform where users seek a hookup and/or romantic partner, socialize with others, and have fun (Cöbek & Ergin, 2021).

Turkey is overwhelmingly a patriarchal society that creates gender as well as sexuality inequalities as particularly women and non-heterosexual individuals face severe restrictions. Hence, it is no coincidence that their online dating practices are also affected by gendered and heteronormative cultural codes, terms, and norms. For instance, the local platforms, i.e., marriage websites, do not allow their subscribers to see same-sex members (Sunam, 2017, p. 137). They are designed for only heterosexual individuals. Moreover, the Turkish government banned or limited access to some LGBTI+-oriented dating apps. Accused of promoting prostitution and obscenity, Grindr was banned in 2013 (Yılmaz, 2020). Access to the app is only possible with VPN. On the other hand, access to the most popular LGBTI+-oriented dating app Hornet was blocked in 2020 and removed from App Store in 2021; therefore, the app was renamed "Hornet Stories" and relaunched on App Store (Çelik, 2022). The app is now available for IOS users as well. These restrictions and bans are overt actions the government takes against non-heterosexual individuals, affecting their social and intimate lives. Despite these official actions, the use of dating platforms is gradually increasing.

Although Turkey has a more-than-two-decade history of online dating, there is still a

powerful social stigma around Tinder and dating apps in general. Tinder is predominantly understood as a hookup app rather than a dating technology. Such social perception unequally affects individuals. The study on Tinder use in Turkey finds that users tend to “believe that non-users consider the app *exclusively* in terms of sexuality,” and the effect of this perception on users is significantly gendered (Cöbek & Ergin, 2021, p. 26, emphasis original). That is, even though Tinder users generally believe that the app has a negative reputation in society, women are more likely to avoid using the app in public places such as restaurants, cafés, workplaces, schools, public transportation, etc. than men (Cöbek & Ergin, 2021, p. 27-29). The social understanding that Tinder is not a dating but a hookup or sex app also leads women to be treated as hookup objects in Tinder (Chapter 5).

Gender inequality in online dating can be observed linguistically as well. There is a popular term in Turkish e-dating jargon, *Tinder’a düşmek* (to slide into Tinder). The phrase is closely related to *kötü yola düşmek* (to be on the streets), deriving from *Yeşilçam* (Turkish Hollywood) movies. In a typical *Yeşilçam* movie, there is always an innocent and unfortunate woman who finds herself on the street because of various misfortunes, primarily because of another woman, a jezebel who presents herself as helpful and benevolent. Being on the streets means becoming a sex worker, hence, bringing shame on the family and dishonoring the family’s name. In this regard, *Tinder’a düşmek* connotes being on the streets. There is an entry named “the Turkish girl who has slid into Tinder” on *EkşiSözlük* (2018), the oldest and most popular urban dictionary in Turkish cyberspace, where (mostly) men talk about “that kind of woman” (Illouz, 2019, p. 220), i.e., a woman who engages in sexual activities. Studies as well as media products draw attention to such inequality between users (Arcak & Öztürk, 2020; Cöbek & Ergin, 2021, Deniz, 2020; Mevzu, 2020). The powerful social stigma that produces gender inequality in Turkey shows that individuals do not have the same relationship with online dating even though the phenomenon is gradually becoming popular.

1.3 The Research

In this dissertation project, I am interested in the interaction between technology and culture in the online dating context. My goal is to understand Turkey’s heterosexual online dating landscape. More specifically, I asked a) why heterosexual individuals use dating platforms, b) which platform they use, why and how they use this specific app, c) how they choose their potential partners, and d) how these technologies influence social as well as intimate relationships. I focus on

- 1) the social, technological, and affective factors that influence heterosexual individuals' motivations to use dating technologies as well as their preferences for certain dating apps,
- 2) their mate selection, or swiping in e-dating jargon, practices, and the social, technological, and affective factors involved in these practices, and
- 3) the influence of dating apps in relationships.

My focus is limited to the heterosexual population for theoretical and material reasons. First, heterosexual dating culture (the norms, laws, rules, codes, and terms regarding dating, intimacy, hooking up, sexuality, and love) and dating practices (how these rules, laws, norms, codes, and terms operate) differ from non-heterosexual dating cultures and practices. For example, the social, political, and affective atmosphere in which both groups find themselves are different. As I have told above, non-heterosexual individuals face restrictions in physical as well as online settings. Hence, the social, technological, and affective factors that lead them to use dating technologies, the mate selection process and the things involved, and their online dating experiences differ. These issues deserve particular and careful attention. Second, studying both groups would be challenging as the dissertation project has limited time (maximum of a year for fieldwork) and financial resources. The research conducted to cover both in such a limited time would also remain superficial because heterosexual and non-heterosexual populations and the relevant literature separately require closer examination and careful attention.

Furthermore, I am particularly interested in the heterosexual population as I aim to challenge academic literature focusing on the issue that I have found gendered and repetitive. Two binary logics regarding people's motivations and mate choices dominate this literature (Chapter 2). First, according to the studies, while casual sex is the primary motivation in online dating, men are more likely to engage in short-term relationships while women look for romantic partners. Unsurprisingly, casual sex is attributed to men whereas love sticks to women. Second, women seem to prioritize socio-economic status, associated with the other party's financial resources and earning potential, whereas men place a greater value on beauty. This thesis primarily attempts to challenge these gendered binaries embedded in the literature that neglected the influence of social, technological, and affective factors on people's intentions to use dating platforms as well as mate choices. To put it differently, the thesis derives from two premises: 1) People do not simply use dating technologies to find a hookup or romantic partner, but certain socio-cultural, technological, and affective conditions lead them to use these platforms, and 2) People do not simply choose their short or long-term

partners through the beauty-status binary, but mate selection is not a pre-determined but an affective process. To challenge these gendered binaries, I follow affect theories and methodologies, suggesting an affective turn to online dating as both a theoretical and methodological framework to move beyond these binary-based arguments. As such, this thesis draws a more thorough portrait of Turkey's heterosexual online dating. More broadly, this research focuses on how technology and culture shape each other. Technology is understood here as "networked digital information technology" (Greenfield, 2017) through which everyone as well as everything is connected and traced. Such technology is designing, thus, dominating everyday life as the world itself is appified (Morris & Murray, 2018). Human and non-human things are connected, communicated, and traced through apps. These small pieces of software are designed by cultural beings. That is, apps are not independent of cultural codes, rules, norms, terms, and imaginaries (Chapter 5). I suggest a third dimension to the culture-technology interaction. Following digital anthropologists (e.g., Daniel Miller), STS scholars (e.g., Tarleton Gillespie), and affect scholars (e.g., Lauren Berlant), I argue that technology is not simply shaped by culture and vice versa, but the body judges and responds to this interaction. I encourage more than a focus on orthodoxies of structures, showing, for instance, choosing a partner via a dating app is not simply shaped by algorithms and one's intersectional background but also challenged by affects – the body's capacity to act (Chapter 6).

1.4 *Outline of the Thesis*

Chapter 2 delves into the heterosexual online dating literature and exposes the binaries, that I name "the female love-male sex binary" embedded in the literature regarding motivations and mate selection practices. To challenge these binaries, which produce gendered and heteronormative arguments, I offer an affective approach to online dating and discuss the importance of a conceptual separation between emotion and affect and the potentiality of the latter. The former refers to cultural practices of feelings. Hence, a study on emotions reveals the social structures (institutions, rules, norms, laws, codes, terms, etc.) that shape these practices, and inequalities regarding class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation embedded in these structures. In contrast, affect refers to the body's capacity to act as well as to be acted upon. It encourages more than a focus on these structures by drawing attention to bodies' capacities to respond to them. Its focus is centered on atmospheres, environments, movements, and thought-in-action, i.e., the interaction between socially constructed knowledge, the visceral response to it, and intuitive knowledge, all of which are crucial

conceptual tools to look at online dating.

Chapter 3 talks about the methodological framework that the affective turn proposes and the non-representational research techniques I used in this research. I discuss

- 1) the walkthrough method, which provides a closer examination of the two most popular and algorithmically different dating apps, Tinder and OkCupid, their technological design and their social impact on people's preferences, dating practices, including in-app activities such as swiping, and experiences,
- 2) the semi-structured Zoom interviews as a way to understand the social, cultural, and affective environment and its influence on the participants' motivations, preferences, and experiences, and
- 3) the video re-enactment technique used during the interviews, providing multiple layers of data about the swiping practice and their sensory registers.

The chapter also carefully describes the demographic background of the participants (N=40), their intentions to use dating technologies, and the challenges I faced during the research as both a female researcher and a researcher who had to conduct her fieldwork via Zoom due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Focusing on why heterosexual individuals prefer dating platforms, Chapter 4 reveals the social, technological, and affective factors that have led them to use Tinder and OkCupid. Using the concept of *sıkıntı*, which refers to both problem and boredom, as an analytical tool, I demonstrate how the participants used dating apps because meeting new people became a problem and because they were bored. The problem of meeting new people stems from two things. First, as Bergström (2022) also shows, social life has been disembedded from ordinary settings for at least two decades. That is, social activities, which were once outdoor events, have become indoor activities that occur within close circles, and social networks have been tightened and more centered around these circles. Thus, meeting new people is physically and spatially trapped in closed and vicious circles. Second, due to 24/7 capitalism, the participants generally lack time and energy to meet new people, which requires effort. In addition to these structural changes in life conditions, meeting a person in a physical setting is no longer the norm because "there's an app for that." Hence, meeting new people becomes a *sıkıntı* (problem) with the Internet technology and the appification of almost everything. These structural changes and material factors generate a repetitive, monotonous, hence, *sıkıcı* (boring) flow of life. People are not only overwhelmed by but also bored with overwork and monotonous life within a confined space. In short, heterosexual individuals' preferences for dating technologies mostly derive from the structural changes in living conditions and norms

(the privatization of social life as the norm), the material factors (lack of time and energy), and their affective impact on the individuals (boredom).

In addition to these factors, revealing the role of technological design in people's intention to use, Chapter 5 attempts to challenge the Tinder-centered literature that generally neglects why individuals prefer some dating apps over others. I show how dating apps' design generates particular aesthetics, affective environments, and social understandings that play crucial roles in individuals' preferences. In this case, Tinder's image-centered design lacking a well-structured algorithm creates a socially diverse atmosphere which has contradictory effects on the participants. Some participants prefer Tinder as the app provides an abundant place where they can meet a variety of people while others specifically avoid the app due to this very social diversity. Instead, they prefer OkCupid as the app lacks a Turkish interface, relying on more textual data, providing numerous filters, features, categories, and well-specified algorithm customize the options and present the results with pinpoint accuracy. For users, OkCupid, with such a design, provides a safer, more secure, and more sophisticated place. Therefore, preferring OkCupid over Tinder has class implications. It is also a gendered preference as women particularly avoid using Tinder because the app's simplicity produces an understanding of Tinder as a hookup app. Such social understanding paves the way for treating women as sexual objects for the male audience. Nonetheless, some men use Tinder to increase their chances although they find it a lowbrow platform. This underlines the gendered experience of matching and the contradictions and incoherence in preferences. What is called preference is not a static disposition but an affective practice.

Drawing on the concept of choice and examining the participants' swiping practices, Chapter 6 elaborates on this affective definition and shows how mate choice is not simply socially structured but a complex process involving many things. It first focuses on the pre-swiping dynamics – individuals' predetermined criteria and algorithms. Although their criteria challenge the beauty-status binary, homophily is prevalent as the participants primarily tend to match with people similar to themselves. Unsurprisingly, based on one's intersectional background, partner selection does have terms. However, in online dating, the terms of mate choice are intervened by algorithms. As learning machines, algorithms produce knowledge regarding the users' preferences and determine the options according to the information they provide and by tracking their swiping decisions. That is, because algorithms primarily decide whom to present to the user, mate choice in online dating is first and foremost mediated. However, algorithmic failures the participants experienced during swiping (e.g., miscalculations or presenting profiles that were incongruent with the customized filters)

challenge the social power of both algorithms and the notion of algorithm. Chapter 6 later focuses on the on-swiping process in which the participants' choices primarily depend on the affection between the user and the profile – the first bodily impression. The users' current mood follows the sensation that arises through this contact. These affective factors (mood and sensation) sometimes produce contradictions and incoherence in their swiping decisions. Hence, the act of swiping is primarily a thought-in-action. The chapter concludes how the swiping design creates “waste(d)-ability,” the ability to waste people, and discusses how such ability is not simply caused by dating platforms but part of a broader evolution of social and intimate lives.

The last chapter first elaborates on Bergström's (2022) crucial distinction between online dating as an industry and online dating as a practice. The former is a competitive market, where companies fight for the greatest share of the revenue while users “purchase” each other and sometimes even fight for a match. The swipe design and its logic dominating the industry reinforces the reification of individuals and waste(d)-ability. Hence, the industry encourages particular attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, norms, and rules regarding dating. However, online dating as a practice cannot be reduced to the dating practice shaped by apps, as it is infused with practices of intimacy with different motivations, desires, needs, goals, intentions, and expectations. In this regard, I suggest the term intimacy, which encourages a focus on different online dating practices, different attachments to dating apps, feelings, affects, and emotions. More broadly, I underline that it is crucial to avoid taking technology as an autonomous agent and consider how technology, culture, and affect interact with each other. The concept of affect suggests more than binary thoughts, perspectives, and logic (e.g., love-sex, beauty-status, technology-culture, and industry-practice) regarding heterosexual online dating. An affective approach to online dating invites scholars to observe and understand the relationship between intimate public milieus created by technologies of intimacy and practices of intimacy or trajectories that people take through to pursue their needs, desires, and goals or simply to find a room to breathe beneath the social constraints of life.

Chapter 2³

BEYOND THE FEMALE LOVE-MALE SEX BINARY: AN AFFECTIVE TURN TO ONLINE DATING

“We have all heard the notion that men come to relationships
looking for sex and not love and that women come to relationships
looking for love and not sex.”
bell hooks (2018, p. 87)

2.1 *The Female Love-Male Sex Binary*

The online dating industry has experienced a boom with newcomers as well as the transformation of the existing websites (e.g., Match.com and OkCupid) into smartphone apps since Tinder. Digital dating has become such a lucrative and attractive business that it paved the way for advice blogs, self-help books, dating coaches, matchmakers as well as self-help specialists who teach how to use these technologies efficiently – from decorating one’s profile to beating algorithms to find the ideal mate (Bryans, 2018; Ettin, 2014; Hoehn, 2015; Webb, 2013). The more dating apps joined the market, the more books, seminars, and TEDx talks were produced for (potential) online daters. It is fascinating to see how fast this business has grown. Today, over 5000 dating apps are available in the app stores (Brooks, 2021, para. 8).

Even though scholars have been interested in online matchmaking since the times of personal ads (e.g., Jagger, 1998; Whitty et al., 2007), the boom in the industry gave way to another - a surge evident in e-dating studies. From sociology to psychology, from science and technology studies (STS) to media studies, many (inter)disciplines began concentrating on this issue. Literature regarding digital dating can be grouped under five themes. Mate selection, self-presentation, and motivation are the most popular. Studies are generally interested in individuals’ actions, such as how e-daters choose their potential partners, or in digital dating jargon, swipe profiles, how they present themselves on these platforms to attract potential mates, and why they prefer digital dating technologies. As I will elaborate on these studies

³ A version of this chapter was published in *Kültür ve İletişim*. See Cöbek (2021).

below, there is a binary logic that I name “the female love-male sex binary” embedded in the research regarding mate selection, self-presentation, and motivation. As the fourth theme, the research on dating platforms follows the same issues but draws attention to the technology itself. That is, dating technologies intervene in individuals’ motives and actions, like their swiping practices and profile construction (Albury et al., 2017; Duguay, 2017; Illouz & Finkelmann, 2009; Tong et al., 2016). They also influence social relationships, dating culture, intimacy, and love (Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2019; Krüger & Spilde, 2018; Vuzharov, 2019), and they reproduce heteronormativity, gender inequality, exclusion, and discrimination (Bivens & Hoque, 2018; Chan, 2018b; Murray & Ankerson, 2016; Shield, 2018). Last but not least, digital dating has negative aspects which affect users on a more personal level. E-daters, mostly more vulnerable groups such as ciswomen and LGBTI+ individuals, are often exposed to sexual harassment, dating scams, and deception (Hess & Flores, 2018; Paasonen et al., 2019; Shaw, 2016; Vandeweerd et al., 2016; Whitty, 2015; Whitty & Buchanan, 2016; Zerach, 2016).

Because this research focuses on heterosexual users’ motivations and their swiping strategies, I looked at the related studies. As a result, I found and reviewed 63 studies. Here are some interesting numerical facts: Most of them concentrate on mate preferences (N=37). Among them, only 2 studies use qualitative methods while one study uses mixed methods. 13 studies focus on e-daters’ self-presentations along with mating strategies, and only four studies within them are quantitative. And there are 12 studies on motivations, among which only two use qualitative and mixed methods. The majority (N=52) focus on the north American, Canadian, European, or Australian contexts while the rest concentrate on China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Turkey. The numbers strikingly demonstrate that the online dating literature regarding motivations and mate preferences predominantly consists of Anglo-American and quantitative studies.

These studies mainly follow a female love vs. male sex binary logic. In other words, I observed that research regarding heterosexual online daters generally moves between two associated dichotomies, love-sex and beauty-status. The studies on motivations highlight that even though dating apps are first and foremost for casual sex or hooking up, men significantly use e-dating technologies for short-term relationships like one-night stands than their counterparts who prefer online dating for long-term, romantic relationships (Alam et al., 2018; Bryant & Sheldon, 2017; Clemens et al., 2015; Gatter & Hodgkinson, 2016; Lange et al., 2015; Newett et al., 2017; Pozsar et al., 2018; Snitko, 2016; Sumter et al., 2017). Only Ranzini and Lutz’s study (2017) challenge the man-sex and woman-love associations and find that in the

U.S., women use Tinder not to form a romantic relationship but friendship while male Tinderers seek not only hookup but also long-term partners. Interested in Momo users, known as the Chinese Tinder, Seta and Zhang's study (2015) draws attention to boredom: Although it is a dating app, Momo is first and foremost used to alleviate boredom. Similarly, Timmermans and Caluwé's study on individuals between 18 and 29 years old in Belgium (2017) argue that people who are more extroverted and open to new experiences use Tinder and they use it to pass the time. Studies interested in e-daters' mate preferences regard dating sites and apps only as platforms for seeking romantic partners; hence they tend to neglect other motivations, such as friendship and entertainment.

On the other hand, 22 out of 37 studies on mate preferences repeat the same argument in terms of the gendered beauty-status dichotomy (Alterowitz & Mendelsohn, 2009; Başar, 2006; Birger, 2015; Brand et al., 2012; Chappetta & Barth, 2016; Dwivedi, 2015; Hitsch et al., 2010a, 2010b; Johnson, 2017; Kreager et al., 2014; McGloin & Denes, 2018; Menkin et al., 2015; Ong, 2016; Ong & Wang, 2015; Oyer, 2014; Peters & Salzsieder, 2018; Schwarz & Hassebruck, 2012; Skopek et al., 2011; Sritharan et al., 2010; Su & Hu, 2019; Tommasi, 2004; Zakelj et al., 2015). In other words, they argue that although physical attractiveness is the most important criterion for both parties, men value physical attraction over anything else whereas women tend to prioritize status (potential partners' education level, job as well as income) in their quest for a romantic partner. These predominantly quantitative studies generally explain such gendered differences through evolutionary or social stratification theories. According to the evolutionary theory (Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993), women seek love or romance more than men because they biologically have a more limited period of fertility than men; hence they tend to value the socio-economic status of a man, the potential husband as well as father of the future child. In contrast, men may have evolved to prioritize physical appearance, sexually attractive and young women, because men's fertility decreases relatively slowly than their counterparts. Basically, men can and do enjoy this "privilege," engaging in short-term relationships which require "less time to elapse before seeking sexual intercourse and desiring a large number of sexual partners" (Buss & Schmitt, 1993, p. 226).⁴ In contrast, the social structure or stratification theory (Arum et al., 2008; Blossfeld, 2009) underlines the unequal distribution of social roles and positions among genders: Women are forced to think of their

⁴ In his book *Dataclysm*, OkCupid' CEO Christian Rudder shares the data provided by OkCupid users: A heterosexual female OkCupid generally prefers a man roughly as old as she is while for men, be it a fifty-year-old man or a college kid, "[y]ounger is better, and youngest is the best of all" (2014, p. 36). However, a mutual like, reciprocity, is required on dating apps. Thus, because young women do not prefer older men on OkCupid, the latter are obliged to like women at most ten years younger than themselves to get a match (2014, p. 38).

future husband's earning potential because they are made economically dependent on their partners. In short, these theories view women as socio-economically more dependent on their partners, hence, as forced to think of their future, and status as access to resources and earning capacity for women. In Sara Ahmed's terms (2014), it seems that love and physical attractiveness stick to women whereas casual sex and socio-economic status to men.

This female love-male sex binary is also evident in self-presentation. Women generally present their physical attractiveness through body images while men highlight their education and wealth through pictures with their cars and/or expensive watches. Qualitative studies on self-presentation have more diverse explanations than the above-mentioned quantitative studies. The female love-male sex binary logic is stable because individuals very much internalize these socially constructed heteronormative gender codes (Casimiro, 2014, 2015; Davis & Fingerman, 2016; Gewirtz-Meydan & Ayalon, 2018; McWilliams & Barrett, 2014). Or because dating platforms with their design templates reinforce these codes (Almjeld, 2014; David & Cambre, 2016; Duguay, 2017; Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Illouz, 2007; Lindsay, 2015). In terms of the love-woman association, studying online daters in China, Lange et al. (2015) find that Chinese women are more likely to seek romantic partners because they feel more social pressure toward marriage than men. That is, heterosexual women's search for love is socially constructed.

On the other hand, 11 studies on mate preferences pay attention to race and homophily. They find that white individuals, especially white men, are the most preferred group in mate selection, and e-daters primarily seek partners who share similar socio-economic and ideological backgrounds (Anderson et al., 2014; Bruch & Newman, 2019; Curington et al., 2015; Felmlee & Kreager, 2017; Jakobsson & Lindholm, 2014; Lin & Lundquist, 2013; McGrath et al., 2016; Potarca & Mills, 2015; Rudder, 2014; Tsunokai et al., 2014; Ward, 2016). Only five "contextual" studies challenge the beauty-status duality.⁵ For instance, He et al. (2013) argue that in China, both men and women use their income to attract potential partners. Lange et al. (2019), who look at the German context and Fu (2015), who analyzes the profiles of *shengny* (leftover women) in China, find similar results. According to these studies from different cultural settings, women prefer sensitive, emotional, kind, and

⁵ Of course, there is "apparently" an academic neo-colonialism in writing practices (Ergin & Alkan, 2019). That is, almost all these studies focus on and produce general arguments regarding Western societies, namely European societies and the United States. When they say men or women, they, in fact, talk about European and/or American heterosexual men and women. However, in a non-Western society, any challenge to those binaries becomes cultural. Chan's study (2018a) on Chinese men's profiles, for instance, demonstrate how new types of masculinities today are associated with gentleness and sensitivity. However, Chinese men are emphasized as a geographic marker, as if they cannot challenge the Eurocentric beauty-status duality. First and foremost, they are not men but *Chinese* men.

intelligent men. The findings from Singapore (Phua & Moody, 2019) demonstrate how women's increasing access to education and the job market have changed their mate preferences. Or a data set collected in 2009 and 2017 in the U.S. (Thomas, 2019) shows how couples are becoming more heterogeneous, and their preferences are not simply based on similarities but diversity. Statistical representations seem to obscure these heterogeneous and contrasting performances as, despite those challenges, love and beauty overwhelmingly stick to women while sex and status to men. Despite the counter-arguments, this socially constructed binary logic, which seems transcultural, continues to be reproduced as a persistent myth in the mainstream as well. Many dating coaches or matchmakers in the digital dating business advise women to look beautiful and men to look rich (Bryans, 2018; Davis, 2013; Ettin, 2014; Hoehn, 2015). Interestingly, the female love-male sex binary continues to be a persistent myth not merely because of the online dating industry but also due to the academic literature.

In summary, the heterosexual online dating literature has a predominantly binary logic, which argues that women use online dating technologies for seeking love whereas men use them for casual sex. Searching for a romantic partner, women value status while men look at beauty in their quest for a hookup partner. Therefore, according to the literature, the former highlights their physical appearance whereas the latter their socio-economic status in their profiles. It appears that the category of heterosexual women is attached to love and beauty while casual sex and socio-economic status stick to the category of heterosexual men. Woman-man, love-sex, and beauty-status dualities are intermingled with each other. They constitute a single binary, the female love-male sex binary, which has become a persistent myth regarding dating, matching, and intimate relationships.

What lies beneath these studies, which reduce the online dating phenomenon to such binary logic, is the problem of oversimplification. Why heterosexual individuals prefer dating apps as well as why they are moved by certain profiles but not others are reduced to love-sex and beauty-status dualities. Boredom, for instance, is one of the dominant affects in online dating (Alam et al., 2018; Bryant & Sheldon, 2017; Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Pozsar et al., 2018; Seta & Zhang, 2015; Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017; Ward, 2016), though, the most underacknowledged one. Lack of attention to boredom might derive from two things. First, it might be neglected because boredom is not generally viewed as an emotion. There are many disputes regarding what boredom is (e.g., Gardiner & Haladyn, 2017; Svendsen, 2008; Toohey, 2012), but it is clearly an ordinary affect embedded in everyday life, influencing individuals' daily actions (Anderson, 2004; O'Neill, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). Regarding dating

technologies in terms of intimacy and love results in less scholarly attention to this ordinary affect.

Second, boredom might also be neglected due to methodology. Studies that find boredom as a dominant factor but disregard it use quantitative techniques. They show how individuals significantly use dating websites or apps to alleviate boredom but do not explain why boredom is a dominant factor. On the other hand, interested in Momo users and their affective practices of courtship and online dating, Seta and Zhang (2015) conducted a mobile ethnographic fieldwork in different Chinese cities. They complement the qualitative data they obtained from semi-structured interviews with auto-ethnographic components of their actual platform experience, such as befriending, chatting, flirting, and even meeting with other Momo users (2015, p. 170). Their study finds that the dating app is “hardly ‘a dating app’” because users are not interested in seeking a partner but an enjoyable talk (2015, p. 178). Momo users are fighting “the boring spells of everyday life” (2015, p. 179) while avoiding the pressures of a more demanding relationship. Therefore, Seta and Zhang suggest viewing Momo as no more than “a pastime flirting platform” (2015, p. 178). This example shows the significance of methodology and research design. Techniques used in research influence the researcher’s perspectives, thinking, and looking at the research objects. Hence, if the quantitative data that individuals use Tinder to alleviate boredom were complemented with qualitative techniques, it would explain why boredom has been such a dominant factor in the context of dating apps. As Chapter 4 will demonstrate, boredom is a crucial but neglected phenomenon that may help us understand today’s dating cultures and practices.

In predominantly quantitative research, mate preferences or tastes are also oversimply explained through beauty and status categories which function as an “element of social reproduction” (Highmore, 2016a, p. 160). Swiping becomes determined, pre-established, a static disposition, “a preference as *already* positioned within a hierarchy” (Highmore, 2016b, p. 557, italics are original). But what is dismissed here is that swiping is a bodily activity. It is about “letting oneself carried away, overflowing with the surprises that arise through contact with” (Hennion, 2007, p. 109) persons or their profiles. That is, because there are “different orienting forces” (Highmore, 2016b, p. 553), the researcher should not simply use quantitative methods, provide participants with specific categories, and claim that women prioritize socioeconomic status whereas men value beauty. As such, these epistemological positions reproduce gendered and stereotypical arguments, hence the female love-male sex binary. Swiping as a bodily activity is neglected because researchers interested in the digital are mainly inclined to forget the existence of bodies. Being body blind, they consider the online

world first and foremost as a disembodied space, as if the body would magically disappear when it comes to the digital. The scholars who study online dating recognize the bodily movements when using dating apps, that is, how users choose their potential partners “with a quick *thumb movement*” (David & Cambre, 2016, p. 4, emphasis is mine); yet, the same scholars criticize that with the emergence of dating technologies, being attracted to someone, to a possible date has become disembodied (Badiou, 2017; Bauman, 2003; Finkel et al., 2012; Hardey, 2002; Illouz, 2007; Roscoe & Chillias, 2014; Sprecher et al., 2008). To put it differently, on the one hand, when it comes to dating apps, the body is recognized since people use their hands, their fingers, and their eyes when they go online, looking at others’ profiles. On the other hand, when it comes to choosing a partner, which requires bodily attraction, through these technologies, the body is surprisingly neglected, as if users decide without feeling an attraction. As Chapter 6 will demonstrate, swiping is in fact an affective practice as the body has a significant role in mate selection.

Reducing the online dating phenomenon to the female love-male sex binary also ignores that “platforms intervene” (Gillespie, 2015), the significant role of algorithms, interfaces, along with templates (Cheney-Lippold, 2017; Galloway, 2006; Matviyenko, 2014; Thrift, 2010; Vuzharov, 2019). In other words, the architecture of an app, its algorithms, templates, and interfaces, has a specific “style of allure” (Thrift, 2010) which moves individuals toward as well as away from the app. Bumble, for instance, presents itself as a “feminist” dating app, ensuring its heterosexual female users’ security and safety by allowing only women to start the conversation after a match is made. As such, Bumble is designed to avoid any kind of harassment, assault, and cyberbullying. Bivens and Hoque’s material-semiotic analysis (2018) displays how Bumble allures heterosexual women by addressing and providing control and safety for them only. On the other hand, the app’s design makes a very narrow construction of masculinity by coding males as “by nature uncivil and incapable of comportment” (2018, p. 449). Or, as Chapter 5 will delve into, using the answers that e-daters give to questions regarding interests, religion, political views, sexual desires, etc., OkCupid gives its users percentages of a match (same answers) as well as a mismatch (different answers) to demonstrate how perfect they are for each other. By drawing attention to the answers rather than users’ images, OkCupid promotes itself in contrast to Tinder: “On OkCupid, you are more than just a photo. You have stories to tell, passions to share...” These features produce feelings of security and more spot-on matches and lead users to view the app as a place with people of better quality than people on Tinder, which is, in the participants’ terms, mostly “a meat market” with higher social diversity. To put it differently, the

algorithmic design fosters both diversity and distinction, affecting individuals' decisions and practices. Therefore, it is very crucial to pay attention to the role it plays.

As bell hooks says, we have already heard about the story of women seeking love and men looking for sex (2018, p. 87). Then, why are the arguments based on the female love-male sex binary still being reproduced today? These reiterative arguments do nothing but reproduce these sticky relationships. Because this reproduction problem mainly derives from methodology, I suggest turning to affect theories to move beyond this persistent myth of the female love-male sex binary.

2.2 *The Affective Turn*

What is meant by “the affective turn” (Clough & Halley, 2007)? Does it mean “the emotional turn,” which has been ongoing since the 1980s, or does it refer to something else? Many scholars (e.g., Ahmed, 2014; Hemmings, 2005; Leys, 2011; Lutz, 2017; Martin, 2013; Ngai, 2005; Rosaldo, 1983; Schieffelin, 1983) use the terms emotion and affect interchangeably whereas some scholars (e.g., Berlant, 2011a; Massumi, 1995; Stewart, 2017; Thrift, 2008) underline that the two have different meanings and the difference matters. The conceptual distinction lies at the heart of the affective turn. Following affect scholars, I find the conceptual difference between emotion and affect important and useful for studying online dating.

According to Eric Shouse, feeling is “a sensation that has been checked against previous sensations and labelled. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labeling their feelings” (2005, p. 77). Such a definition views feelings simply as psychological states and private issues and tends to disregard that feelings emerge in social relational situations (Kemper, 1978, 1981; Scheff, 1988). To say it differently, feelings are not natural, precultural, personal, and biographical but situational, social, and cultural. And emotions are social as well as cultural practices of feelings. They are a display of sensations (e.g., Hochschild, 1998; Myers, 1988; Rosaldo, 1983; Schieffelin, 1983). In her classical work *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1983) draws attention to cultural “feeling rules” or emotional vocabularies that indicate which feelings are and are not “feel-able,” where, when, and how one should display, practice, and perform a feeling, and who are (not) allowed to display. This attempt to unnaturalize emotions is a structural intervention to the Western understanding of emotion as “beneath” the faculties of thought and reason (Ahmed, 2014; Lutz, 1988). Emotions are, in fact, embodied in narratives. They are part of power relations and “bound up with the securing

of social hierarchy” since we do not have the same relationship to emotions (Ahmed, 2014, p. 4).

Emotions are “sticky,” and while they stick to individuals, they create a hierarchized “I” versus “you,” “we” versus “they” (Ahmed, 2010b, 2014). Shame, for instance, arises “out of the monitoring of one’s own actions by viewing one’s self from the standpoint of others” (Scheff, 1988, p. 398). It functions as a control mechanism of one’s own conduct, as a mechanism for conformity and social order. Shame sticks to those who act outside the norms, rules, and laws. Hence, women or LGBTI+ individuals are, first and foremost, those who “bring shame on the family” or the society (Ahmed, 2014, p. 107). However, shaming, which had remained a masculine act for a very long time, is used today as political activism by women to expose toxic masculine performances (Hess & Flores, 2016; Paasonen et al., 2019; Shaw, 2016). Women take shaming back: “Let the real shame begin” (Shaw, 2016, p. 6). As I have discussed in the previous section, love sticks to women. Hence, in heterosexual intimate relationships, women are expected to do not only the domestic work but also the emotional work, which includes nurturing, caring, as well as talking about and managing feelings (Duncombe & Marsden, 1998; Green, 2018; Hochschild, 1983; Jacobs & Hens, 2018; Piazzesi et al., 2018; Sadler, 2018; Uiorean, 2018). In *Love and Gold*, Hochschild (2003) draws attention to how love is today being extracted like gold. Because of work overload and increasing career pressures, many American as well as European middle-class women must employ other, mainly non-American and non-European, working-class women who would give love and take care of those women’s children in their place (Hochschild, 2003). As such, she underlines, love remains a cultural, social, and predominantly female practice. And the female love-male sex binary reproduces this sticky relationship between women and love.

While emotions are social and cultural, affect is somewhat different. There are two approaches to affect. One comes from Silvan Tomkins (1962) and his student Paul Ekman (2007, 2009). Their works identify eight primary affects (fear, anger, distress, disgust, interest, shame, joy, and surprise) located in the subcortical parts of the brain. Unlike the understanding of emotions as social and cultural practices, Tomkins and Ekman view these affects as universal and pancultural adaptive responses of the organism, accompanied by distinct facial expressions (Leys, 2010, p. 69). Since they manifest a shared biological heritage, affects are nonintentional, lacking an object, and essentially separate from the cognitive and other information-processing systems. In the Tomkins-Ekmanian view, affect means the body’s automatic (re)action, autonomous from cognition and the cultural vocabularies of emotions. Concentrating on affects, facial expressions, and deception, Ekman’s works inspired the

famous television series *Lie to Me*.

The other, the one that I follow, stems from Spinoza, his *Ethics* (1994), but most importantly, Deleuze, his reading of Spinoza (1988) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Inspired by Deleuze mostly, many scholars such as Brian Massumi (1995, 2005, and 2010), Kathleen Stewart (2007, 2015, 2017), Lauren Berlant (1997, 2004, 2011b), and Nigel Thrift (2004, 2008, 2010) have focused, and suggested focusing, on affect rather than emotion since almost three decades. It is a poststructural intervention that critiques the Cartesian mind-body duality in which there is always a primacy of the mind over the body. Refusing such binary logic, Spinoza underlines no one does and can know what the body can do because it surpasses the knowledge of the mind (1994, p. 156). Spinoza even goes further and says that if a person claims s/he knows, s/he is nothing but a fool. The body's capacity to act both influences and is influenced by the mind and its capacity. Thus, the mind has no primacy over the other or vice versa. In Spinoza's philosophy, bodies move and are moved by other bodies in many great ways, and affect (affectus in Spinoza's use) refers to the body's capacity, power, or intensity to affect, move, act upon, as well as be affected, moved, and acted upon. Its capacity for movement can be increased or diminished by affections (affectio), that is, encounters between the affecting body and the affected one. This is the primary principle of affect theories.

Affect scholars agree that emotions are social and cultural practices of feelings, but the concept of affect is "more than a feeling" (Dean, 2015, p. 237). It underlines the body's capacity. Neuroscientist Damasio's works (2003), for instance, demonstrated how the body acts before our cognition. This is the second fundamental view in affect theories: "[C]ognition follows the affects" (Berlant, 2011b, p. 145).⁶ Nonetheless, this does not mean that affect is entirely bodily and "mindless," but that the body is not simply affected but also has the capacity to affect the mind, other bodies, our socially and culturally shaped cognitions, ideas, thoughts, etc. Because sensation occurs before cognition, affect is viewed as resistant to narrative and cognitive capture, as if it is impossible to know (White, 2011, p. 15). It precedes consciousness and cognition (Clough, 2000; Massumi, 1995). Therefore, it is non-representational, which is the third principle of affect theories. However, non-representation can by no means be understood as anti-representation since affect theories apprehend what passes for representations as "performative presentations, not reflections of some a priori order waiting to be unveiled, decoded, or revealed" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 19). Rather than

⁶ According to some critics (e.g., Leys, 2010, 2011; Martin, 2013), the view that cognition follows affects can be oversimplified by associating the notion of affect with a research area in neuroscience. This would be unfair to affect studies since they endeavor to draw attention to bodies, subjects, or modes of being, movements, and atmospheres or environments.

being simply planned codes and symbols, representation is continuously de-presented and re-presented (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000). In other words, representations are not closed upon themselves but open to making, unmaking, and remaking. Hence, non-representational refers to non-fixed, non-static, and moving. Affect scholars, in this regard, pay attention to non-human things such as atmospheres or environments (e. g. Adey et al., 2013; Anderson, 2009; Ash, 2013; Stewart, 2011) because, and this is the fourth fundamental view in affect theories, “bodies are continuously busy judging their environments and responding to [affective] atmospheres in which they find themselves” (Berlant, 2011b, p. 15). And atmospheres, be it an atmosphere of a room, class, situation, app, event, or story, are not fixed, or static, but they are constantly changing, moving, affecting as well as being affected.

This conceptual distinction of affect from emotion draws attention to escape (e.g., Biehl, 2005; Locke, 2009). That is, it underlines that no structure, or assemblage in Deleuzian terms, be it language or society, is closed upon itself but open to acts of unmaking, changes, and resistances. According to Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage consists of lines of articulation, stratas, and territories as well as lines of flight, lines of escape, intensities, and movements of deterritorialization (1987, p. 4). For instance, society is an assemblage consisting of rules, laws, institutions, and lines that individuals must follow. These are not only social and cultural but also spatial, or territorial in Deleuzian terms. Thus, there are not only specific rules, laws, norms, and lines to follow but also specific spaces, places, and territories to inhabit. There are stratas in every assemblage, i.e., power relations, hierarchies, and conflicts. However, society as an assemblage also involves struggles against these territorial rules, laws, institutions, and lines, resistances that lead to the unmaking and remaking of those spatial lines. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) name them as movements of deterritorialization, decoding, lines of flight, and lines of escape. And affect as the body’s capacity to act, or the intensity of the body to act for Deleuze and Guattari, might follow or be shaped and regulated by the rules, lines, laws, and institutions, or it might escape from them. In this sense, while emotion refers to power relations, hierarchies, rules, stratas, structures, etc., the concept of affect highlights the possibility of escape.

Some scholars (Ahmed, 2014; Hemmings, 2005; Leys, 2010, 2011; Lutz, 2017; Martin, 2013) critique that affect theory is inclined to disregard the role of culture, hence pay less attention to power dynamics, the mechanisms of construction and regulation of bodies. However, affect theories (e.g., Berlant, 2004) do not refuse emotions as social and cultural practices. They do not reject the existence and operation of feeling rules, power dynamics, and hierarchical relations within them. In Berlant’s terms, affect theories “encourage more than a

focus on orthodoxies of institutions and practices” since life is a porous zone that consists of lots of incoherence and contradiction, lots of ways that people make through it: “Laws, norms, and events shape imaginaries, but ... people make up modes of being and responding to the world that altogether constitute what gets called ‘visceral response’ and intuitive intelligence” (2011b, p. 53). For instance, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate, individuals’ mate preferences are shaped by their intersectional background (social class, gender, age, education, physical appearance, namely height, weight, etc.), but their criteria are sometimes transgressed as their decisions are very much dependent on their mood as well as the affection (encounter) between them and the profile.

Life is not of an already constituted individual (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 13) but on the move because “we never stop migrating” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 85). It is full of surprises that arise through affections because senses are always “active and responsive without being expressive, necessarily, of ideologies, or truths, or anything” (Berlant, 2011b, p. 198). In other words, affect theories do not refute laws, norms, institutions, and constructions but make room for modes of being that are made up by individuals. They encourage us to look at not only milieus (social, symbolic, and material worlds which involve laws, institutions, feeling rules etc.) but also trajectories as affective moments (the journeys people take through milieus to pursue needs and desires, to try to find a room to breathe beneath social constraints) (Biehl & Locke, 2010). There are always large aggregates, or “molar machines” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology, that follow the rules, laws, norms, lines, and institutions. These molar machines are never closed upon themselves but are always broken, ruptured, and decoded by singularities, or “molecular machines,” that escape the rules, laws, norms, lines, and institutions. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) view singularities as movements of deterritorialization, movements of unmaking, movements of decoding, lines of flight, and lines of escape. They find molecular machines, which try to be organized into molar aggregates, creative and positive (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 40). And for affect scholars, there are many things to learn from those molecular machines and their creativities. Thus, the emphasis in affect theories is more on singularities that intervene in the power dynamics rather than large aggregates that demonstrate the power structures and hierarchical relations. This is what makes the emotion-affect distinction valuable.

Catarina is a crucial example of that creative and positive singularity. Biehl’s “anthropology of a single person” (2005, p. 6) tells, in Catarina’s terms, the *pharmaceuticalization* and the social abandonment of a being. Catarina was one of the individuals who had been left to die in Vita, in Brazil, an institution that was supposed to

rehabilitate drug addicts and mentally ill people; in Biehl's terms, a zone of social abandonment. Following Catarina's diaries and her hospital records, interviewing with her, her family, and her doctors, Biehl displayed how she was forced to become *louca* (mad) while she was resisting against it, insisting that her condition, the pain in her knees that had made walking very difficult for her, was physiological rather than psychological. Both for the family and the hospital, Catarina was talking nonsense; she was *louca*. But she knew she felt the pain her body suffered was not in her mind but on her knees; hence, she refused any psychological or psychiatric treatment. In the end, it was found out that her body was suffering from a genetic physiological disease. It was too late, though, because Catarina was dead, and we were left with the truth of pharmaceuticalization of being and the story of a single person's struggle against her forced pharmaceuticalization.

On the other hand, Sara Ahmed tells her own story in *Queer Phenomenology*. For Ahmed (2006), individuals, without exception, come from a family background and are taught and expected to follow these familiar lines. We all inhabit specific spaces, not others; we are oriented toward and away from certain bodies and objects. In other words, social relations are spatially arranged; they are territorialized. Through her own story of being a white-European and Middle Eastern-Asian mixed queer woman, Ahmed attracts attention to queer feelings such as feeling disoriented. These feelings do not derive from following the lines; they disrupt such arrangements and deterritorialize social relations. Ahmed's personal story is a story of deterritorialization and disorientation, a story of lines of escape or flight. Xavier Dolan's movie *Laurence Anyways* (2012) introduces another story of queer feelings. Living happily with his girlfriend in Montreal, the 38-year-old literature teacher Laurence Alia reveals on his birthday that he felt he was born in the wrong body for his entire life. He wishes to restart and reorder his life as a woman. In the process of becoming a woman, his girlfriend Fred at first supports Laurence by teaching how to do makeup and buy her clothes, but she eventually leaves Laurence. Fred later marries someone else, having a child together, meanwhile Laurence is released from the position at the school because she becomes a trans woman, and she is beaten almost to death in the street. At the movie's end, Fred resents Laurence that they could have a "normal" life and live "happily" ever after. They could follow the lines together, but Laurence chose a different path she feels oriented to or at home.

The stories of Catarina, Sara Ahmed, and Laurence Alia are minor stories – stories of trajectories that expose and intervene in the, predominantly heteronormative and gendered, power relations. They are modes of being that people make up. These trajectories inspired me to look at the online dating phenomenon, searching for what is beyond the female love-male

sex binary. My focus was immediately noticed. In December 2020, when I continued to collect data for my fieldwork, I was invited to the program called “Masculinity on Query” on an internet TV named Medyascope to talk about my research on Turkey’s digital dating culture (Pierre-Magnani, 2020). The program was not live but shot on Monday, December 7, 2020, and posted on YouTube on Sunday, December 13, when there was a curfew due to the coronavirus pandemic (Medyascope, 2020). I discussed the preliminary results and my observations on users’ swiping practices on the show. I told how the participants acted in contrast to the female love-male sex binary logic, that is, they were unattracted to the stereotypical profiles (e.g., men with expensive cars and men with half-naked, muscular bodies, and women with selfies in front of mirror where they display their bodies). Someone named Amuleth, who watched the program on YouTube, commented that the issue of unattraction was not realistic, that people who did not prefer muscled men and beautiful girls were only minorities and asked: “Are you looking for minorities? 😊” (Amuleth, 2020). Amuleth was not alone in this regard. After watching the show, many people told me how they were surprised by the results. They were expecting findings consistent with the persistent myth of the female love-male sex binary that we have been told for decades. But the stories in my research are different. They are not simply part of large aggregates but include lines of escape. As the following chapters will demonstrate, they are stories that do not refute the female love-male sex binary but move beyond it.

To summarize and conclude, by encouraging a different focus, affect theories might change the focus on online dating studies that center around the female love-male sex binary. An affective turn might help to transcend the binary logic embedded in the digital dating literature regarding heterosexual individuals in several ways. First, the conceptual difference between emotion and affect may help concentrate on what is/are neglected. Not only love and sex, but also affects beyond love and sex might gain attention. Chapter 4, for instance, will demonstrate how boredom is a dominant affect that moves individuals toward dating apps and challenges the sticky association that sex is, first and foremost, a male practice whereas love is predominantly a female one. Second, emphasizing environments (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 16), non-representational theories might lead to a focus on dating platforms, their algorithmic designs, profiles on the platforms, and their aesthetics as affective atmospheres (e.g., Ash, 2010b). How do dating platforms and profiles as “affective atmospheres” (Anderson, 2009) or “atmospheric attunements” (Stewart, 2011) influence individuals? In

addition, social and cultural factors⁷ are also important affective environments that influence users' motivations, decisions, and actions. While Chapter 4 will delve into the social, cultural, and affective factors that lead heterosexual individuals to use dating technologies, Chapter 5 will show how algorithmic design and aesthetics influence users' preferences and actions by creating particular affective atmospheres. Moreover, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate, the emphasis on thought-in-action in affect theories might help us understand how swiping is not already constituted but a bodily activity because what one sees on the screen does something to the body (Ash, 2009). Affect studies emphasize that images are affective, and experiencing an image is an embodied event (Latham & McCormack, 2009; Pink, 2011; Thrift, 2008). It is important to note that my aim is not to refute the female love-male sex binary but to draw a portrait beyond it by focusing on performances rather than statistical representations. Before delving into these performances, the next chapter will discuss how to study, analyze, and write about affect and affective practices.

This chapter discusses the problems within the heterosexual online dating literature and suggests an affective turn to this contemporary phenomenon. It offers affect as a theoretical framework since the concept draws attention to how people do not simply follow the lines but also make their own ways. While it focuses on the theoretical possibilities the notion of affect offers, the following chapter will concentrate on non-representational methodologies, discussing the methodological opportunities the concept proposes.

⁷ For example, some studies (Arvidsson, 2006; Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Henry-Waring & Barraket, 2004, 2008) attract attention to structural issues, such as overwhelming working life, increasing career and time pressures, and lack of leisure, that move working singles toward dating apps.

Chapter 3

DESIGNING THE ONLINE DATING RESEARCH: WHEN A FEMALE RESEARCHER STUDIES THE MORE- THAN-REPRESENTATIONAL

“Enough of words, let’s meet the world.”
Tim Ingold (2015, p. vii)

3.1 *More-than-representational methodologies*⁸

Affect theories do not introduce “a set of regulated steps to be taken towards the realization of some predetermined end” (Ingold, 2015, p. vii) but invite the researcher to be creative and experimental. Hence, there are no single but multiple more-than-representational methodologies (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Vannini, 2015). To design my research and make my own way within these methodologies, I followed the focuses affect theories encourage.

More-than-representational theories are primarily centered around the concept of movement. In this regard, affect scholars are first and foremost interested in worlds, environments, atmospheres, and compositions in which bodies find themselves and encounter with human and non-human things (Anderson, 2009; Ash, 2013; Stewart, 2011). This focus not only encourages a closer examination of the environment that moves individuals toward dating technologies (Chapter 4). It also paves the way for an understanding of dating platforms as idiosyncratic environments with distinct features, algorithms, interfaces, and templates that individuals are affected by and respond to

⁸ “Non-representational methodologies” has become an umbrella term for diverse work focusing on affects for the last two decades (Vannini, 2015). However, although the term non-representation refers to “performative representations” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 19) that are open to constant making, unmaking, and remaking, it might be confused with “anti-representation.” To avoid this negative connotation, I prefer to use “more-than-representational” (Lorimer, 2005) as the term highlights how the concept of affect “encourages more than a focus on orthodoxies of institutions and practices” (Berlant, 2011b, p. 53). It offers the opportunity to explore more-than-human, more-than-textual, multi-sensual worlds in which life takes shape and gains expression (Lorimer, 2005, p. 83-84).

(Chapters 5 and 6). Therefore, it is crucial to understand both the socio-cultural environment that leads individuals to use dating apps and the technological environment in which online dating practices occur. Whether online (Condie et al., 2018; Light et al., 2018) or physical (Paterson, 2009; Pink, 2007), walking is a common research technique that helps the researcher sense and understand atmospheres, compositions, worlds, and environments. As I will elaborate below, I walked through not only the participants' narratives to understand the atmosphere in which their lives take shape but also dating apps to observe the environment in which their online dating practices occur.

Second, the concept of movement attracts attention to thought-in-action. Affect theories underline that thoughts, imaginaries, ideas, desires, and feelings are more than static dispositions shaped by institutions, laws, rules, and norms. This crucial intervention suggests a closer examination of the practices where thoughts emerge and decisions are made. In other words, swiping as the contemporary mate selection practice deserves a focus beyond the female love-male sex binary, a focus on the affective atmosphere in which swiping occurs, and other different orienting forces involved in the practice. In this respect, the re-enactment technique (Pink, 2012; Pink & Mackley, 2014) and video as a research tool (Bates, 2014; Dant, 2004; Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002; Laurier & Philo, 2006a; Pink, 2008) are important methods to study practice. In addition to more-than-representational research techniques, affect theories make crucial interventions to data analysis and writing processes by emphasizing the more-than-textual and encouraging a descriptive writing technique.

Walking, re-enactment, video, body language, and descriptions have been very influential while designing my research. This chapter talks about these more-than-representational research techniques. In addition to the interview technique as the sine qua non of qualitative research, it introduces the walkthrough technique to study dating apps and their affective environments and the video re-enactment technique that provides a closer examination of swiping. It later discusses the challenges of conducting research during the pandemic and describes the recruitment, analysis, and writing processes. The chapter concludes with a discussion on reflexivity – the impact of my position as a researcher as well as gender on the participants and the effect of the participants' experiences on my personal understandings.

3.2 *Research design*

This study aims to understand Turkey's heterosexual online dating landscape. It asks why

heterosexual individuals use dating platforms, how they choose their potential partners, more generally, how dating technologies shape dating culture, dating practices, and intimate as well as social relationships. In other words, I focus on 1) the socio-cultural and technological factors that influence their motivations to use dating apps and 2) their mate selection, or swiping in e-dating language, and the socio-cultural, technological, and affective things involved in this process. Although they are interrelated, these focuses require a careful and closer examination. Hence, more-than-interview techniques, namely walkthrough and video re-enactment, must be at play.

3.2.1 Studying an App and Its World: Walkthrough

Studying apps and their design is crucial as today, people overwhelmingly connect with each other, orient within their habitat, and pass their almost entire time with apps (Matviyenko, 2014, p. 1). With their distinctive design, including algorithms, templates, features, and interfaces, apps generate a sense of attachment. In this regard, they are affective small pieces of software (Dean, 2015, p. 234). The more-than-representational approach paves the way for understanding dating apps as affective environments. Bodies move within as well as are moved by these worlds. Understanding the technological factors that influence heterosexual individuals' motivations and mate choices requires not only an analysis of the app they use but also a comparison of different apps. Comparison is needed as apps differ in design (templates, algorithms, and features); hence, they have different effects on users. What is more, they are not only technological but also cultural objects. As techno-cultural artifacts, apps shape and are shaped by the cultural contexts in which they are used.

Since walking is a common and crucial technique used for an examination of atmospheres and environments (e.g., Condie et al., 2018; Paterson, 2009; Pink, 2007), I used the walkthrough technique suggested by Light, Burgess, and Duguay (2018) to understand the effects of dating technologies. The method is “a way of engaging directly with an app’s interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences” (p. 882). It comprises two parts. The first part draws attention to pivotal aspects of the apps’ content “for analysis in conjunction with [their] technological architecture” (p. 889). In this part, I looked at a) app-generated materials gathered from websites and blogs, b) media coverage and ancillary media such as discussions on *Ekşi Sözlük* (one of the popular urban dictionaries in the Turkish cyberspace), and c) app store descriptions to understand their visions, operating models, and governance. The second part is the technical walkthrough, which means

“engaging with the app interface, working through screens, tapping buttons, and exploring menus” (p. 891). From a user’s position, the researcher applies an analytical eye to a) user interface arrangement: the placement of buttons and menus; b) functions and features: pop-up windows, compulsory fields, and requests made by the app; c) textual content and tone: the order of drop-down menu options, the categories available; and d) symbolic representation: the look and feel of the app (p. 891-892).

Following these steps, I walked through and compared two algorithmically different dating apps to understand the influence of technological design and its aesthetics on users’ preferences and practices. In contrast to other studies that compare Tinder with its “feminist” counterpart Bumble (MacLeod & McArthur, 2018; Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2021), I chose Tinder and OkCupid as research objects for three reasons. First, they are the products of the same company named Match Group and the most popular dating apps in the market both globally (Jansen & Beaton, 2020) and locally (Vida Select, n.d.). Second, they are algorithmically very different from each other. As Chapter 5 will delve into, Tinder is basically an image-centered app that uses the phone’s GPS functionalities to locate potential matches. In contrast, OkCupid depends more on the textual data that generally comes from the questions to which users respond to calculate the best matches. Third, their cultural meanings also differ. Tinder is primarily seen as a hookup app both globally (Grigoriadis, 2014; Sales, 2015) and locally (Aba, 2020; Arcaç & Öztürk, 2020; Mevzu, 2020). In contrast, OkCupid is mainly associated with finding (true) love, meaningful connections, and serious relationships globally and locally (Aba, 2020; Ekşi Sözlük, 2020; Google Play, n.d.; Jacobson, n.d.; Poulsen, 2014). While observing the app-generated and media materials since September 2019, I downloaded free versions of Tinder (11.24.0) and OkCupid (45.3.0) on my Android smartphone and began the technical walkthrough on September 30, 2020.⁹

3.2.2 *Old but Gold: Interview*

Interviews are sine qua non of qualitative research as they help the researcher understand, explain, and generate in-depth information about the phenomenon, individual motives, desires, goals, actions, opinions, and experiences. Since there is no such thing called a full-structured interview, I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews between October 2020 and January 2021. Semi-structured interviews allow “much more leeway for following up on

⁹ Apps are very challenging objects to study as they are constantly updated. For instance, there were no app-generated materials of Tinder and OkCupid specific to Turkey during research. However, on March 2, 2021, OkCupid introduced its Turkish-language interface after the fieldwork and created a Turkish Instagram account to produce cultural-specific materials.

whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewee has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 1002).

The interviews, which lasted between 18 and 79 minutes, were composed of three sessions. First, I asked questions regarding a) their everyday lives in general, how they spend their days, and where they mostly spend their leisure time; b) why people generally prefer dating technologies, the interviewees’ motivations to use them, why they specifically prefer Tinder and/or OkCupid, how they engage with the app(s), how they use and customize the features; and c) the profiles they often encounter and their partner preferences. In the second part, I used the re-enactment technique, which is elaborated below, and focused on their swiping practices to observe the mate selection process. After looking at five to ten profiles, we talked about what happens after a match is made and what kind of situations or events the interviewees find themselves in after matching. Finally, I concluded the interviews with questions regarding a) the apps’ influence on their lives as well as the society, b) the meaning of these apps for them, c) their definitions of the worlds these apps have created, and d) whether there is a social stigma around online dating and, if yes, whether it has an impact on them. What is innovative about this old-but-gold research technique is the video re-enactment part.

3.2.3 When a Practice Is Under Study: Video re-enactment

The video re-enactment technique (Pink, 2012; Pink & Mackley, 2014) aims to understand how a practice is performed. It is a combination of video recording and participant reflection, which closely examines the practice under study. In this session, I asked the interviewees to go online, swipe a few profiles, and describe a) whom they are looking at, what they look at first, what is un/attracting and un/interesting about what they see; b) what they later pay attention to, what is written on the profile, and what they feel about the written text; c) how they feel about the profile generally, their impression regarding it; and d) what they decide to do with the profile and why. Video recording of the performance under study is crucial as video provides multiple layers of data about the practice (Harris, 2016; Heath et al., 2010). In other words, video offers the opportunity to observe multiple dimensions of a practice (Ash, 2009; Bailliard, 2015; Latham & McCormack, 2009; Laurier & Philo, 2006b; Nolan, Paatsch, & Scull, 2018) – in this case, the context, the environment in which mate selection takes place, other things such as the affectivity of image and text involved in swiping, and the interviewees’ interactions with them.

Of course, there are several numerous challenges to video use: relatively high costs, lack of protocols (lack of consensus regarding how to perform video research), lack of rules regarding the analysis of video data, bias (the influence of the camera's presence on the participant's behavior), and dissemination (the problem of displaying the video data in dissertations, article, essays, etc.) (Bailliard, 2015). To overcome (some of) these challenges, many scholars suggest a) transcribing the interview comprehensively, writing down the words as well as the body language, gestures, and silences, and b) describing all the details, including the atmosphere that might affect the participant. In this sense, Simpson (2011) recommends that taking field notes or (audio-)diary is crucial to capture the affects in the atmosphere after the interview and during the data review and analysis process. In addition, for ethical concerns, profiles and users should be anonymized; thus, screenshots from the video interview should either not show or should blur the participants' faces (Dant, 2004; Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002; Pink & Mackley, 2014; Race, 2015). All these studies suggest recommendations for research conducted in physical settings. What happens when the research is conducted online? More specifically, what happens when the research *must* be conducted online due to a global health crisis?

3.3 *Research in a Time of Pandemic*

In March 2020, when the ethics committee approved my research (2020.074.IRB3.030), when I was about to start recruiting and scheduling the interviews, the government announced the first coronavirus case in the country and declared a national lockdown as a caution. At first, I was naively hopeful, thinking that the pandemic would end in a couple of months, so I delayed the interviews to September 2020. As the number of cases and deaths were accelerating, it seemed that we would be locked down for one more year. Therefore, considering all the risks, I decided to conduct my research online rather than face-to-face.

I chose Zoom as an interview platform for two reasons. First, Zoom provides the user both an audio-visual recording and an audio-only recording. It also allows for pinning the video on whomever the meeting organizer wants. Second, as many individuals who worked from home generally organized their meetings on Zoom during the lockdown, they became accustomed to the platform. Thus, I did not generally need to explain how to use it. Of course, Zoom interviews had both pros and cons. To begin with the latter, I often faced technical problems like unstable Internet connections that led the display and sound to freeze. In addition, video recordings offered the opportunity to observe merely the face and

facial expressions – gestures, mimics, and tone of voice. I could neither look at the profiles simultaneously with the interviewees nor observe their body language. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate, the findings challenge the structural arguments mentioned in the previous chapter. What is more, I expected the participants to feel uncomfortable with the presence of the camera, the recording, and talking about intimate issues via Zoom, but surprisingly, they were, or seemed, very comfortable. This comfort might derive from the opportunities that Zoom has provided. For instance, thanks to Zoom, the interviewees participated from home, the most comfortable place. They also chose the perfect time for the interview. They all participated in the interviews when they were alone at home. Furthermore, as users of smartphones or other technological devices, they were familiar with the camera. The webcam or smartphone camera seemed invisible. To put it differently, if I conducted face-to-face interviews, the participants would be more likely to be uncomfortable with the presence of a physical camera.

3.4 Recruitment

I created four accounts as a researcher on both Tinder and OkCupid (two male and two female profiles) to reach potential participants (Figure 3.1). With the same picture and text, these profiles briefly introduced the researcher as well as the study and invited those interested in the research to contact me via e-mail: “I am a Ph.D. student at Koç University. I study online dating culture in Turkey. I want to interview people online and talk about dating apps, user experiences, the profiles users mostly encounter, and users’ swiping or mate selection practices. If you want to participate in the interviews and contribute to the research, please send me an e-mail to [the e-mail address]. Thank you.” In addition, the screenshots of these profiles were posted on different social media platforms, namely Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, by friends, friends of friends, and the participants. Among those who contacted me, I interviewed the ones who gave consent to participate after being well-informed about the process.

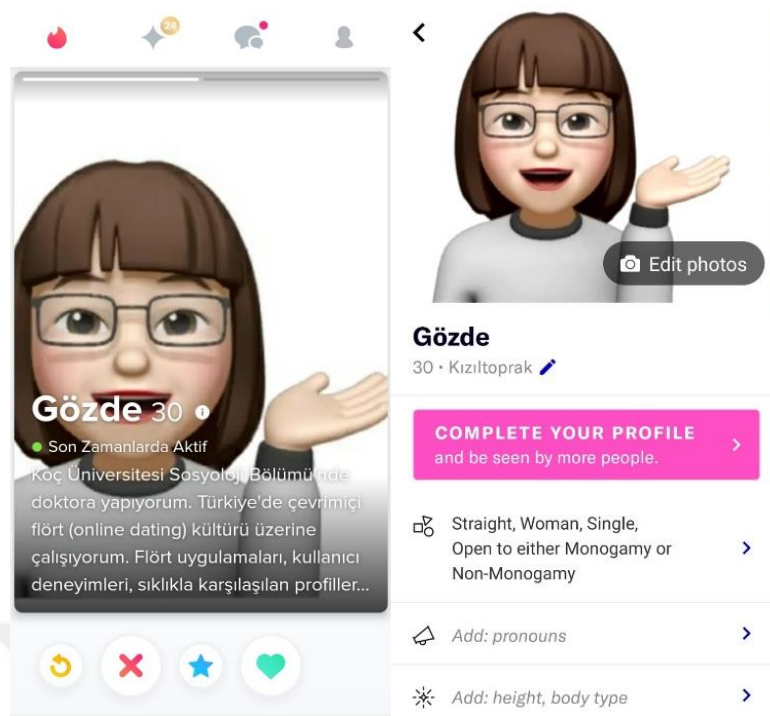


Figure 3.1: My Tinder and OkCupid profiles

Recruitment is a crucial and challenging process in qualitative research for several reasons. First, personal characteristics such as shyness or previous experiences might have a role in individuals' reluctance to participate in the study (Clark, 2010; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Scott et al., 2012). Second, some groups, such as wealthy, powerful, or disadvantaged populations, are harder to reach than others (Adler & Adler, 2003; Anthony & Danaher, 2016; Barratt & Maddox, 2016). For instance, Marland and Esselment (2019) draw attention to the difficulty of acquiring an interview with a politician while Price (2005), interested in the retirement experiences of women, underlines the challenges to recruiting minority and rural women. Third, research topics, especially sensitive subjects, affect peoples' participation (Morse, 2001; Renzetti & Lee, 1993), and gender might also play a role in participating in research with particular topics (Butera, 2006). For example, Butera (2006) faced recruitment problems in her study on the experience of friendship across gender and the life course as men were considerably reluctant to participate due to several possible reasons, such as lack of time and the topic, friendship, which is mainly attached to femininity, and the researcher's gender.

I faced similar challenges during recruitment. As soon as I created the accounts and started swiping at the end of September 2020, I received tens of messages demonstrating the individuals' willingness to participate in the research. However, many of them refrained from participating as they learned about the interview process and video recording. It was justifiable that they could not trust me, a stranger, who would record them, and they wanted

to remain anonymous. This is one of the major issues in qualitative research – building trust (Dibartolo & McCrone, 2003; Steinke, 2004). To gain their confidence, I amplified the research process, explained it step by step, including the interview, analysis, writing, and publishing processes, and emphasized how I would protect their privacy. Some of them agreed to participate, and we scheduled a Zoom meeting.

What is more, I mainly received messages from men interested in the study while I had difficulty reaching potential female interviewees. Women were considerably harder to recruit than men. Hence, two months later, when I completed a few interviews, there was a discrepancy between male and female participants. To overcome this gender inequality and reach more women, I re-shared the profiles on social media platforms in December 2020 and January 2021, underlining the need for female participants. For example, most male participants (N=17) saw the research on the apps while only one female participant reached me via these platforms. Others participated in the study either after seeing the screenshots of the profiles shared on different social media platforms or after other participants had recommended it. In other words, I reached the majority of female participants and a few male interviewees via friends, friends of friends, and some participants (for more detail, see Table 1). This gendered difference in recruitment points to three crucial facts. First, trust is the key factor that influences participation. As my study shows, a sponsor or a “gatekeeper,” the person that advertises the research (Butera, 2006; Singleton, 2003), has an essential role in building trust and participation. Second, trust becomes more important, so recruitment becomes more challenging when the research focuses on private, sensitive, or intimate topics and includes video recording. Individuals are generally reluctant to take part in these studies. Third, gender might play a greater role in this topic-dependent reluctance as women were harder to recruit than men in my research.

In the end, I interviewed 40 heterosexual individuals (Appendix A); 22 men (six Tinderers, eight OkCupiders, and eight men who use both) and 18 women (five Tinderers, 12 OkCupiders, and one woman who uses both). Although they come from different age groups (from 22 to 51), they share a middle-class background. They all have at least college degrees. Some were unemployed due to the pandemic while most were working at that time. The sample includes graduate students, white-collar people working in a corporate firm, self-employed individuals, employees in a school or an NGO, journalists, actresses, and freelancers. The majority (N=31) live in Istanbul, followed by Ankara (N=4), Çorlu (N=2), İzmir (N=1), Adana (N=1), and Trabzon (N=1). Some users were new at that time while others were using them for years. As Chapter 5 will elaborate on, there is a significant

relationship between male participants and paid subscriptions. To put it differently, only one woman in the sample told me that she had used OkCupid Premium once but later passed to the free version while six male participants were paid subscribers of Tinder and/or OkCupid. Last but not least, the participants had different motivations. The majority were then using the apps to look for a short or long-term partner. One participant was using them with her fiancé, whom she had met on OkCupid, to find a third partner that would fulfill their sexual desires while a male participant, having an open relationship, was using OkCupid to have different sexual experiences. Other motivations were adjusting to a foreign city and talking to people around the world. I also interviewed a woman who used Tinder a long time ago and married the man she had met on Tinder almost three years ago. For ethical concerns, I replaced the participants' names with pseudonyms and used abbreviations for the profiles.

3.5 *Analysis and Writing*

The interview days were intense. I interviewed three individuals in a day, taking notes regarding my observations and what I paid attention to after each interview. After I completed the interviews, I spent 40 days transcribing 40 interviews. First, listening to the audio-visual recordings, I transcribed them word by word, taking notes of all the things that drew my attention, such as a word, phrase, metaphor, or motif repeating in the narratives. Then, I re-transcribed them by watching the video records and added the participants' body language (gestures, facial expressions, mimics) and their changing tone of voice, taking notes of the repeating bodily reactions. In this process, I followed both feminist and affective research techniques, emphasizing the importance of the interviewees' gestures, mimics, and silences (Ash, 2010a; DeVault, 1990; Ingold, 2015; MacLure, 2011; Mazzei, 2011; Patchett, 2014). That is, I paid attention to a) when and why the participant has remained silent, what this silence has meant, b) when and why the gesture has occurred, what it has meant, c) whether there have been differences among the participants in terms of gesture and silence, if so, what might be the reason(s), what these differences have meant, and finally d) what kind of metaphors, motifs, and/or similes the participants have used, when, in which context, and why they have used them. These questions were especially crucial for the analysis of the participants' swiping practices.

I later walked through the transcriptions and my fieldnotes, identifying the prevalent themes and subthemes – motivation (boredom, lack of time, lack of a physical space, changing norms), human-app interaction (app features, social stigma/cultural meaning,

Tinder vs. OkCupid), mate preferences (standard profiles, naturality), swiping (mood, algorithms, changing decisions, affectivity of text and/or image), and technological impact (wasting). I uploaded the interviews to MAXQDA and divided the quotes according to these themes. I examined each theme separately and later together. The concepts and the tone of the narratives were already speaking for themselves. My duty was simply to gather these separate quotes under distinctive concepts and write them. In other words, I gathered what people know, knowledge from below that is local, regional, and differential (Foucault, 2003, p. 7-8).

Another challenge in qualitative research is related to the writing process because, as Brinkmann highlights, “the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation over the interviewee’s statements” (2017, p. 1017). Gathering this knowledge from below brings the risk of exercising power over the participant. To avoid this domination and silencing the interviewees’ voices, the affective approach encourages using direct quotes, letting the participants speak for themselves, trying new ways of highlighting their voices, and engaging in creative ways (e.g., Latham, 2003; Vannini, 2015). In this regard, more-than-representational methodologies are writing techniques focusing on descriptions (Stewart, 2015; Vannini, 2015). It is a way of writing that describes the affective environment in which the narrative emerges, the body language (gestures and tone of voice) that accompanies the narrative, and the tone or atmosphere of the narrative rather than jumping into a theoretical analysis and explanation. Inspired by affect scholars (Berlant, 2011b; Biehl, 2005; Ngai, 2005; Stewart, 2007), I adopted a writing method whose goal is to turn the cold language of academia full of passive voice into a moving language, an active voice by encouraging sensuous descriptions. Last but not least, writing my feelings and thoughts changing with the participants’ experiences is as important as giving voice to the participant since the encounter with the participants made me realize my position as a researcher, my gender, and my biases regarding online dating.

3.6 Reflexivity: Being not simply a researcher but a female and biased researcher

Conducting research is far more complex than simply asking open-ended questions and meaning-making from them, requiring a heightened self-awareness about the researcher’s intersectional background (Arendell, 1997, p. 342; Sankar & Gubrium, 1994, p. xi).

Background here means “family background,” as Sara Ahmed defines in *Queer Phenomenology*, referring “not just to the past of an individual but also to other kinds of

histories, which shape an individual's arrival into the world" (2006, p. 38). Considering one's intersectional background and its relation to the research elicits questions of reflexivity: What does the researcher's class, gender, ethnicity, race, personal understandings, beliefs, and worldviews mean for the research process? What is the relationship between the researcher and researched? What are the power dynamics between them? More specifically, what is the power dynamics when the researcher is a woman? Does the power imbalance shift? Or is the conventional gender hierarchy maintained or re-established during the research? In these dynamics, are there other variations such as race, ethnicity, and class? If so, how? These are the questions I engaged in during my research. However, a sense of self-awareness mainly arises through interaction. In other words, I was not simply self-aware but *made* aware of myself in terms of researcher position, gender, and biases.

Studies generally draw attention to the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (Brinkmann, 2017; Holland & Ramazanoğlu, 1994; Kvale, 1996). It almost goes without saying that the researcher's position is predominant as s/he is the dominant figure who asks questions, collects the data, interprets, and writes on it, hence, the ultimate knowledge-producer. Thus, a certain closeness and intimacy must be created so that the participants do not feel uncomfortable or the researcher's power over themselves while telling their experiences. To create such an atmosphere, the researcher must build a relationship with the researched, which is neither formal nor hierarchical (Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012, p. 411). I developed some strategies to build such a relationship and reduce the dominance of my position as a researcher. First, I re-introduced myself and the research to the participant before the interview. I underlined that there is no such thing called as "the right answer," telling my interest in their personal experiences and my enthusiasm for learning about the online dating phenomenon. I emphasized that they were not obliged to respond to all the questions and their right to end the interview whenever they wanted. I also tried to show my "lack" of expertise on the issue by specifically asking about the apps and their functions. That is, I asked them how these technologies operate, what kind of places they are, etc. I was deliberately taking notes to show the significance of what they were telling at those moments when they were talking not about themselves but the profiles. Still, there were moments when I felt their hesitations while they were responding to the questions. In those moments, I re-highlighted that there was no right or wrong answer but multiple experiences, ideas, goals, and desires that would lead me to find out about the online dating world. In addition, I sometimes felt the power of social stigma over the participants. For example, some participants were complaining about the reactions they

received from their close circles. To avoid any perception of me as a biased researcher, I supported them by highlighting how using dating technologies is a common and ordinary way to meet people and showing examples from my own close circle, those that were using then, those who formed a couple with or married people that they had met on a dating app.

In addition to the researcher's authority, many articles are devoted to showing the power dynamics between the female researcher and the male participant, that is, the impact of gender on the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Female researchers reveal considerable differences between interviewing men and women (Arendell, 1997; Kosygina, 2005; Pini, 2005), between gaining access to potential male and female participants (Şentürk, 2016), the challenges they face in rural or male-dominated settings (Gill & Maclean, 2002; Gurney, 1985; Pini, 2005), and the vulnerability of female researchers in research with sensitive topics (Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012). Having similar experiences with these female researchers, I became more visible to myself as a female (researcher) in both the processes of recruitment and interview.

During recruitment, I received various messages from men via e-mail, Tinder, and OkCupid. They were mainly flirtatious, approaching me not as a researcher but as a potential date: "What if we start to like each other very much and be with each other? Very dangerous [smiling emoji]," "So you're saying we're not going to have sex? [smiling emoji]." I received much more uncomfortable messages than these examples on Tinder and OkCupid. To avoid them, I revised my self-summary in both apps and added, "I am here only for research interests" as a first sentence. However, this did not help. I was still receiving these kinds of messages; hence, at one point, I started to ignore them. The male participants must have paid attention to this phrase as many of them gave it as an example of how online dating is a male-dominated place where some men become aggressive toward women. These messages demonstrate how a study on online dating conducted by a female researcher produces sexual connotations for some men. On the other hand, it has other connotations since I also received aggressive messages such as "You just boil the ocean [emoji laughing with tears]," "Now even people's lives are measured with parameters. Sick of this f**king shit." In this regard, studying an intimate phenomenon like online dating meant crossing the line for some. And lastly, I received an e-mail that was instructing me on how to conduct research:

Hi,

I can contribute to your research, but this cannot be done online. You only obtain superficial information online, and your research will remain average [*vasat*] because I don't think people will take risks and talk about their personal issues in an online environment.

If your goal is to conduct good research or thesis, I advise you to meet me or other test subjects

[denek] face to face, take notes without tape recording, and keep the names anonymous.

Good day.

It was a typical example of mansplaining. As a portmanteau of man and explain, the term is used by women to describe men who speak to women in a patronizing way that assumes women's lack of knowledge regarding the spoken issue (Bridges, 2017). The man was clearly assuming that I did not know how to conduct research. These kinds of attitudes do not simply derive from the online space, which provides the "opportunity" to harass, attack, scam, and lynch people in addition to meeting new people, finding a date, or connecting to friends and family. Many female researchers have similar experiences in physical settings while recruiting and interviewing men. Some of them experienced mansplaining by being instructed on how to operate an interview (Arendell, 1997) or exposed to unnecessary, unrelated, and uninvited details (Flanigan, 2021) while some received sexual as well as aggressive comments during the interviews (Arendell, 1997; Pini, 2005; Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012). Hence, these attitudes are first and foremost masculine performances since, as these female researchers also highlighted, I never received such messages or actions from women. These individuals' practices of masculinity made me more aware of myself as a gendered being.

However, I must note that I was not exposed to such masculine performances while interviewing. The participants were very kind and supportive – except, one of the male participants, who was using the app for hooking up, e-mailed me, after the interview, at 2 a.m., telling me how beautiful I was and asking me to hook up. This does not necessarily mean that gender was absent in the interviews. My gender has a contradictory role in my relationship with the participants. Despite the strategies I mentioned above, some interviews occurred in a tense atmosphere as I could overtly sense the participant's hesitation while answering the questions. The tense atmosphere or hesitation I felt and the heightened self-awareness about my position as a researcher are primarily associated with interviewing male participants. Their hesitations might derive from the fact that they would be careful not to express sexist or misogynist sentiments, even if they held them, to offend me. The male participants mostly seemed cautious of their remarks by which I might be offended – except one participant, who mostly denigrated women by defining them as gold diggers. Like many other female researchers (Arendell, 1987; McKee & O'Brien, 1983), I had to absorb his sexist and misogynist comments. On the other hand, the female participants were much more comfortable talking to me. This is unsurprising as their comfort is very much related to my gender and the perception that I, as a woman, might share similar social experiences (Finch, 1984). These examples demonstrate the contradictory role played by gender in the power

dynamics between the researcher and the researched. In some cases, gender shifts the power imbalance between them, and the conventional gender hierarchy is maintained whereas in other cases, gender reinforces the researcher's power over the researched.

Finally, hearing about the participants' experiences made me aware of my personal understandings, beliefs, and biases. I realized how much the dominant discourses on online dating shaped my imaginaries, thoughts, and feelings regarding dating technologies, and I faced the symbolic power of these discourses over me. I sensed this symbolic power over others, as well. Affected by these dominant discourses, many people I talked about my research had negative feelings towards dating apps, thinking that dating and intimacy have been commodified since Tinder. These individuals and I expected the participants' stories to reproduce the arguments regarding the commodification of intimacy and the banalization of sex. On the contrary, they drew a portrait of heterosexual online dating as more complex than this too simplified and extreme one. In this respect, this thesis attempts to challenge the biases mainly constructed by these dominant discourses as the following chapters that focus on different parts of the participants' stories present a more complex world beyond the simple online dating market.

Chapter 4

“*SIKINTI VAR*”:¹⁰ THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORDINARY LIFE, PEOPLE, AND DATING APPS

“*El mahkûm*” (must needs)
Serkan, an interviewee

4.1 What *Sıkıntı* Proposes

Boredom is a very “complex, dynamic, and ambivalent phenomenon” (Gardiner & Haladyn, 2017, p. 9). It is a controversial concept because it is mostly not regarded as an emotion with a specific definition. Boredom is difficult to define. It sometimes appears as a mood or a long-term feeling with no object (Gardiner, 2014; Heidegger, 1995; Kierkegaard, 2004; Svendsen, 2008). Sometimes it becomes a sense of emptiness, which involves feelings such as disgust, melancholia, and depression (Toohey, 2012), or a feeling of many things instead of a specific emotion like anger, shame, or joy (Barbalet, 1999). What these conceptual differences agree on, however, is that boredom is, first and foremost, a modern concept. However, boredom appears in different terms before modernity. Seneca, for instance, writes about *taedium vitae* (tiredness of life) in “Tranquility of Mind” (Svendsen, 2008, p. 21), or *acedia* (indifference or apathy) is a Greek word that was first used to describe the monkish malaise by the early Christian hermit Evagrius and many clerics that followed him in the fourth century (Toohey, 2012, p. 108). These terms were later replaced with melancholia and depression to describe. All these terms described existential boredom (a mood or a feeling state when the world as such is boring, an inability to find life as a whole interesting). Existential boredom was primarily associated, or in Ahmed’s terms (2014) stuck to a specific social class, namely the aristocracy, priests, monks, etc. The word boredom appeared in eighteenth-century England to define situational boredom (a feeling of being bored by something specific or when there is

¹⁰ A word-for-word translation would be “There is a problem or issue.” However, “*Sıkıntı var*” connotes more “We have a situation,” as the police conventionally say.

nothing to do). It became not a specific concept used by a particular social class but a very democratic term used by everyone: “I’m bored.”

Boredom is a modern concept because the invention of the word is particularly associated with modernization’s idiosyncratic processes, namely secularization, individualism, bureaucratization, and rationalization (Auerbach, 2005; Bennett, 2001; Healy, 1984; Highmore, 2001; Spacks, 1995). Due to these processes, everyday life became standardized, monotonous, and divided into routines (Anderson, 2004; Fromm, 2008; Gardiner, 2012, 2014; Highmore, 2001). Continuous technological developments make time faster and faster, day by day, bombarded with information, stimuli, and images. In this rapid, overwhelming, monotonous modern world, boredom stills time, slows the fast flow of everyday life, and temporarily detaches individuals from the thing that is boring. To put it differently, it is an affective reaction to monotony (Auerbach, 2005; Goodstein, 2005; Spacks, 1995), overload information (Klapp, 1986; Kracauer, 2011; Ringmar, 2017; Simmel, 2002), and technology (Hand, 2017; Henry, 2012; Johnsen, 2016). In contrast to ennui and acedia, boredom is democratic. Anyone can be bored by something specific when there is nothing to do, or bored with life now because boredom is “the affective texture of modern everyday life” (Anderson, 2004, p. 739; O’Neill, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). It is no longer metaphysical but quotidian.

Boredom is not simply a modern concept but also an English one. Invented by the Anglo-American emotional vocabulary, the term remains limited to embracing meanings, attachments, and experiences in other cultural contexts. Thus, this chapter prefers to follow *sıkıntı* rather than boredom. The latter is limited to being bored by boring things and being bored with life. *Sıkıntı*, on the other hand, is more than boredom – whether it is situational or existential. According to Turkish Language Association (TLA) (n.d.a), it refers to a) mental exhaustion, rigor, and suffering that derive from idleness, monotony, tedium, etc.; b) effective and constant exhaustion, the suffering caused by a disorder or a mess; c) financial difficulty caused by poverty and lack of money; d) absentmindedness (the state of being absent, scarcity); and e) issue, matter, syndrome, problem. The word comes from the origin *sık*, which points to a physical and spatial experience of *sıkışmışlık* (being stuck or trapped in) and a temporality that alludes to repetition (Kuryel, 2020, p. 12). *Sıkıntı* transcends the Anglo-American word’s limited world of meaning. It is more than a modern affect that derives from standardization, routinization, monotony, and overstimulation. It is also related to disorder, mess, problem, and financial difficulty (*geçim sıkıntısı*), which is based on class inequality. To put it differently, coming from the word *sık*, *sıkıntı* connotes order as well as disorder, physical, spatial, and

symbolic borders, and structures.

This chapter uses *sıkıntı* as an analytical tool to understand the social and affective factors leading to the use of dating apps in the Turkish setting because the term dominates the atmosphere of the participants' narratives. It is the "qualifying aura" (Böhme, 2006) or the "tone" (Ngai, 2005) in their narratives where it emerges as both problem, boredom (*can sıkıntısı*), and physical as well as spatial entrapment (*sıkışmışlık*). To put it differently, the participants do not simply use dating apps to alleviate boredom, but they are, as I demonstrate below, directed toward or forced to use them because physical interaction with new people is now *sıkıntı* (problem). Hence, focusing on *sıkıntı* as both a concept and an affect provides more than a focus on users' motivations. It also offers the opportunity to understand and describe the social and affective atmosphere of Turkey's everyday life. In a sense, using *sıkıntı* as an analytical tool, this chapter explains the classical question posed by Sherry Turkle (2011): Why do people expect more from technology and less from each other (and culture)?

The first part focuses on *sıkıntı* as a problem, how meeting new people in physical settings becomes a problem (*tanışma sıkıntısı*). It describes how after college, a season of life when time and space are the most abundant, individuals find themselves in a confined space where physical interaction with new faces becomes almost impossible. Physical and spatial entrapment goes along with 24/7 capitalism, where individuals lack the free time to meet someone new, and the changes in cultural norms regarding flirting and dating due to appification. The second part focuses on *can sıkıntısı* and discusses how the monotonous, repetitive, and hence *sıkıcı* (boring) flow of life moves them towards dating platforms. Dating apps and their game-like feature of swiping temporarily suspend boredom and interrupt the boring routine life. The final part discusses the paradox of dating technologies in a dialogue with Mark Fisher, who argues that no one is bored but everything is boring. It demonstrates how individuals who use dating apps to solve the problem of physical interaction are, in the end, left with another problem and how dating apps as products of entertainment produce boredom. Although these technologies offer the opportunity to meet someone new, they pave the way for no more than stillborn meetings that users get bored with.

4.2 *Sıkıntı as a Problem: When Physical Interaction Fades Away or Is at the Very Least*

The meaning of *sıkıntı* as a problem is very recent. It was first used in the last decade and rapidly embraced. The term was first coined, it is said, by a former football player named Seren Yalçın during commenting on the matches in a TV program in 2010: "There is *sıkıntı*

with Fenerbahçe's wing defense." (Bora, 2018, p. 35). As other football commentators and coaches quickly followed him, *sıkıntı* as a problem became a popular term in ordinary language. Many individuals started to use "*Sıkıntı yok*" (no problem) rather than "*Önemli değil*" (not at all) to reply to "Thank you" and/or "Sorry." Even political figures quickly embraced the popular term. President Erdoğan, for instance, began to use the word very often: "We still have some *sıkıntı* regarding our social and cultural hegemony," "We should not go through *sıkıntı* because of the inflation" (Bora, 2018, pp. 33-34). The term was used both officially and daily so often that TLA could not resist and added it as a figurative meaning to the Turkish dictionary. It became one of Turkey's terms of the 2010s (Bora, 2018). This part follows this recent and popular meaning to demonstrate the social and cultural issues that direct heterosexual individuals to dating apps to find a short or long-term partner. The participants do not specifically use the word, but their experiences and feelings of physical and spatial entrapment underline that there is *sıkıntı*. In other words, they use dating technologies because there is a significant problem with meeting someone physically.

Meeting someone as a potential short or long-term partner in physical settings appears as *sıkıntı* in three different ways. The first is related to the flow of life itself. The participants and I first talked about their life in general, their working life, leisure time, and how they spend their days. They later told me how they started to use Tinder and/or OkCupid. All the interviewees from a middle-class background¹¹ told me the same story:

College is a place where people can make friends very easily. But when I started to work, my social circle dwindled down and down and down and down. I also broke up with my girlfriend then. So, I began to use Tinder. ... The benefit of Tinder for me is that I can meet a variety of people. (Berk, the 33-year-old architect using Tinder for five years)

After graduation, the chance to meet new people (stops for taking a breath) decreases because you're stuck in a very limited circle. I mean, if you work, you are with coworkers, your old close friends, and your family. You rarely get a chance to meet new people. ... After a certain age and time, social circle narrows, so that's why I find dating apps necessary and positive. (İlke, the 27-year-old graduate student who also works in an NGO, using OkCupid)

We are perpetually working from Monday to Friday. We see the same people in the office. If your office is a home office, like in my case, then you see NO¹² people, none. You spend your weekend with family and friends. Then, how and where am I supposed to meet someone new? (Gizem, the 30-year-old Tinder user who owns a startup and works with an international company)

Five days, we're busy with work, nine-to-six. Well, it's the private sector, so we're busy. In work hours, we don't have many opportunities to move. We don't do anything except work. ... Because we're

¹¹ The emphasis on their class background is crucial as these are the stories of middle-class heterosexual dating app users.

¹² I deliberately used the upper case to point out their emphasizing tone of voice when the interviewee was saying the word.

PERPETUALLY in a busy working environment, we have difficulty going into new social circles. Online dating provides convenience, and we want that. (Talat, the 34-year-old OkCupid user who first used Tinder)

As the narratives show, college is a season of life when time and space are the most abundant. It provides numerous places to explore, such as clubs, activities, courses, etc., where one can meet, talk, and socialize with various people. When college ends, these opportunities mostly end along with it. When individuals graduate and start working, they pass into a season of life when time and space are more repetitive and confined. They generally spend one-third of their day at work with co-workers while socializing with family and friends in leisure. Seeing new faces becomes difficult in this life stage. Hence, it is no surprise that there is a sense of physical and spatial entrapment (*sıkışmışlık*) in the participants' narratives. This is where *tanışma sıkıntısı* arises. Physical interaction with new faces becomes a problem when individuals pass from an abundant environment to a confined space. However, to use Deleuzian terms, the ordinary is not simply a constrained milieu with material and symbolic boundaries but a porous zone where people try to find their way to pursue their needs, desires, and curiosities (Berlant, 2011b, p. 53). They "try to find room to breathe beneath social constraints" (Biehl & Locke, 2010, p. 323). As the following chapter will discuss in detail, dating apps are one of the tools to make one's way because they offer the opportunity to meet a variety of people and to transcend the physical and spatial borders of life – to some extent.

Although this physical and spatial entrapment is mainly the transcultural result of modern life, it takes a cultural shape. What strikes me in the participants' narratives is that not only those who live in the towns come to Istanbul to socialize but also those who live in the city spend their time in certain places. In other words, while listening to their stories, I realized that almost all of them socialize in the same few areas within the city where they are all stuck. This is not a transcultural physical and spatial *sıkışmışlık*, but a very local, cultural one. Nefis is a 43-year-old white-collar woman currently unemployed due to the pandemic. She lives in a town named Çorlu, 120 km from Istanbul, an industrial town where many blue and white-collar people inhabit. "How do you generally spend your time in weekdays and weekends," I asked her. She described how her life flows:

I was working before the pandemic, so I was just going to work and coming home on weekdays. This was the only thing to do, I mean, except go shopping. On weekends, if it's possible, I meet my friends. Well, they live in Istanbul, a little far from me. So, I go to Istanbul to meet them. Many of my friends here are married. They have kids and different jobs. I have friends who work on weekends. That's why I give priority to time when my friends are available and postpone other things like cleaning the house (smiling). I mean, my focus was as such: Because I don't have a room where I can be myself and talk to people in my working environment, I get an urge to satisfy that need on weekends. ... I look at the

community here. There are people who wake up at 6 am, get on the shuttle at 7 am, and get off it at 7 pm. They are TIRED, so exhausted that they can't have the energy to talk to someone because of the working environment. So they can't meet anyone. Usually, I don't have a chance to meet someone here because nobody goes to a café. Everybody WORKS. We can't meet new people. ... I could only find that environment online because you can talk to or message someone anytime there. I mean, I can't meet someone in my kitchen while sitting here [at home]. ... But STILL, I'd like to meet people naturally [rather than online].

Her experience of physical and spatial sıkışmışlık intensely dominates her narrative. Unlike Istanbul, Çorlu does not have much to offer regarding social activities, events, and places. Both space and time in Çorlu seem to be distributed according to industrial work and work alone. What an inhabitant can only do in Çorlu is to work, as Nefis described. Cenk, the 29-year-old graduate student and self-employed man using Tinder for three-four years, also lives in Çorlu, and he also has difficulty finding a place in Çorlu to socialize:

There is no pub here. There is not a culture like that here. So, when I want to go to a pub or bar, I must go to Istanbul. And there, I go to Beşiktaş or Kadıköy. Because I don't have the opportunity to go to Istanbul very often, I do it once or twice a month. That's why I don't have much chance to spend my time in a bar or pub here. Here there are primarily cafés.

Other than work, space and time in Çorlu seem to take shape as cafés and cafés alone. In Turkey, towns are less likely to have liquor stores, taverns (*meyhane*), bars, or nightclubs than cities. In addition, these places are predominantly masculine. Therefore, many people who live near Istanbul, like Cenk and Nefis, go to the city to satisfy their needs, such as meeting friends, having a drink with friends, going to a tavern with friends, etc. Beşiktaş and Kadıköy, but mostly Kadıköy, are where they prefer to go within the city. They are also the same few places where the participants living in Istanbul like socializing.

Nevertheless, the physical and spatial sıkışmışlık in Beşiktaş and Kadıköy is not a result of modern life but one of the consequences of the Islamic neoliberal politics of the JDP (Justice and Development Party) government. Since the mid-1980s, Istanbul has undergone a significant economic and social restructuring and an intensive commodification of land whose neoliberal goal is to improve the city's urban face and to turn it into an important center of international finance and tourism (Aksoy, 2012; Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2008; Keyder, 2005; Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010; Türkün, 2011). The city, to which corporate strategies and marketing techniques were adapted in the urban renewal, has intensely become a city for "the tourist gaze" (Urry, 2002) and has been segmented along income and spatial lines. The city's nightlife is a microcosm where dimensions of this urban restructuring are evident as Beyoğlu, the oldest entertainment neighborhood in Istanbul, has been the main target of a comprehensive urban

renewal and transformation project (Eder & Öz, 2015).¹³ The renewal process targeting Beyoğlu started in the 1990s and has accelerated dramatically since the 2000s. The project aimed to convert nineteenth-century buildings into hotels, shopping malls, and luxurious residences (Türkün, 2011, p. 67). Moreover, it has become increasingly challenging to run a business in Beyoğlu with municipal regulations such as unfairly charged entertainment tax and removing the street tables belonging to entertainment establishments which left smaller, low-quality businesses in a disadvantageous position (Eder & Öz, 2015, p. 297). In addition, the Islamic party (JDP) intervened in alcohol consumption by increasing the related tax twice a year, banning liquor stores from selling alcoholic drinks after 10 pm. These regulations, especially the high increase in the tax, turned drinking into an almost high-culture activity.¹⁴

These gentrifying attempts could not destroy Beyoğlu's diversity and inclusive nature. It continued to host high-end bars, fancy restaurants, underground pubs, and alternative music locations (Eder & Öz, 2015, p. 293-294). Nonetheless, its idiosyncratic aura and fabric began to change in 2015, when JDP lost its position as a single-party government and the country faced a series of violent attacks which caused the death of hundreds of people. The district was abandoned because of these violent attacks for some time as locals and tourists stopped visiting the place. When the attacks were decreased, Beyoğlu was reanimated again but mainly occupied by Arab and Persian tourists as well as Syrian refugees while the former local visitors and residents of Beyoğlu moved to Beşiktaş and Kadıköy (Akyol, 2018; Mermercioğlu et al., 2017). In the last ten years, especially Kadıköy has become the new Beyoğlu. Hence, it is no surprise that the participants living in Istanbul predominantly mention Kadıköy and Beşiktaş when they talk about how they spare time. They experience a physical and spatial entrapment not only because they are both materially and symbolically stuck in a confined working milieu after college but also because they are literally stuck in the same few places, mainly Kadıköy and Beşiktaş. This symbolic and material sıkışmışlık is supported by a rural one when one lives in a town and not a city like Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Antalya, Adana, etc.

There is a different kind of sıkıntı in towns or countries. Özarslan (2020) calls *taşra sıkıntısı* (rural boredom), which derives from the slow and empty rhythm of rural life in contrast to urban boredom. Towns do not have such an entertainment industry, a nightlife like

¹³ For Beyoğlu's social, cultural, and political history, see Bartu (2001), Freely and Freely (2017), Öz and Özkaracalar (2010), Sandıkçı (2015), and Türkün (2011).

¹⁴ The special consumption tax (SCT) on alcoholic beverages was first established in 2002 when JDP came to power and increased dramatically in 2010 ("Alcohol laws of Turkey," 2021). Under nearly 19 years of JDP rule, prices have risen by %1800 – primarily through taxes (Bianet, 2021). The high tax rates on alcohol consumption cause bootlegging and lead many people to produce their own homemade drinks. Only in October 2020, 67 people were dead of alcohol poisoning (Elden, 2020).

cities have. While cities are full of events, activities, and entertainment places, others have almost nothing to do. No pubs or bars in Western style but cafés, as Cenk said. There are also cultural entertainment places that serve alcoholic beverages, such as pavyons and *türkü bars* (a place with live folk music). They are exclusive for men as the public sphere in towns is predominantly masculine. Hence, when Özarıslan (2020) talks about *tařra sıkıntısı*, he primarily talks about a type of boredom associated with masculinity. However, *tařra sıkıntısı* experienced by Nefis and Cenk is different than Özarıslan's rural boredom. Unlike the latter, which connotes rural life's empty, slow, and inert flow, the former stems from double physical and spatial entrapment. They do not merely feel trapped in a limited and hectic working environment, but they are also stuck in a space where physical entertainment places for socialization are very much limited. When they find a chance, they come to Istanbul, where such social places are concentrated in very few districts. In short, the problem of physical interaction, first and foremost, stems from both a modern and cultural *sıkıřmıřlık*, which is sometimes supported by a rural one, as in Nefis and Cenk's cases. All these kinds of *sıkıřmıřlık* are social, cultural, symbolic, and affective. The sense of physical and spatial entrapment is a collective affect that leads the participants to use dating apps. These technologies, in this regard, are tools that help individuals find room to breathe beneath a physical milieu with social, cultural, and symbolic constraints.

However, the modern experience of physical and spatial *sıkıřmıřlık* is not new at all. People have already had this *sıkıntı* (the problem with meeting someone new after college) before the smartphone technology. As a solution, they were using physical opportunities, such as going to a bar, a café, or an event to see new faces, meet potential partners, and socialize. Therefore, there must be another *sıkıntı*. To put it differently, the socio-cultural experience of physical and spatial entrapment is not the only *sıkıntı* that moves heterosexual individuals towards dating technologies, but it is accompanied by another *sıkıntı* which is related to appification of the world itself. Appification has influenced individuals' socialization in physical places in two ways. First, since its inception, the Internet has blurred the borders between online and offline, public and private spheres. With appification, not only have these borders disappeared, but the boundaries between work and leisure, between working and personal lives, also disappeared. With the pandemic, these borders are completely annihilated. People now work 24/7; everything is, or becomes, related to work. Time passes faster day by day. There is no time to waste or spare for things other than work. "I cannot even leave home," said Cihan, for example, the 29-year-old graduate student using both Tinder and OkCupid, or as Nefis said, "everybody WORKS." Hence, in this 24/7 busy and exhausting pace, there is

no time or effort to spare for meeting new faces in physical settings, which requires time and energy. For instance, the 22-year-old graduate student working in an online newspaper, Didem, who passed from using Tinder to OkCupid and Bumble, emphasized untimeliness: “In a metropolitan, NOBODY has time to meet. We don’t have time. It is hard to meet someone in a [physical] place. So, having such an app at your hand is useful.” The 28-year-old counselor Leyla, who married the guy she met on Tinder, also said that meeting a new person is not easy because life flows too fast; hence Tinder makes this easier. “24/7 capitalism” (Crary, 2019) almost ends free time and intensifies the sense of physical and spatial sıkışmışlık which makes meeting someone new something that requires time and energy, hence harder for individuals. Dating technologies provide convenience in this regard. They do the work for users, spending time and energy to find potential partners.

Second, appification has changed the cultural norms regarding flirting and dating. That is, since “there’s an app for that,”¹⁵ meeting someone in a bar, club, restaurant, café, or event is no longer normal. Serkan, the 27-year-old Ph.D. student using Tinder Plus and OkCupid, told me that he downloaded the apps after he went through a specific incident related to the issue:

I had a more colorful life in college [when he was an undergraduate student], but now I feel a little like it [using dating apps] is a must. And also, things have now changed. For example, I realized that trying to meet someone in a bar or any social place has become something annoying. A woman even told me, “Why do you bother us? Download Tinder or something and meet whoever you want there. I went out with my friend. Okay, you expressed yourself very nicely, but if people like you approach me like that, they will ruin my night.” And she was right. After that, I stopped trying to flirt with someone in public places. After that (smiling), I said, “Okay, it doesn’t work like that in Turkey anymore.”

Going to a social place like a bar or café by oneself, seeing someone, glancing at each other, approaching to meet, and then spending the rest of the time with each other seem to be history. Flirting and dating rituals, practices, and hence culture are changing as now there is an app for everything. Individuals are, in this sense, forced to use dating apps due to the changing norms. Ceren, the 42-year-old director in an NGO using OkCupid for hookups, said she feels nostalgic because of this change: “There is, unfortunately, no more sitting in a café, in a film theatre, or a bookstore and meeting someone. I’m now being too romantic about that, I think.”

Besides these social issues that direct individuals towards dating apps, there is another problem – a psychological one, which makes physical interaction with people difficult. Some

¹⁵ It is the slogan of Apple, used in 2008 to introduce 3G technology and App Store. The slogan has become so popular since then that it is now a typical introduction to launch an app, write about it, etc. The world’s appification left nothing to appify. If one thinks of anything and searches in an app store, s/he will probably find an app for that.

interviewees told me that in addition to their experience of physical and spatial entrapment, they personally have problems with meeting someone physically. Thus, dating apps help them transcend this personal issue as well:

My friends always tell (changing his tone of voice, pretending to be someone else), “I went to a bar. There was a chick. I approached and said, ‘How you doin’ baby?’ And there it was.” I’ve never been a person like that (smiling). I could never do something like that. ... Never IN MY LIFE. (Murat, the 37-year-old freelancer using Tinder)

I’m not a person who meets, is ABLE TO meet people. I have an asocial character. ... [Dating apps] cater to the search for someone. (Eymen, the 33-year-old software developer using both Tinder Premium and OkCupid Premium)

I was an undergraduate student when I first used it. I had two or three close friends, and they both had boyfriends. I wasn’t a VENTUROUS person when I was a junior. So, meeting someone was very complicated for me. It was hard. ... When my friends had boyfriends, I said to myself, “You can’t go on like this.” I mean, I felt (smiling) left out. I was like, “Make a MOVE at least!” and I thought I should do it in the safest way [by downloading OkCupid]. (Çağla, the 25-year-old intern and volunteer in an NGO using OkCupid)

Meeting someone new in physical places is not merely a social and cultural sıkıntı that derives from life after college, dominated by and mostly limited to the business circle and from technological developments. It is also, in some cases, a psychological problem as approaching someone to talk or flirt is not one of the ordinary things one does in daily life. It is a practice that moves between the usual and the unusual, the ordinary and the extraordinary. Dating platforms make it easier for people who have difficulty making that move in person. As in other online platforms, it is easier to start a conversation, flirt, ask for a date, or reject or be rejected in these places where one does not physically see the other.¹⁶ However, this personal sıkıntı is accompanied by a social one, which derives from the limited circle in which people are trapped, the lack of time and energy to meet someone in physical settings, and the changes in cultural norms regarding flirting and dating. The aspects of modern life create not merely the problem of physical interactions but also boredom that moves heterosexual individuals toward dating apps.

4.3 Can Sıkıntısı as the Feel of “Ordinary Ordinarity”

[On weekdays] I come home exhausted. I try to cook but fail, so I order out. I eat that and spend time on the computer. I eat my dinner at 6 or 7 pm. Then, I am on the computer until I go to bed. On weekends,

¹⁶ However, not seeing each other physically in online platforms not only provides convenience, but also paves the way for cyberbullying and harassment (Hess & Flores, 2018; Paasonen et al., 2019; Whitty & Buchanan, 2016). As the following chapter will demonstrate partly, it is sometimes seen as a freedom to say and do anything even though the actor is consciously aware of the fact that the thing he says or does harm the other.

if I find a chance, I go out and spend time with my friends. ... Besides these, I am generally at home. ... I mean GENERALLY on weekdays I play computer games after work. I watch movies on weekends to do something different than video games. I'm like, "At least, do THAT." That's it. We can say that this is a boring life (smiling). (Cihan)

On weekdays, I work the whole day. I come home in the evening, eat dinner, and rest. I VERY rarely go out with my friends or by myself. On weekends, I try to spend some of my time out. I try to meet my friends. But, as I said, I mostly pass my time after work at home four, five, or maybe six days a week. (Taner)

Weekdays generally pass with routine work. I come to the office at 9 am and start working. I leave the office at 6 pm. Then I go home like normal people. We complete the routine of a working human being in the classical, normal, modern world. On weekends, I normally spend time with my friends. If I don't meet them, I have time for my hobbies like watching movies, reading, painting, etc. I generally don't do something special, something DIFFERENT than other people. It's normal, general, classical, cliché things. (Cenk)

Cihan is a 29-year-old graduate student who lives in Istanbul. While working as a research assistant at the university, he endeavors to set up his own business, a startup; hence, he spends most of his time on the computer/laptop. Taner is 30 years old and graduated with English language and literature. Living in Ankara, he works in a call center where he talks to foreign customers all day. Cenk, on the other hand, is both a graduate student and self-employed. Living in Çorlu, the 29-year-old man has his own office. Living in different confined milieus, they have different backgrounds and social circles, but they all take the same journey. In Sara Ahmed's terms (2006), although they follow different paths, they follow the same ordinary line every day. That is, they wake up, go to work or sit at the table if they work from home, work, come home tired or leave the table, eat, and spend the time watching movies, TV series, reading, playing, or doing their own work on weekdays while they try to go out and pass the time with friends on weekends. These are the routines of modern life that every individual must realize, and this is where boredom arises. TLA (n.d.b) defines *can sıkıntısı* as "uneasiness, depression which derives from when there is nothing to do or not a single opportunity to mess around with anything." Since nothing new that might distort this cycle happens, or it is very rare for that to happen, in this too busy, fast as well as routinized flow of life, individuals get bored and try to find a leak or make up one to breathe beneath this flow. Dating technologies are one way of that:

I look at Tinder or these kinds of platforms out of boredom. ... I deleted it as I get bored of it. I redownloaded it as I get bored [with life]. (Murat)

My friend recommended it. We chitchatted about it, and I subscribed to Tinder for fun. For laughs. I subscribed just for adventure. (Ercan, the 29-year-old computer engineer using Tinder Gold)

I first prejudged, saying like "God forbid!" But then, I got really bored and thought I could give it a try. It wasn't as horrible as I had imagined.

[Me:] Why do you think people prefer dating apps?

We have NO TIME, and also, we're really bored. (Didem)

Whenever there's nothing interesting, whenever things get monotonous, or whenever I'm bored, I download and use it. (Çağla)

In *Digital Flirtation*, a documentary series by Sami Öztürk aired on BluTv in 2020, a white-collar woman who works in a corporate company, Sena, complains about her life that is physically and spatially trapped as the participants: "What should a white-collar person do? I mean what can s/he do? Should s/he be with someone from work? I'm sorry, but I live a corporate life, so at least that person should not be in it." The audience understands that she is using OkCupid as she shows a profile with a naked picture of a guy to make fun of. She later reads her messages sent by an exciting guy who "works" as a cage fighter. He tells her that he has a match, so if they meet after the cage fighting, she might be distracted by his punched face. Sena bursts into laughter while reading his message and says: "Did he interest me? Well, yes, he did. I mean, just for a second, I was like, 'Should I go?' Because people look for adventure in their life. This is the goal of these apps" (Öztürk, 2020, 6:52-7:05). As routine life flows in a context of continuities, adventure is "cut off from the entanglements and connections to everyday life" (Lyman & Scott, 1975, p. 149). Romantic and/or sexual affairs, dates, flirts, or simply talking to someone new are adventurous as they temporarily suspend the disenchanted ordinary with its routines and continuities. They are "the social experience of 'adventure'" (Illouz, 1997, p. 170). In addition to adventure, "For laughs" in Ercan's narrative is also critical since laughter as an affective expression also interrupts the situation in which individuals find themselves. It interrupts the flow that is taking place, "the normalized interrelations and interactions that are happening and the functions that are being fulfilled" (Massumi, 2015, pp. 8-9). Dating apps, in this sense, pave the way for a temporary suspension of life's boringness.

While sıkıntı as a problem is the dominant qualifying aura or tone in the participants' narratives, can sıkıntısı is highlighted continuously because "routine life falls into a context of continuities" (Lyman & Scott, 1975, p. 149). The two complement each other. In a confined space with a busy pace, where individuals feel trapped, they have a social circle of people they have already met, and there is almost no one new to meet, no things to discover. They fulfill the required daily tasks, perform the routines, and do them every day. Even though time goes by faster every day and there is always some work, modern everyday life is repetitive and monotonous. As the participants' life flows demonstrate, a middle-class adult life is predominantly about waking up, working, resting, eating, working again, or spending time by watching TV, Netflix, YouTube, etc., looking at social media platforms, reading, talking to

and/or meeting friends and family, and sleeping. It is a boring flow of life. Hence, everybody is bored by work and routines, bored with the repetitive, monotonous life. Boredom is a collective affect in this sense. To put it differently, as Berlant says (2011b), “the present is perceived first affectively, ... a thing that is sensed” (p. 4), and boredom is one of the affects through which individuals perceive and sense the present.

Borrowing Berlant’s concept of “crisis ordinariness” (2011b, p. 10) which describes the ordinary of neoliberal societies, Anderson (2021) proposes “ordinary ordinariness” to portray Fordist societies. He claims that boredom emerges as a feeling of ordinary ordinariness of these societies. The Fordist ordinary is an ordinary ordinary where there is nothing but “mindless routine and mechanized repetition” (Gardiner, 2014, pp. 40-41) whereas in the post-Fordist ordinary, emotions and affects are the primary commodity of beings and what is sold as a product is not simply the product itself but experience (Massumi, 2015). The former is based on industrial capitalism in which owners of means of production extract profit by exploiting the labor of factory workers. On the other hand, the latter is a “semiocapitalist” (Berardi, 2009) world based on information technology in which life becomes more fragile and precarious as a variety of people beyond factory workers are exploited and lacking both social and economic security (Antonucci, 2018; Bone, 2019; Bulut, 2015a). In other words, in a neoliberal society where the primary issue is no longer manual labor, but an emotional and affective or immaterial labor (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Hochschild, 1983; Muehlebach, 2011), many people from different social classes face high levels of labor insecurity such as low wages and low levels of regulatory protection, employee control over wages, hours, and working conditions (Bulut, 2015b; Burchell et al., 2014; Vosko, 2010). With all these idiosyncratic characteristics, the neoliberal present is sensed as an impasse shaped by crisis embedded in the ordinary (Berlant, 2011b). Precarity, hence, is the affective texture of late modern life while burnout, stress, and anxiety become collective emotions and affects in the crisis ordinary (Chabot, 2019). Boredom seems absent here, as if these have replaced the once-dominant collective affect of early modern, Fordist, life. Crisis interrupts the structure and order of life and creates a shock since it is something exceptional (Berlant, 2011b, p. 7). However, in a present that is sensed through constant crisis, what was once shocking and exceptional becomes something ordinary which, embedded in the flow, repeats itself every single day, and hence, it becomes boring. Boredom will never fade away as long as the capitalist life based on overload (work, information, image, stimuli, etc., monotony and routines) does not disappear, that is, as long as ordinary ordinariness is here to stay. Broadly, *sıkıntı*, which refers to mental, constant, and effective exhaustion, rigor, suffering, financial

difficulty, absentment, and problem, will always be present as long as the capitalist mode of production and relations will not cease to exist.

Boredom might be understood as a modern affect of many things that might encourage impassivity, but it actually moves people. It mobilizes them to act against the boring flow of life. Therefore, it is critical in nature (Barbalet, 1999; Gardiner, 2012; Kracauer, 2011). Lefebvre even claims that “the critique of everyday life has a sociology of boredom as part of its agenda” (2002, p. 75). It is no coincidence that the Situationists engaged in a series of urban practices not to be bored while boredom was invoked in UK punk music such as London’s Burning (The Clash), Boredom (The Buzzcocks), Pretty Vacant (The Sex Pistols), and A Boring Life (The Slits) (Anderson, 2004, 2021; Ferrell, 2004; Grossberg, 1984; Vanegiem, 1983). The critical nature of boredom creates “*horror vacui*” (Kracauer, 2011, p. 102). The entertainment industry rises above this fear.¹⁷ It has a significant role in modulating, regulating leisure, and taking control of boredom.

Dating apps can be regarded as a product of this industry as they fill in leisure time. Hence, they take control of boredom, which moves heterosexual individuals towards these technologies. Looking at people there, swiping, matching, and talking to them pause boredom and interrupt the boring flow of life as well as the current boring situation where there is nothing to do. As Nefis said, one can simply meet someone via a dating app in the kitchen while sitting on the couch. In addition, just looking at the profiles and swiping them is fun. For instance, Leyla, though she is married now and does not have a Tinder account, sometimes uses her friend’s account just to look at and swipe profiles because she wonders what kinds of profiles are, maybe still, there, and because swiping is fun. She emphasized fun several times while talking about using Tinder: “It was fun. I was having fun. Having fun a lot. ... I chitchatted there quite a lot, having too much fun. I was using it (smiling) for fun.” The app seems to reach its goal as the co-creators of Tinder, Sean Rad and Justin Mateen, primarily launched the app as “a fun way to meet new people” (cited in Mason, 2016, p. 823). As the following chapter will thoroughly demonstrate, the swiping feature, swiping people left or right to select a potential partner, allures bored individuals by gamifying meeting new people. It is what made Tinder a worldwide trend in the first place. It was later embraced by other dating apps. Swiping turned matching into a game that users might play with friends even:

I generally use it at home when I’m alone. ... [Dating app] is not something I use when there are others around me. Just to have fun with my friends. For example, I sometimes say to my FEMALE FRIENDS

¹⁷ I broadly use the concept of the entertainment industry, which includes any product people spare their free time with, such as TV series, YouTube videos, Hollywood or Netflix movies, video games, self-care apps, dating apps, etc.

“Let’s look at it together. You choose the match for me. I can’t apparently [choose by myself].” There are such times when I use it with my friends for fun. (Reha, the 31-year-old man who passed from using Tinder to OkCupid)

This reminded me of the time my friends and I looked at the Tinder account of our friend at a bar years ago. It was not as popular as it is now. We were curious about the profiles there, the swiping act itself, trying to figure out what swiping was and how it functioned. I still remember the fun we had during swiping. To distort the algorithm just for fun, we deliberately liked the profiles our friend disliked and passed others he liked. It was a fun game and a fun night which temporarily suspended our boredom. Interestingly, Tuana specifically used the verb play rather than “to use” while talking about dating apps: “As you play it, you start to figure out which profiles would like or dislike you.” She is a 27-year-old working woman who owns a business with her partner, whom she met on OkCupid. She started to use the app in 2016 and met him a year later. They were engaged in 2020. To have different sexual experiences and fulfill their sexual desires, and for adventure, they use both Tinder and OkCupid as a couple, looking for a sexual partner. For Tuana, using a dating app means playing a game that makes things entertaining. It seems that it is not only her:

I have co-workers who are 45-50 years old. They’ve never used it, so they know nothing about it. They ask me, “Can I look at it for once?” Or my friend who has a partner, for example, says, “Can I play it just for five minutes?” and grabs my phone immediately (laughing). Then I say, “Don’t swipe everyone right or left; just swipe the ones of my type right.”

In the pilot study I conducted in 2017, I interviewed a woman who used Tinder then. Moving her thumb right to the left, she said using it was a game and added, “The best place to use is the toilet.” It is no coincidence that many people in other cultural settings also use dating apps in the toilet (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Illouz, 2019). People pass the emptiest time when they are in the toilet. The game-like swiping feature fills the void by turning the empty time into an entertaining one. Meeting someone, or matching in the e-dating language, becomes fun with swiping, temporarily disrupting the boring flow of life. Using a dating app is apparently one of the leisure activities today. Dating platforms not merely solve tanışma sıkıntısı and gamify meeting new people, but they also temporarily suspend boredom through gamification. However, I avoid making a structuralist claim that dating apps as products of the entertainment industry manage boredom and hence, leisure because these technologies might alleviate boredom to some extent, but they also reproduce not only can sıkıntısı but sıkıntı in general.

4.4 *Back to Sıkıntı: A Paradox*

You meet a lot of people there. But actually most of them are those you don’t [physically] meet. You

remain a person who has met many people at a more virtual level. I don't know. There are, for example, lots of guys who have liked you, but they are and aren't in your life simultaneously. I mean, real life does not coincide with virtual one. So, after a while, this affects me like, "What kind of a world is this!" I mean, I feel that there are many people I talk to but can't share a thing with. When this [feeling] gets you, you say, "Okey, I'm going to DELETE [Tinder]" and you delete it. (Aslı)

As a future architect who recently graduated from a public university in Istanbul, Aslı is living in Adana with her family because of the pandemic. Meanwhile, the 25-year-old woman is seeking a job, engaging in temporary freelance work. Describing herself as, first and foremost, a social being, Aslı uses Tinder to fulfill, in her terms, the emotional necessity to meet new people. During the pandemic, especially in which socialization was minimized by lockdown policies, she said that dating apps helped her deal with the feeling of solitude. In this regard, she acknowledges the crucial role dating technologies play in the meeting problem arising from life and the pandemic. However, she also draws attention to the paradox embedded in online dating. On the one hand, dating technologies provide solutions to this significant problem. On the other hand, they produce another problem related to the former. They often generate stillborn interactions. Therefore, at the end of the day, she is left with the feeling of solitude that she uses dating apps to deal with in the first place.

The paradox that dating technologies both partially solve the problem of meeting new people in physical settings and generate stillborn interactions and hence a vicious circle simultaneously does not pertain to Aslı. Despite the differences in their online dating experiences, most participants take almost the same journey, which will be thoroughly analyzed in the following chapters, or again in Ahmed's terms, follow nearly the same line in these platforms. They generally swipe to find a date. After a match, they introduce themselves and start talking. If they feel a vibe, they meet physically to get to know each other more. After the first date, they generally decide not to continue. Therefore, they go home and start swiping again. It is the cycle I predominantly heard in the interviews. Almost the same profiles, talks, introductions, messages, dates, chitchats, and "failures." Except for the man who uses OkCupid for sex only and the man who has serious difficulties receiving a match on Tinder, most of the participants are disappointed because of this continuous and empty journey. They are bored with the repetition dating apps generate. They were even bored when they were describing their journey. I felt their boredom and the boringness of the journey. They meet and talk to a lot of people there. Because they decide to continue talking on Whatsapp or Instagram, they have a variety of phone numbers or Instagram followers. At the end of the day, they have no concrete person, but they are left with several numbers and accounts. They delete the numbers or unfollow the accounts after a specific time passes.

It is the paradox of dating apps: Users can meet a variety of people online, but they actually have nobody among these people in their life – neither as a partner nor as a friend – but temporarily some numbers and accounts. To use Turkle’s words, the ties they form through dating apps “are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are the ties that preoccupy” (2011, p. 280). Hence, they unsurprisingly find themselves in the same boring cycle with the same beginnings, actions, conversations, and ends. The problem of meeting someone new turns into a problem of having someone in real. Sıkıntı is, therefore, what they are left with. They delete these apps when they feel there is nothing new under the sun and realize that these supposed-to-be-useful-and-entertaining platforms are empty and repetitive milieus. In other words, dating apps first interrupt the boring flow of life, but later they become absorbed within it. Things that was once supposed to pave the way for leaks become the part of the flow at the end. Nevertheless, routine life, which is physically and spatially confined and contextually repetitive, does not cease to exist; hence, individuals are forced to use them. The physical, spatial, and symbolic boundaries of life and empty repetitions within it move them towards dating technologies.

Apps are both fascinating and fasteners (Dean, 2014, p. 233). They are fascinating because, as in the case of dating apps, individuals can simply arrange a date with a quick thumb movement. They facilitate the way individuals fulfill their needs and desires. However, they are also fasteners as they fasten people to the device, smartphone, or tablet, via which they use apps. They fasten all the attention to the device. Apps enthrall and attach them to their devices (Dean, 2015, p. 233). Dating apps are also “fasteners of attachment and enthrallment” (Herman et al., 2015, p. 7). However, in this case, there is not an addictive relationship between dating apps and their users, but a forced one. Because of the participants’ experience of physical and spatial sıkışmışlık, the change in cultural norms regarding flirting and dating, and 24/7 capitalism, which almost ends leisure, even sleep, and ordinary ordinariness of life, they are forced to use dating technologies to meet someone new. In Serkan’s words, dating apps are objects that “el mahkûm” (needs must). This forced attachment becomes cruel “when the object that draws [one’s] attachment actively impedes the aim that brought [one] to it initially” (Berlant, 2011b, p. 1).

In a talk named *The Slow Cancellation of the Future* (Pmilat, 2014), Mark Fisher draws attention to the disappearance of the sense of specificity of cultural time. For him, the future that one can compare with the archaic disappears as everything becomes the same. Interested in music, he observes that there is no difference between the musical sounds of 2005 and 2008, but between 1975 and 2005. One can catch the difference between 1974 and 1994 or 1954 and

1974 but cannot identify the difference between 1994 and 2014. Fisher claims that there is nothing new that draws one's attention. Today's new music is just another form of the old one, or in his words, "nothing ever really dies" (Pmilat, 2014, 04:50). He describes the present as "a period in which 'no one is bored, everything is boring'" (36:09-36:10). For him, no one is bored because we are all attracted by micro stimuli. Hence, no one is bored because "we do not have the freedom to be bored anymore. ... We are distracted from our own boredom" (37:17-37:27). In this repetitive world where everything is boring, Fisher claims that "boredom 1.0", boredom that once moved the Situationists and punk musicians, no longer exists (36:05). Although I understand and acknowledge Fisher's remarkable point, I do not share his pessimism. Sıkıntı as both boredom and the sense of physical and spatial entrapment does not cease to exist. As a collective, modern affect, it haunts people every day and everywhere. It moves them. It moves, in this case, the participants towards dating apps as well as away from them. Some of the participants, for example, told me at the end of the interview that they would delete the app, at least for a while, and try to take more physical actions to meet someone, to overcome sıkıntı both as a problem and boredom. To say it differently, they will try to expect more from each other and less from technology. The ordinary is repetitive, monotonous, and hence boring, but also a porous zone in which people try to find or make up leaks to interrupt the physically and spatially confined and boring flow of life.

Following sıkıntı, this chapter aims to explain why people expect more from technology and less from each other. Moving beyond the taken-for-granted, simple explanation that people prefer dating apps to find a hookup partner or a long-term, romantic one, it demonstrates the social and cultural factors that move individuals towards these technologies. The next chapter will focus on why heterosexual individuals choose a specific dating app over others. That is, it will concentrate on the design of OkCupid and Tinder and their aesthetics (how individuals sense design) to understand why these two apps are more popular than others in Turkey.

Chapter 5

DESIGN AS A STYLE OF ALLURE OR REPELLENCY: TINDER VS. OKCUPID

“There is not even a single instant in which the life of individuals is not modeled, contaminated, or controlled by some app[aratu]s.”
Giorgio Agamben (2009, p. 15)

5.1 *Appified Mundanity*

“There’s an app for that.” In 2008, Apple used this slogan to introduce the iPhone 3G and its App Store. The slogan and the App Store became so popular that we tend to think Apple invented the word app. However, the term was commonly used as shorthand to “describe the various kinds of software applications available” by the early 1980s (Morris & Elkins, 2015; Morris & Murray, 2018, p. 4). The advent of the internet and its subsequent development in the 1990s and early 2000s paved the way for a diversity of software such as music and video software, web games, Flash animations, etc. There were already app stores like GetJar, Handango.com, and Pocketgear.com where people could search for, buy, and download apps onto their phones (Dean, 2015, p. 234; Morris & Murray, 2018, p. 4). What Apple did in 2008 is that it allowed third-party developers to write apps for the iPhone and sell them in the App Store, where all apps could gather. In other words, Apple created a new market by consolidating a series of acts and interconnecting the actors of these previously separate actions – developer, operating system, device manufacturer, service provider, consumer, analytics, and store itself (Dean, 2015, p. 234).¹⁸ Purchasing, downloading, and upgrading apps became very quick and easy.

Today, there is an app for everything. As small pieces of “software designed for a specific narrow purpose” (Dean, 2015, p. 234), they are, first and foremost, built to solve our

¹⁸ It also charges a 30% fee on all paid app revenue and in-app purchases; however, starting this year, Apple introduced a new program that reduces App Store cut to 15 percent for any developer who earns less than \$1 million in annual sales per year (Statt, 2020).

daily problems. Apps help us wake up, organize calendars, plan time, and take notes. They even remind us to drink water. In addition to the quotidian support, they also help us communicate with friends, family, and strangers, find a date, travel, play, and find our way when lost. Apps keep us informed, entertained, and healthy, as well as distracted, addicted, and deceived. We unquestionably give apps the consent to watch, track, follow, monitor, use, and sell us since they “make it fun for users to produce data, appealing to their desire to be organized, productive, or creative” (Matviyenko, 2014, p. 6). The world is appified since, fastened to our devices, we now connect with each other and orient within our habitat by apps.

Over 5000 dating platforms worldwide are available in the app stores (Brooks, 2021, para. 8). Tinder, Momo, Grindr, Hornet, OkCupid, Match.com, eHarmony, Bumble, Jack’d, Muzmatch, Happn, Inner Circle, Hater, Meetic, PlentyofFish, OurTime, Tastebuds, Hinge, Coffee Meets Bagel, Badoo... Not all of them, however, have become a trend. Some apps gain global or local popularity over others while some strive to survive in this appified world. Moreover, such achievement is not the ultimate cause but only the beginning. An app might lose popularity after a couple of years, months, weeks, or even days. One of my participants, Reha, who had tried several dating apps other than Tinder and OkCupid, told me about an app named Cuddlr (later Spoonr). Launched in September 2014, it was an application where nearby individuals could meet for a cuddle. Users were looking for not a hookup or romantic partner but a cuddling one, he told me. This interesting app shut down six months later, returned another six months later to app stores, rebranded as Spoonr, and officially shut down one and a half years later (“Spoonr,” 2021). Cuddlr/Spoonr is just one of the countless examples. Within this fastest-growing software industry, apps must compete over attention to sustain their popularity and survive. They not only must allure individuals to get them purchase, but they also must keep the attention centered on themselves by updating, upgrading, and introducing new features. The world of apps, in this sense, constitutes an “attention economy” (Kendall, 2018) or “assemblages of attention” (Wise, 2012, 2015).

Design is crucial in this competition over attention because apps are not simply designed to deliver services/functions, but they also consist of interfaces, algorithms, templates, and features which make them un/attractive. These features of an app must be entertaining, user-friendly, and continuously updated according to users’ demands and feedback. In other words, consisting of algorithms, codes, interfaces, and features, technological architecture is the primary “style of allure” (Thrift, 2010) in this appified world since “our entire digital experience is based on a User Model, derived by algorithms”

(Vuzharov, 2019, p. 83).¹⁹ Nevertheless, an app's design is not simply technological but also cultural. It is created, developed, and updated by cultural norms, laws, codes, and imaginaries (Beer, 2017; Bivens & Hoque, 2018; Cave & Dihal, 2020; Gillespie, 2014). Hence, apps are, first and foremost, "algorithmic cultural objects" (Galloway, 2006, p. 6).

What makes Tinder a worldwide trend and OkCupid as popular as Tinder in Turkey in contrast to other apps must be associated with their design and cultural understanding. There must be something with these dating apps that render them appealing. However, when it comes to individuals' motivations to use them, design and its cultural interpretation, and their role in users' decisions and actions are paid little attention in online dating studies.²⁰ This chapter focuses on Turkey's two most popular dating apps, Tinder and OkCupid, to understand how their technological architecture attracts heterosexual individuals toward themselves. Combining the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018) with interviews, it aims to understand how an app's design influences users' choices and how it is meant for and interpreted by its users in the Turkish context. In other words, this chapter traces the technical reasons rather than socio-cultural ones embedded in heterosexual individuals' intentions to use Tinder and/or OkCupid.

5.2 *Tinderland: A Meat Market or an Abundant Place?*

Launched in September 2012, the app is the first smartphone application designed for heterosexual peoples, and later including non-heterosexual individuals. As of January 2021, with over six million monthly downloads, Tinder is the most popular dating application in the world, both on Apple App Store and Google Play Store (Statista Research Department, 2021, para. 3). Introducing swiping, the app has affected the dating landscape. The very practice of meeting people and dating has turned into swiping. Today many individuals can arrange their dates via their smartphones by swiping profiles either left or right. Dating has almost reduced to a quick thumb movement.

I first downloaded Tinder on January 1, 2019, to understand the account creation

¹⁹ There is, of course, as in all fields, a politics of visibility. App stores are not simply the infrastructures for organizing and distributing apps, but they are also decision-makers. They can highlight some apps while they can reject others entirely. With the ability to decide whom to highlight and whom to reject, they have power over apps, their developers, and hence users (Gillespie, 2015, 2018). In this regard, it is first and foremost crucial for app developers to attract app stores' attention before users', and design is still the primary way to allure. However, Apple is not the absolute decision-maker in some cases. For instance, the bans and restrictions on some LGBTI+-oriented dating apps, such as Hornet and Grindr, in Turkey show how the government becomes the primary decision-maker in particular contexts, deciding which apps can and cannot be available to individuals.

²⁰ Duguay's study (2018) on the relationship between Tinder's design and popular reception is an exception.

process. Users could sign up either through their Facebook accounts or phone numbers. I chose the latter. I wanted to remain anonymous, so I wrote respectively a random name, my age, skipped the education section, and my high school e-mail address, that I have not used since graduation. I then uploaded a picture from a reality show called *Kısmetse Olur*,²¹ and finally, I allowed the app to use my location information. That was all. I was ready to swipe. The first profile I encountered was a muscled, tattooed guy. I closed the app after it and didn't engage for three days. Then the app began to send me nearly the same notifications almost every day and approximately at the same time. It was telling me that I got a Super Like, that someone liked me, or that more than 2000 people had swiped me right since I joined Tinder, inviting me to swipe to see those who liked me (Figure 5.1). It attracted my attention. I wanted to see who they were, so I opened the app and encountered the Tinder Gold ad: "You've got 99+ people who liked you. Buy Tinder Gold to see who they are and match right away!" (Figure 5.2). Whenever I clicked the notification, the app directed me to buy Tinder Gold. It was a vicious circle, aiming to attract my attention and keep me Tindering, i.e., producing data, so I stopped clicking at the beginning of March, never opened the app again, and wondered when the app would quit as well. It finally gave up on July 8 when I received the last notification: "Your profile is now unseen. Open Tinder to be seen by your potential matches."

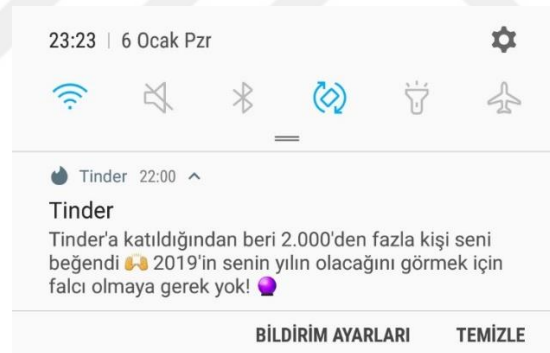


Figure 5.1: An example of a Tinder notification²²

²¹ Users are allowed to upload up to 6 photos, but they can attach their Instagram account if any.

²² The notification I received five days later the day I joined Tinder: "More than 2000 people have liked you since you joined Tinder. There is no need to be a fortuneteller to see that 2019 will be your year."

The figure displays a sequence of screens from the Tinder app during account creation:

- Log In:** Options to log in with phone number or Facebook. A link for "Trouble logging in?" is at the bottom.
- What's your email?:** A screen to verify email with a "CONTINUE" button and a "SIGN IN WITH GOOGLE" option.
- My number is:** A screen to enter a phone number with a "CONTINUE" button.
- My first name is:** A screen to enter a first name with a "CONTINUE" button.
- My birthday is:** A screen to enter a birthday with a "CONTINUE" button.
- I am a:** A screen to select gender with "WOMAN" and "MAN" options and a "CONTINUE" button.
- Welcome to Tinder:** A screen with "house rules" and a "CONTINUE" button.
- My sexual orientation is:** A screen to select sexual orientation with options like Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Asexual, Demisexual, Pansexual, Queer, and Questioning. A "CONTINUE" button is at the bottom.
- Show me:** A screen to select who to show with "WOMEN", "MEN", and "EVERYONE" options and a "CONTINUE" button.
- My university is:** A screen to enter a university name with a "CONTINUE" button.
- Passions:** A screen to select passions from a list of interests like Spirituality, Grab a drink, Football, etc. A "CONTINUE (0/5)" button is at the bottom.
- Enable location:** A screen to enable location with an "ALLOW LOCATION" button.
- Add photos:** A screen to add a profile picture with a "CONTINUE" button.

Figure 5.3: Steps to create a Tinder account

Sexual orientation and passion sections were new. One might skip the two along with university. I enabled my location and uploaded my picture. If you take a selfie at that moment and upload it, then Tinder places a blue tick next to your name, which confirms that the person is not fake but real. The app also writes, under your name, “recently active” if you actively use Tinder. As such, it tries to protect its users from fake and inactive profiles, like my old profile, from potential harm and deceptions. Tinder is so centered around the image that users must click “EDIT INFO” right after the “SETTINGS” and “ADD PHOTO” buttons on the

profile if they want to write a short bio (Figure 5.4). Because writing a self-summary requires an “effort,” profiles generally lack a textual representation. This is what most of the participants have complained the most: “Tinder is like [grimacing] an obscurity. It is nothing more than a photo. ... I mean, there is a photo. You decide according to it. How am I going to decide? You just swipe right and left.” (Eymen, the 33-year-old man using both OkCupid Premium and Tinder Premium).

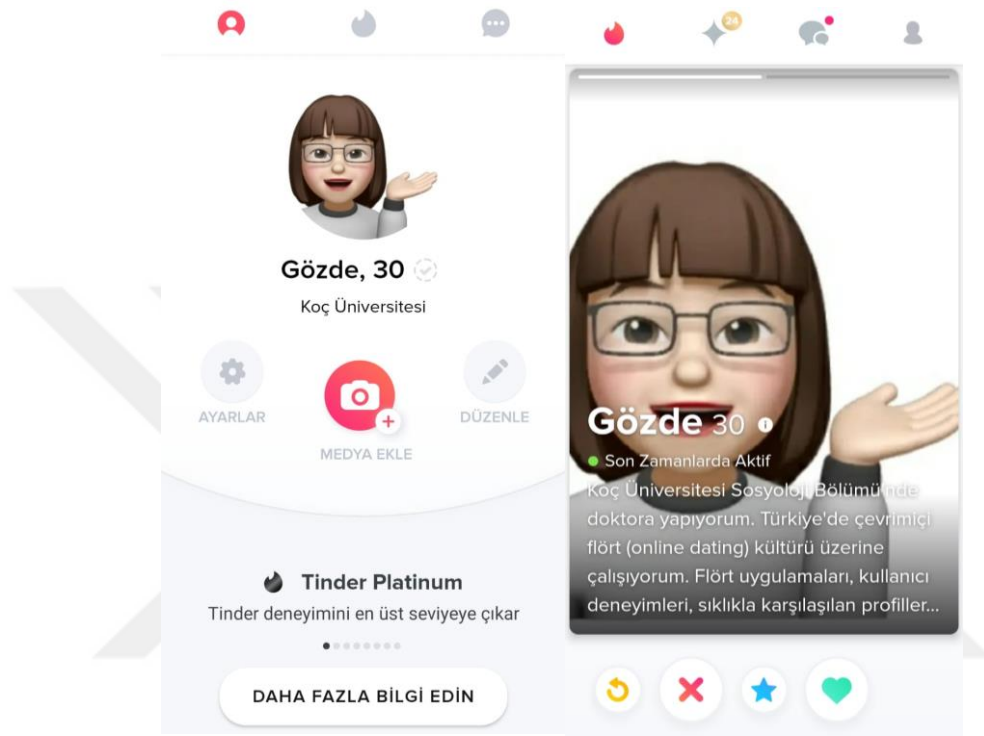


Figure 5.4: Tinder profile²³

How the app really operates seems a mystery, as Tinder’s algorithmic infrastructure is beyond one’s knowledge. It is no surprise because algorithms are mainly black-boxed (Kitchin, 2017; Pasquale, 2015). The only visible thing is the location function. That is, since its inception, we have known that Tinder basically uses the smartphone’s GPS functionalities to locate potential matches. But we later learned about the Elo Score (Carr, 2016). Tinder has been using a rating system that assigns each user a score based on how others swipe the one to match its users (Holden, 2021; Krüger & Spilde, 2019). Being swiped right increases one’s score while left decreases it. Meanwhile, through its “smart photo” function, the app continually tests the success rate of one’s photos, showing the best-performing image to other users first (Holden, 2021, para. 13). A picture’s performativity relies on likes that produce scores, and the lowest score takes one to the end of the algorithmic queue. In other words, one’s desirability depends on clicks, rates, and matches. It is claimed that Tinder gave up the

²³ The image on the left represents where users can edit their profile and write a short bio. The other image is how others see their profile.

Elo Score Rating System in 2019 and now keeps tracking users' behaviors on the app without ranking (Holden, 2021, para. 68). The app's operating system is still unclear. Some of the interviewees told me that when they like a person, Tinder then shows similar kinds of profiles. For instance, Didem, who first used Tinder but then passed to OkCupid and Bumble, said that she had liked a pilot on Tinder; the app later showed her primarily pilots. It seems that there is a "If you like this, then you may like these as well" logic. Algorithms and ranking systems can change, but one thing is persistent: Like app stores, Tinder is the primary decision-maker, organizing who will present first and who will not. Again, a politics of (in)visibility is embedded in the infrastructure. To put it differently, like other apps, Tinder is not transparent regarding the operating system.

To be on the top of the queue, that is, to "beat" or "trick" the app's algorithms, one might buy one of three Tinder packages, respectively, from the cheapest to the most expensive, Tinder Plus, Tinder Gold, and Tinder Premium. In other words, one must pay the app to overcome its algorithmic limitations. Of course, one might simply focus on the image s/he has created on the app, but this does not assure a match. Hence, buying a package that can "trick" the algorithmic hierarchy is more secure. More importantly, purchasing a dating app is gendered in the heterosexual dating landscape. Many male interviewees use a paid version of Tinder while, except one OkCupid user who first bought the app but later passed to its free version due to the high exchange rate, women use the basic package. I was interviewing İlke, the 27-year-old graduate student working in an NGO. She was using OkCupid at that time. I asked her whether she was using basic or premium. "I've never used premium," she said,

With this kind of app, women don't prefer to be Premium users [laughing]. Men prefer it, I think, to be more visible [laughing]. Women usually use basic because they receive more messages. That's also what I hear from friends around me, and the match rate is much higher than for men. And they receive so many more messages, they can connect with so many more people, so, from what I hear around me, women don't prefer premium much [smiling]. But I have guy friends who use premium, for instance.

Men in this research complained about the difficulty of matching with a woman the most. Some were angry at women, blaming them for the low match chance. For instance, "If I had money and exercised regularly, they would like me," said the 29-year-old Tinder Gold user Ercan. As a computer engineer working in a corporate company, he already knew about the Elo Score Rating System. He told me about his experiment on Tinder. He had once changed his profile to a female one and gotten 5000 likes as soon as he had created it. After a while, he deleted the profile and returned to his real profile. His match rate immediately decreased when he became Ercan again. Though he understood that his difficulty in having a match might be because of too many matches women receive per day and the algorithm based on the Elo

Score, he insisted on believing in the female love-male sex myth. He repeatedly underlined that he does not have a match because women are attracted to rich and good-looking men. On the other hand, some men perfectly knew that the asymmetrical match rates derive from the fact that women receive so many likes that they cannot catch up with. Hence, they tried to “beat” Tinder’s algorithm by creating new accounts, changing their photos, or buying a Tinder subscription. Reha, for instance, underlines that men should use Tinder strategically because the app does not inform its users about the algorithm, the way to match people:

After using the same account for a long time and constantly swiping right on one after the other, the matches were gone. I realized then that it [Tinder] doesn’t make you visible to other people anymore. So, I deleted the app. Instead, I mean, deleting my account and starting over. Then, when I restarted, I noticed that it made me visible to many more people. I mean, it must be so because I noticed that I started getting A LOT MORE MATCHES. I used that trick a few times.

For Tinder, a new profile means a new person to introduce – until he becomes old. New profiles are mainly placed on the top of the queue. Changing one’s photo is a similar strategy to receive more matches. Because the app still uses its smart photo function, a new photo means a new image to test its performance. To calculate its success rate, the app must show the image to numerous users. The participants’ tricks show that users are not simply passive audiences subject to algorithmic measures and calculations but also active players who can influence the algorithmic outcomes (Albury et al., 2017; David & Cambre, 2016; Wang, 2018). However, these strategies are generally temporary solutions to the matching difficulty. If he wants to secure his place in the algorithmically determined queue, he must be willing to pay, or, in 35-year-old self-employed Hakan’s words, “if you want to do something in this business, you have to make some sacrifices.”

Tinder’s paid versions, in this sense, are a style of allure that mainly targets men. They differ from each other as the 26-year-old Tinder Gold user Ömer described:

If I’m not mistaken, Tinder Plus [as well as Tinder Gold] gives you five super likes per day. What’s super like? Even when you don’t match, when I send you a super like, you SEE me. You don’t need to have swiped me right. So that gives me another CHANCE. It DOUBLES my chances. And you also have a boost per month. The boost gets you viewed by ten times more people than usual. Uh, there’s also the passport feature. Meaning you can look like you’re wherever you want to be in the world. I started with Tinder Gold right away to [begins to laugh] increase my chances. So, in Tinder Premium, the only additional difference is that, uh, you can send an introduction to someone before matching. This also improves your chances by whatever percentage.

More details regarding Tinder’s subscription options are written on its website (Tinder, n.d.). A Tinder Basic user can only like 100 profiles and get one Super Like per day. In contrast, a Tinder Plus user has more options such as unlimited likes, unlimited rewind, which allows the

user to take his swipe back, ad-block, passport, 5 Super Likes, and one boost per month.²⁴ A Tinder Gold user increases his chance as, besides these options, he can see who has liked him without necessarily swiping that profile. A Tinder Premium user can have the highest chance since he can send a message without having to wait for a mutual match. All these chance-increasing paid options are alluring because they allow one to “beat” the app’s hierarchical order based on the algorithm. It seems that premium features attract mainly men since men are more likely to compete with each other over a mutual match while women mostly match with the one she likes. Design matters for men in this regard.

Despite the different subscriptions Tinder offers, the app is essentially centered around photos, leading users to swipe according to the image. Such a simplistic design can be both affectively alluring and repelling. When I asked the participants how they felt about Tinder, they had mixed feelings toward the app. Some see this most popular dating app as a meat market while others consider it an abundant place. On the other hand, they share the same feeling regarding the social stigma around Tinder. That is, they believe that there is a negative understanding of Tinder as a hookup app.²⁵ As the studies of Duguay (2018) and Illouz (2019) show, such a perception of perception is not limited to the Turkish setting. Tinder’s image-oriented, simple design produces such an understanding because it mostly paves the way for stillborn relationships like hookups or one-night stands. (Duguay, 2018; Illouz, 2019). A user must swipe a person by her/his look without any detailed information other than age and geographical proximity – maybe university and occupation. Tinder, in this sense, is not a dating app but “a digital ‘Hot or Not’ game” (Mason, 2016, p. 823). This leads users, mainly male users, to evaluate others physically and treat them as sexual objects. This is why male participants mostly encounter profiles who write, “I don’t use it for its purpose” (*Amacına uygun kullanmıyorum*). It is the most encountered sentence on Tinder among women’s profiles, they told me:

²⁴ These features provide different opportunities. First, swiping is basically a quick thumb movement. Many individuals decide whether they like the person they look at by simply using their thumbs. Therefore, they sometimes accidentally swipe right or left. The rewind function allows users to take this accidental action back. Second, users of the free version are exposed to too many ads during swiping. One can block these ads through a paid subscription. Third, the passport function allows users to overcome geographical boundaries, show themselves wherever they want, and match with anyone worldwide. Forth, on Tinder, a user can only match with another through a mutual like. However, if the user wants to attract the person on the profile, he sends a Super Like. That is, he does not simply swipe right or press heart but clicks star. The person who gets the Super Like immediately receives a notification. If interested in him, she can swipe right and match right away. And finally, the boost feature allows users to be placed on the top of the queue.

²⁵ In May 2018, we (Cöbek & Ergin, 2021) conducted an online survey in which 948 individuals participated to explore Turkey’s Tinder landscape. Individuals generally use the app for hooking up ($M=2.20$). However, they think that non-users have a negative understanding of Tinder as a hookup app. Such a social stigma around Tinder influences their use. That is, many participants, as you will also see below, abstain from using Tinder in a public place because of this socio-cultural stigma.

Tinder is perceived as a hookup app. There's even a saying now, "using for its purpose" or not. For example, women write such things in their profiles: "I am not using it for its purpose." I mean, they probably encountered some things. How do I put it? Because of this [perception], something like "This is what this thing is. So, let's do that." They probably developed a defense mechanism as such. (Aras, the 34-year-old construction engineer who first used Tinder and then passed to OkCupid)

You especially see a lot of "Not using for its purpose." A LOT. I mean, you definitely encounter this note in every third or fourth profile.

[Me:] By that, do they mean that you see it as a hookup app, but that's not the purpose they use it for? Yes, that's what they try to mean, but they probably match a couple of people, and they encounter some questions they don't want. And when they turn them down, the man's answer is probably along the lines of "Isn't this the purpose of this app? Why are you here if you're not using it for that?" My guess is that these notes are a reflection of that. (31-year-old Reha, the old Tinder user and recent OkCupid)

It seems that the image-centered app with the swiping feature is essentially perceived as a hookup app, not a dating one, and users are mostly expected to play by the rules. Those who do not play by the rules seem to feel obliged to write it on their profiles. Interpreting Tinder as designed for finding a hookup or one-night-stand partner creates this feeling because there is an unequal distribution of roles, a gender inequality embedded in such an interpretation. Hookup requires a hooker, a predator, and a hookee, a victim (Salecl, 2010, p. 73). As the female love-male sex binary myth displays, men generally play the hooker role while the role of hookee sticks to women. Like other types of relationships, hookup is also socially constructed. Yade is a 31-year-old, currently unemployed woman. She has been using OkCupid for a couple of years now. She told me she first used Tinder to find a hookup partner. But then she laughed and said:

Thanks to Tinder, I realized that I DON'T WANT to sleep around [laughing]. It's absolutely a MEAT MARKET. ... On Tinder, it's very result-oriented. I mean, on the day you match, they ask for your WhatsApp or Instagram. Tinder is VERY FORWARD. They ask for your phone number. Like, "Let's meet today," "Let's meet tomorrow," "Let's do something on the phone. Let's sext. Let's turn on the camera too. Turn around and show your ass" [laughing]. I felt like it was just such an ASSAULT. ... Here, Tinder is only used as a straight-up sex app. Otherwise, looking for other than sex, you can only find [laughing and pointing me] A RESEARCHER on Tinder. That's why I switched to OkCupid.

Men are generally the sexual subjects whereas women are, seen and treated as, sexual objects in hookups, and Tinder plays a role in the reproduction of this unequal relationship between heterosexual individuals as its simplistic design paves the way for an understanding as a hookup app. This demonstrates how technology and culture are in a relation of co-production (Jasanoff, 2004). The socially constructed hookup and the unequal gendered distribution of roles within it are implicitly reproduced by Tinder's simple design. Though, in theory, anyone can find a hookup partner on Tinder regardless of gender, it seems that, in practice, men have

the “right” to be the predator. Because of the socially constructed structure of hookup, the app seems to be a legitimate place for men to play the predator role, as the narratives of women demonstrates:

Tinder has a bad reputation. ... I used Tinder briefly. I deleted it ... because EVERYONE is there, REALLY all sorts, it's TOO MUCH, all kinds of people are there. ... So, after a while, it made me feel like, well, it made me FEEL like I was walking on the street and constantly being catcalled. (Ceren, the 42-year-old director of an NGO, seeking a hookup partner)

Tinder's architecture creates an affective environment filled with negative aesthetics of “Everyone is here,” along with a sense of being attacked by everyone. Such an affective environment repels some individuals away from the app. The 32-year-old woman Selma, who describes herself as white-collar, has never used Tinder because she finds it horrifying:

Many of my friends kept telling me to use Tinder. But it's more like a place of “Let's have sex tonight.” So, it struck me as such a terrible platform. ... There's even a derogatory term, “Tinderer” (*Tinderçi*). My friends use OkCupid, and my prejudice hurts them. “You take us for Tinderers, Selma,” they say. I don't know; I thought Tinder was terrible. A friend of mine, for example, because there are packs of cigarettes behind the man in his profile photo, asks him if he's running a TOBACCO SHOP. And the answer is, “I can be delicatessen, baby” [bursting into laughter for a couple of seconds]. I mean, for instance, you come across these characters [laughing]. “Just ask, I'll be a deli owner.” So, Tinder is very, very, very far distant. It is a very distant platform.

Such aesthetics, which is an outcome of the technology-culture interaction, leads some individuals, primarily women, to write “I am not here for hookup” on their profiles while it repels others away from the app. It also affects the users' activities. Many Tinder users doubt using Tinder in a (semi-)public place. For example, the 33-year-old architect Berk, who has been using Tinder for five years, abstains from using it in public because a Tinderer man is seen, even his friends see, as “horny.” The 28-year-old counselor Leyla, who used Tinder three or four years ago, met a guy on Tinder and married him. Though they are married now, she said, her husband Mecnun still does not tell anyone that they met on Tinder. As such, he aims to protect Leyla from the possible stigmatizing looks and thoughts since, like in many different cultural settings, women who use Tinder are seen as “that kind of woman” (Illouz, 2019, p. 220). The aesthetics of Tinder as a hookup app seems to have an unequal impact on the users.

Nonetheless, Tinder's design is not only a style of repellency but also a style of allure as some users perceive it as an abundant place. It offers the opportunity to meet a variety of people. The 26-year-old Mert, for instance, said he used Bumble for a while. But then he specifically preferred Tinder because

I'm already at a certain place in a certain social circle. So, I don't want to reflect that aspect. For instance, I don't want to reveal who my parents are or my social status, and Bumble probes at that a little with those questions. ... It's slightly higher quality compared to Tinder. I don't want to be in that locality. My

own social circle is already people of that quality.

As my older fake profile also shows, one can be anybody on Tinder since the app is centered around an image and not detailed information. This can lead to deception and scams, but for Mert, this makes Tinder attractive. He wants to be anybody and to meet anyone other than his circle. In Bourdieu's terms, Mert desires to meet people beyond his social capital, and Tinder's simple design allows him to move beyond the borders of distinction. I could observe during swiping how this was crucial for him. Though he found her pretty, he swiped a profile left just because, by simply looking at her pictures, he felt that she looked as if she shared a similar social capital, as if one of his friends could introduce her to him. Tinder's style of allure is this primary affordance, the opportunity to discover what is beyond one's social capital. For Mert, Tinder removes the curtains that one's capitals close and temporarily suspends distinction. The 30-year-old stage actress İrem, who has been using dating technologies for six years, repeatedly used the word magnificent while she was telling me about her experiences on Tinder:

At first, I found it very ridiculous. I was constantly swiping left, saying [doing the swiping movement with her thumb] "disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, disgusting." I had no match because I found it very RIDICULOUS. ... But later, Gözde, I started to meet people I cannot encounter in normal life THERE. This was magnificent for me because I was always in the circle of theatre. I was always in the little world of stage players. I was like, "Oh my God, I can meet people I'm never able to encounter in daily life. This is MAGNIFICENT." I had GREAT relationships, thanks to it. I really feel gratitude. ... I could never imagine if it wasn't in my life.

İrem told me she had to move from Istanbul to her home city, Bursa, for some time to help her brother out with his recently launched shop. She used Tinder there and matched with a guy:

I saw him. He wasn't my type, wearing skinny jeans and chic shoes underneath. I saw him and said, "Shit! How do I escape?" We sat down and talked. And, Gözde, he said, "Why are you here?" and I was like, WHY ARE YOU HERE [laughing]. We were in a bad district, by the way. We were thinking about each other and that we didn't deserve to be here. There were only students and nothing to do. We were very surprised to meet each other. ... I'm grateful to him for what we had. Because in normal conditions, he could never ask for my number if he came to the shop because I would never give that type my number. Neither would he look at me that way, nor would I look at him.

The abundance that Tinder's architecture provides refers to different fields, networks, and people. In other words, the aesthetics of Tinder is also associated with different experiences that one may never have in the physical world, the opportunity to move beyond the limited field one lives. Tinder is not simply a meat market per se. It is the most popular online platform where one can reach various people, which is the most alluring thing about Tinder. The participants who use Tinder underlined its popularity, simplicity, and easiness in terms of preference.

It seems that the simplistic design, which turned Tinder into the most popular dating app worldwide, produces both positive and negative affects that are two sides of the same coin. In other words, Tinder's simple architecture welcomes everyone, and the sense of "Everybody is there" is both alluring and repelling. On the one hand, the popularity of Tinder provides an abundance of choice, offering the opportunity to meet anyone. Tinder, in this sense, is an abundant place to meet people. On the other hand, this offer resonates with a negative sense of "Everybody is there." That is, the existence of various people leads to the aesthetics of Tinder as a lowbrow platform, a meat market where one can find and be presented to any person. This is one of the primary reasons why some individuals choose OkCupid over Tinder.

5.3 *The OkCupid Universe: "Pinpoint Results" as Safer and Classy*

In January 2004, OkCupid was launched and became one of the most popular dating websites after Match.com and eHarmony in the U.S. Since it was introduced before the app store innovation, OkCupid was formerly designed according to desktop architecture and culture. That is, members were filling in their profiles and looking at others' *without* swiping. Moreover, members did not necessarily have to look for someone to date but could talk to people under numerous titles. Besides the dating service, OkCupid provided its members with a forum platform where they not only could talk to each other under specific categories but could also create new titles to start a conversation. I learned all these from the 43-year-old unemployed white-collar woman Nefis, who joined the OkCupid community in 2009. There were no, or very few, Turkish individuals then, but mainly Americans. Aimed to practice her English, she described the atmosphere of OkCupid then:

Mine was a little bit different. THE GOAL was to practice English. There were lots of online websites. I didn't want to date. I just wanted to talk. Only OkCupid provided me with that environment. When it was in a website format, there was a forum environment. I mean, you could create a title. For example, I play guitar and have trouble with its string. And I have to ask, for example, "Does anyone know?" I give such a headline there. And under it, people come and begin to reply to you. And there, people start to talk to each other. As such, there was a continuously flowing screen during the day. I mean, there was anything, any topic you might think of. For example, music, books, industry, ANYTHING. Psychology, sexuality. It was a seashore environment. Under these headlines, there were sublines that people had created. Someone had asked, for instance. If interested, you could click that question, and a screen would open. You saw flowing texts. People were perpetually talking. ... It was a forum environment. There were quizzes you could take, and blogs you could comment. ... It was a beautiful environment.

This forum atmosphere faded away in 2014 when a smartphone app, precisely Tinder, influenced OkCupid's design. The swiping feature was introduced, and the forum environment disappeared. The design shifted from a desktop architecture to a smartphone one. Though OkCupid used Tinder's swiping feature, its design was still quite different than Tinder. The idiosyncratic architecture had made OkCupid more attractive than Tinder for some in Turkey.

"It took my whole day!" said a friend of mine, talking about creating an OkCupid account. I first thought she was just exaggerating. I realized later the feeling of "taking all day long" on October 6, 2020, when I tried to create an account as a researcher on OkCupid. It wasn't as easy, quick, and effortless as Tinder. But the exact goal of the app is this. It aims explicitly not to provide such a simplistic and effortless platform like Tinder because, for OkCupid, dating deserves better (Figure 5.5). The app allures individuals through better quality that people must try to reach. OkCupid assures this better quality with its architecture. To put it differently, the betterness that both people and dating deserve is embedded in its interface, algorithm, and features. Hence, one must first understand, closely examine, and engage with the app.

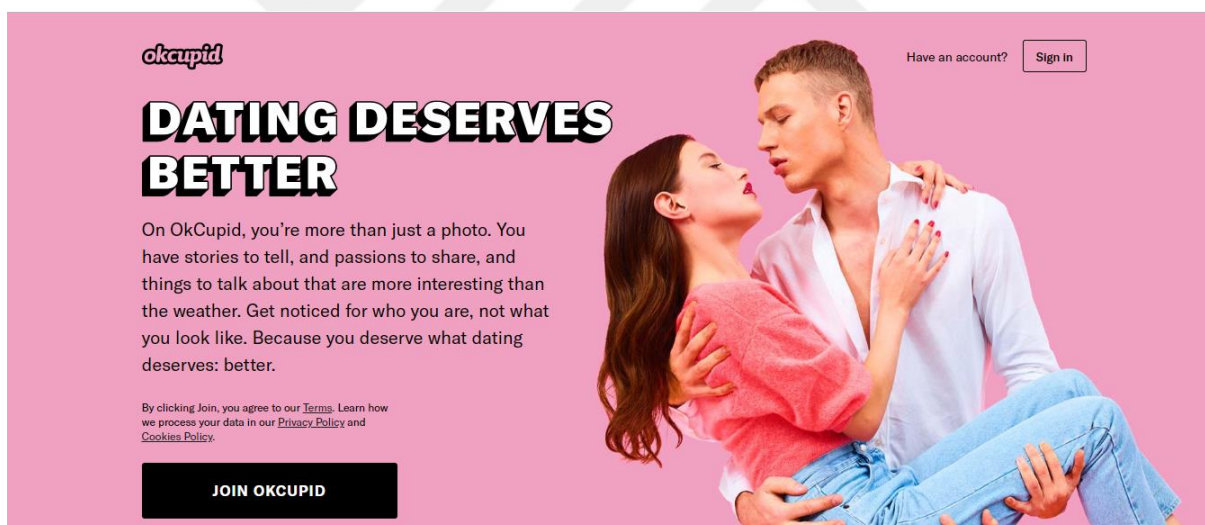


Figure 5.5: The welcoming page of okcupid.com

"You're about to go on better dates," OkCupid welcomed me, "Join OkCupid." Unlike Tinder, it requested my e-mail and a strong password. After I created an account, the app wanted me to "start with the basics": name, gender²⁶, age, and location (one also may pick the "anywhere" option) (Figure 5.6). Then it asked me who "I am looking for," that is, it wanted me to fill in "what connections I am looking for," "relationship type I am," "the ideal person

²⁶ Unlike Tinder, which is based on only two gender (man and woman), OkCupid provides users with numerous categories: Woman (ciswoman, transwoman), man (cisman, transman), agender, androgynous, bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, hijra, intersex, non-binary, other, pangender, transfeminine, transgender, transmasculine, transsexual, and two-spirit.

I am looking for” (the same categories with gender), and age range²⁷ (Figure 5.7). Then it requested me to tell them about myself, that is, to upload up to 9 photos,²⁸ write a short self-summary, and answer questions to calculate my best matches (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.6 displays the initial steps of a profile setup process, consisting of four sequential screens:

- Screen 1: What's your first name?** Features a text input field for the first name.
- Screen 2: I am a...** Features radio buttons for gender selection, with 'Woman' selected.
- Screen 3: When were you born?** Features dropdown menus for 'Month', 'Day', and 'Year'.
- Screen 4: Where do you primarily live?** Features a prompt to 'Fill out your location automatically by enabling location services' and a toggle for 'Enable location services'.

Each screen includes a 'NEXT' button at the bottom, and privacy notices are visible below the input fields.

Figure 5.6: Basic steps to set up one's profile

Figure 5.7 displays the 'Who are you looking for?' section of the profile construction process, consisting of four sequential screens:

- Screen 1: What connections are you looking for?** Features checkboxes for 'Hookups', 'New friends', 'Short-term dating', and 'Long-term dating'.
- Screen 2: I am...** Features radio buttons for relationship type, with 'Monogamous' selected.
- Screen 3: I am looking for...** Features checkboxes for 'Men' and 'Women'.
- Screen 4: How old should they be?** Features a range selector for age, currently set from 18 to 99.

Each screen includes a 'NEXT' button at the bottom, and additional options are available via 'MORE OPTIONS' links.

Figure 5.7: The “Who are you looking for?” part of profile construction

²⁷ To reach potential participants from various age ranges, I filled in 18-99, the lowest and highest ages the app suggests. The app then asked whether I was sure of this and put a thinking emoji.

²⁸ “Whatever you like. Just keep it clean!” it told me before uploading any. I put two photos, the same ones on Tinder, one of my memoji and one of my drawings. The app said, “Look at you, hot stuff. You must be in the photo.”

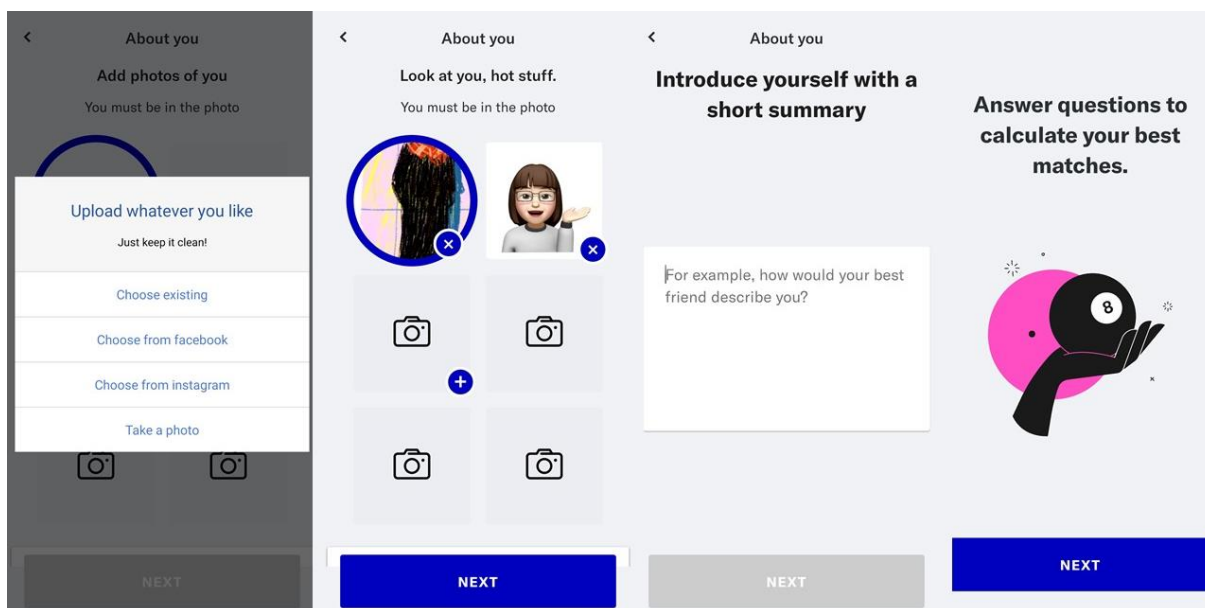


Figure 5.8: The “Tell us about yourself” part

This is where the “It took my whole day!” part begins. I first thought that there would be an end. Two hours later, I realized that the questions were endless. The app does not allow one to tab next and to swipe unless one answers at least 15 questions. OkCupid not only requires an answer but also wants the user to give her/his ideal partner’s response. Endless questions involve numerous issues, from politics to ethics, sexual fantasies to tastes, and global questions to local-specific ones (Figure 5.9). The more question one answers, the better the app calculates. This is where OkCupid distinguishes itself from Tinder since its emphasis on betterness lies in the questionnaire part, which is the app’s primary style of allure. OkCupid requires personal information more than name, age, university, location, and picture to calculate “an algorithmic ‘you’ alongside with your algorithmic others” (Cheney-Lippold, 2017, p. 182). Turning users into measurable types, the app matches users with each other according to match percentages by calculating the numbers of agree and disagree. In Reha’s words, the app gives the user “pinpoint results.” As I will discuss below, providing pinpoint results, the algorithm produces feelings of security and safety and a sense of “better quality.”

The image displays a questionnaire interface from a dating app, organized into two rows of four questions each. Each question is labeled '1 of 15' at the top. The interface includes a 'You' profile icon and a 'Skip this question' link for each item.

Row 1 Questions:

- Question 1:** Due to the pandemic, do you find it harder to commit to future/long-term plans?
 - Yes, it's hard to plan during lockdown ☐
 - No, I'm just riding the wave ☐
- Question 2:** Which best describes your political beliefs?
 - Liberal / Left ☐
 - Centrist ☐
 - Conservative / Right ☐
 - Other ☐
- Question 3:** Do you fast during Ramadan?
 - Yes ☐
 - No ☐
 - Sometimes ☐
- Question 4:** Most trusted woman in Turkey?
 - Müge Anlı ☐
 - Seda Sayan ☐
 - Neither of them ☐

Row 2 Questions:

- Question 5:** Do you find it disturbing that products are still tested on animals?
 - Yes ☐
 - No ☐
- Question 6:** Which makes for a better first date?
 - Coffee and chit-chat ☐
 - Drinks and making out ☐
- Question 7:** Do you enjoy dark, violent, or disturbing music?
 - Yes ☐
 - No ☐
 - When I'm in the mood. ☐
 - Unsure ☐
- Question 8:** Would you ever record a video of yourself having sex?
 - Yes ☐
 - No ☐

Additional Features:

- Question 9:** Your ideal person would say:
 - Yes ☐
 - No ☐
- Question 10:** This is important to me ☐

Figure 5.9: Some examples from endless questions

Feelings of safety and security also derive from the app's strict rules regarding profiles. Just a few hours after I created my account (Figure 5.10) and started swiping, the app removed my pictures and messaged me that I was not present in these photos, and less than a month later, on October 28, 2020, I found out that OkCupid had banned my woman profile, but my man profile still existed. I had never had such an experience with Tinder. My participants told me that users must have complained about my profile because the app would not normally ban a profile. People on OkCupid seem to take fake and/or anonymous profiles more seriously than Tinderers.

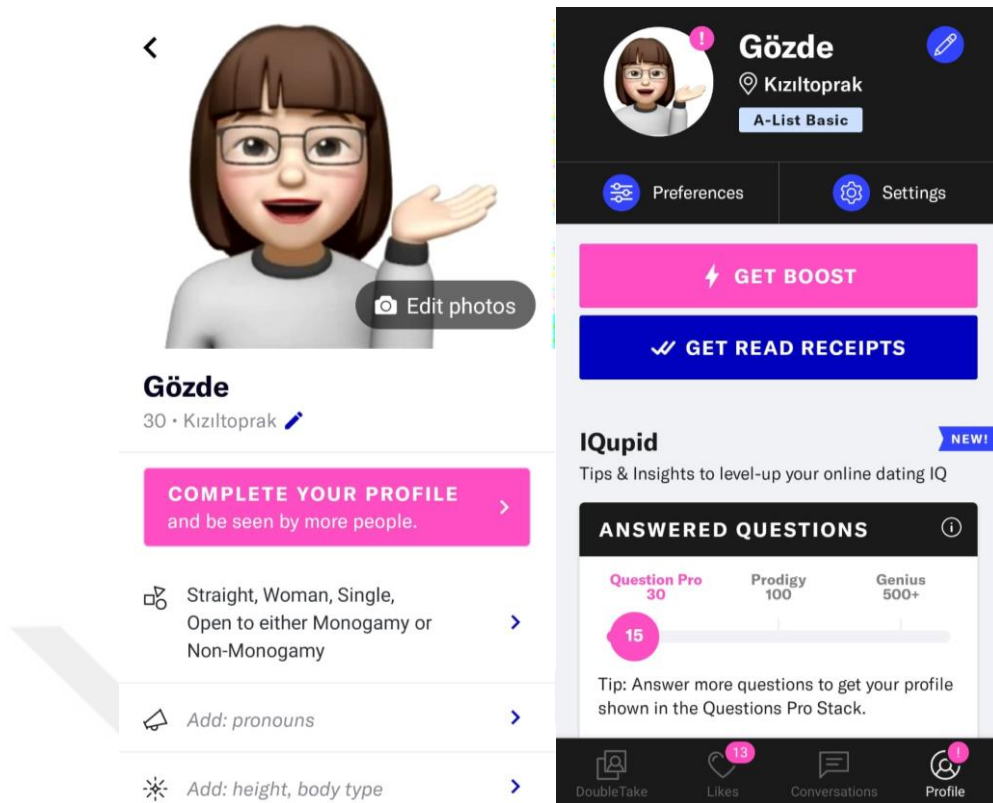


Figure 5.10: OkCupid profile²⁹

The app does not limit users in terms of profile decoration but encourages them to write more about themselves. Besides continuing to answer endless questions, users can add their height, body shape, religion, political view, whether they have a child and/or pet, whether they want any of them, etc. What is more, the app provides 50 profile prompts that let its users get to know each other more such as “On a typical Friday night, I am...” and “I’d like to be known for my...,” or the app introduces topics that help the user personalize her/his matches such as vegetarianism, sports, feminism, LGBTQ, gaming, art & design, etc. Through these kinds of tools based on the text that helps one produce more data for calculation, OkCupid reinforces the sense that “one is more than just a photo.”

Details are not simply unique to the profile decoration but also swiping. To put it differently, pinpoint results not only stem from the data the user produces but pinpoint profiles differ according to how the user wants to swipe. In contrast to Tinder, OkCupid provides its users with certain categories that they can choose to look for their potential partner. At the top of the main page, where one swipes profiles, there are seven categories in which the user can find profiles specific to that category: recommended, online, new people, match %, popular, question pros, and nearby (Figure 5.11). OkCupiders generally use “Recommended Just for You” because it is free. If users want to reach other specialized categories, they must pay.

²⁹ The image on the left represents my current profile. After clicking the “complete your profile” button, the app takes you to the page on the right.

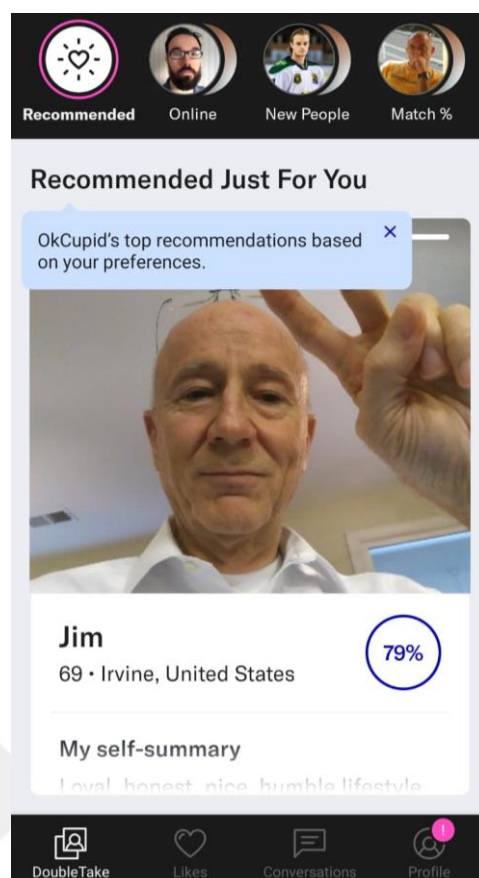


Figure 5.11: OkCupid's swiping page

There are four different subscription types: free, OkCupid Basic, OkCupid Premium, and Incognito Mode. According to the app's website (OkCupid, n.d.), free OkCupid users can only like up to 100 profiles per day and constantly encounter ads during swiping. OkCupid Basic users can have dealbreakers which arrange filters according to what matters to them the most, unlimited likes, no ads, one boost per day, can see whether the match reads their message, and can unlock intros (catching all intros at once). In addition to these advantages, OkCupid Premium users can see who likes them before they like and everyone's public answers to questions before they answer. Finally, Incognito Mode allows one to keep an active profile while being hidden from others unless one sends a message to or likes them. Only four OkCupiders in my research have bought the premium package while others use the app for free. This might be because of the high exchange rate and/or because, unlike Tinderers, OkCupiders can send an intro to the profile they like without necessarily waiting for a mutual match. If the person accepts the intro, they can start a conversation. In fact, on OkCupid, writing an intro is more important than liking the profile because when users only like a profile and do not write an intro, they cannot reach that profile unless the person likes back. This feature leads many users to write on their profiles, "I cannot see your likes, write me an intro." It is one of the most encountered sentences the participants mentioned to me. Hence, if users

want to be visible to others, they should send an intro rather than a like.

A Tinderer might easily embrace the app due to its simple design while an OkCupider might need some time to adapt and get used to it. OkCupid seems more complicated than Tinder, but its complex design is perceived, first and foremost, as safer than its counterpart. The participants mainly described Tinder as superficial while OkCupid as safe and secure:

OkCupid is the one that I use the most. I find it safer. ... Before going on a date, I want to have more information about the person. And there I can find some information, for example, regarding free speech, or her ideas about sleeping together. I can easily reach the information that I may get within months. This is a good thing, I think. (Salih, the 32-year-old man using both Tinder and OkCupid)

It's an entertaining platform. I prefer OkCupid to Tinder because Tinder requires less information and is more superficial. I mean, you just swipe right or left, and there, men treat you like, "I'm looking for a woman to have sex. Are you coming or not?" That's why I don't like Tinder. But OkCupid is more about getting to know each other because you answer questions, the other party answers questions, and [the app] matches you accordingly. ... That's why I prefer OkCupid. ... It provides me a safe place and an easy one. (Serra, the 27-year-old, white collar woman)

An algorithm is "a well-specified recipe," according to Greenfield, "a finite, structured, sequential and highly explicit set of instruction" (2017, p. 211). It appears that OkCupid has a better-specified recipe that creates feelings of safety and security than Tinder. It is sensed as safer and more secure because such an algorithmic design protects users from facing anyone or creates the feeling of being more protected. By answering questions, filling in other sections, and choosing categories, one can avoid being visible to anyone. In contrast to Tinder, the app makes one feel "Not everyone is here" or "Anybody can be here, but the algorithm can block them from reaching me." This sense of "Not everyone is here" is not merely created by the app's well-specified recipe but also by its lack of a Turkish interface. When I asked the participants why they specifically prefer OkCupid, many of them highlighted the app's only-English-language interface:

[Talking about both Bumble and OkCupid] They have no interface in Turkish; that's why I think few people use them. And because few people use them, few people only know of them. So they seem more sterile to me. And also, I guess the lack of a Turkish interface moves people away from them. What is good about OkCupid, I think, is that it shows people according to percentages. I don't want to describe it as such, but you don't see people who smoke HOOKAH, for example. You see people who look like you a little. You can choose his political view too. At least you don't see conservative people. (Didem, the 22-year-old graduate student who is also currently working, using both Bumble and OkCupid)

I think Tinder is REALLY DIFFERENT from OkCupid. Tinder is severely getting worse. It is, how should I say, MORE public. I mean, today, everyone is using it as I understood. ... There were college students, I mean, newly graduated people were using Tinder before. But now there are more blue-collar, I'm not saying this to despise, but [Tinder] is more at the bottom. But there are OLDER people on OkCupid, more graduate people, people in their 30s, and WORKING people. (Serkan, the 27-year-old

Ph.D. student using both Tinder Plus and OkCupid)

I prefer OkCupid because the communication there is in English. ... There are more people who are decent, who have a higher level of education, mostly college graduates, people who are economically independent, who can stand on their own feet. (Şahin, the 51-year-old retired man)

OkCupid is safer and more secure not only because its algorithm calculates the best matches, but also because the app is designed in English. There are people who know English on OkCupid, that is, more qualified individuals than on Tinder. Knowing English is felt as a higher level of education, higher socio-economic status, and people with better quality. Thus, OkCupiders eliminate, or they believe so, to some extent, everyone of the “Everybody is here” just by using the app. In this sense, using OkCupid refers to drawing a symbolic boundary. Ceren, for instance, complained before about Tinder and how everyone is using it. She later told me that OkCupid is closer to her: “Because the app’s in English [smiling]. This is a very distinctive feature in Turkey, unfortunately. ... At least I can eliminate those people like the grocery store owner in the neighborhood or the liquor store owner.” Safety and security here resonate with better quality. In the 34-year-old working man, Talat’s words, OkCupid’s design, with the lack of a Turkish interface, provides a “status difference,” a symbolic boundary. Choosing OkCupid over Tinder is, hence, a social and cultural marker of distinction in this case.

Design matters. It can both allure and repel individuals. That is, people do not simply use dating apps and randomly choose one to find a partner, but they specifically prefer the one that they are affected by its design the most. In this case, Tinder’s affective atmosphere filled with a conflicting sense of “Everybody is here” allures some while repelling others. OkCupid, on the other hand, with its more complicated algorithm and English-only interface, creates a “technofantasy” (Hong, 2020, p. 16) that the algorithm knows better and calculates the best match with pinpoint accuracy. The English-only algorithmic design with such a technofantasy produces an aesthetics of OkCupid as safer as well as with better quality. That is, there is an imagination of OkCupid that it is safe and there are highbrow people. Preferring OkCupid is, thus, also a matter of taste as users can conserve their class positionalities and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 2017, p. 20). In Bourdieu’s terms, it is part of the distinction and reproduction of symbolic boundaries.

5.4 Distinction: “Dating Apps Are Like a Music Festival, But Some Have a Better Quality”

“Now I open Tinder just to laugh at the types. With new apps like OkCupid and Bumble,

Tinder has fallen through the floor. I mean, EVERYBODY started to use it. ANY TYPE OF PERSON,” said İrem, who has been using dating technologies for six years. Once upon a time, she felt gratitude towards Tinder as the app was a magnificent place to meet people she could not physically meet. But now it is a lowbrow platform for her because there are currently Arabs and Syrians on Tinder. Today what excites her instead is Bumble, where she can meet European guys like she had met once on Tinder. Bumble is the new Tinder. Similarly, Onur has been using dating apps for five or six years, and he said that the profiles are worsening on Tinder regarding quality. He made a list of the apps that he used and is currently using based on quality:

There is Happn, for instance. One hundred percent, people there are not people I can get along with. They are from different societal layers. I can use the word lower class scientifically, right? Yes, I think so. Socio-economically. ... Tinder is very popularized, so there is fifty percent of these kinds of people. In fact, now there are more. OkCupid is still OK. I can keep using it because this percentage is still lower there. Bumble, in this respect, is completely the opposite of Happn. Ninety percent of its population is from the circle that I am looking for.

Founded in 2014, Happn is another location-based dating application with 100 million users (Happn, n.d.). It is one of the most popular dating apps in Turkey. Similar to Tinder, the app uses GPS functionalities to match; however, it basically matches users based on the locations where they crossed paths. Users do not have to be nearby to have a match. Because of its popularity, many participants told me that they once tried Happn but immediately deleted it due to the lack of filters. Like Tinder, one can have a match with anyone. In this sense, Happn’s simple design, like Tinder’s, is a style of repellency.

On the other hand, Bumble and OkCupid seem to be better-quality apps. But what is interesting is that Bumble’s design is almost identical to Tinder’s, except that only women can send their first message to men after a mutual match. Like OkCupid, the app has no Turkish interface. Also, it is not compatible with Android – yet. Bumble’s “profeminist” feature, lack of a Turkish interface, and incompatibility with Android lead very few people to use Bumble and women to prevent anyone from contacting them. Hence, these features turn Bumble into a better-quality, high-class app than Tinder in this cultural setting. However, though there are highbrow people on Bumble unlike Tinder, some participants insist on using OkCupid since the former also lacks a detailed design. In other words, Bumble’s lack of a well-specified recipe moves individuals away from the app. That few people use it is insufficient because what makes a dating app a better-quality app is embedded in its technological architecture. Nevertheless, on March 2, 2021, OkCupid launched its Turkish interface – the only non-English language. OkCupid must have aimed to increase the number of downloads and

subscriptions, but this might affect the users who have preferred the app specifically because of its lack of a Turkish interface. By removing this distinctive feature, such an update might create a sense that “OkCupid is worsening because everyone is here now.”

The technological design has a role in the reproduction of distinction. Apps are not simply designed for everyone, but some are designed with an aim to target particular groups or designed in such a way that users can personalize them in order to distinguish themselves from everyone of the “Everybody is here.” People generally might be happy with Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, or Snapchat although everybody is there. They can block anyone or limit anyone’s reach through certain features of these apps. They themselves can draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and everyone. However, when it comes to dating apps, not all people are happy with the one that includes everybody. In other words, the ultimate goal of dating apps can be the same, to match people and help them find a short or long-term partner, but how they are designed, the affective environment they create, and aesthetics have an impact on individuals’ preferences. Aras, for instance, who has been using them for almost six years, defined dating apps as like a music festival: “It’s a huge festival area. Everybody’s there. You’re passing by someone, catching each other’s eye for a second. Then you’re moving on. It’s like that.” When I asked why he passed from Tinder to OkCupid, he underlined: “Because it’s a festival with BETTER QUALITY, more organized.” Design can function as both a style of allure and a style of repellency that move people toward and away from themselves. To some extent, it plays a role in distinction, paving the way for creating or maintaining symbolic boundaries. I say “to some extent” because, as I will also demonstrate in Chapter 6, preference is not a static, predetermined disposition but full of contradictions and surprises. Some participants, for example, were using both Tinder and OkCupid though they found the latter better. Onur makes a clear high vs. popular culture distinction between Happn, Tinder, OkCupid, and Bumble, but he continues to use Tinder, OkCupid, and Bumble.

To give another example, the dating app Inner Circle distinguishes itself from Tinder, emphasizing better quality and the opportunity to improve one’s social capital, etc. It is more than a dating app, a networking app, in fact, as it matches users based on their LinkedIn accounts. Inner Circle appears as a high-culture app, more sophisticated than Tinder, since it has an application process that creates a sense perception that “They are not letting everyone subscribe.” I asked the interviewees whether they knew about the app. Some knew, some did not, and some used it for a while. I was surprised to hear that they immediately deleted it. The app aimed to produce a distinction with its functionality based on the LinkedIn account. It might have thought that its social-capital-improving feature would be appealing to people.

However, such a defined recipe was seen as a repelling style rather than an alluring one. The participants told me that swiping and being swiped by people through their occupation is not attractive. The Inner Circle example reminds us of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication. In his "Encoding/Decoding" article (1980), Hall argues that audiences do not simply consume media messages that are produced as they are, but they have an active role in decoding these messages, and they can interpret the message differently. According to Hall, the consumer might take the intended meaning directly, be unwilling to take it directly, or reject the dominant, intended meaning altogether. Thus, the consumption of a message is as crucial as its production. Technological architecture, encoding in this regard, matters, but a dating app's design alone is insufficient to attract or repel an individual. The design's aesthetics, or decoding, is as important as the architecture itself in terms of preference. To say it differently, an app's design might aim to produce a distinction by targeting a particular group of people. It reproduces distinction to some extent, but this should not disregard the fact that preference is not a static disposition but affective, sometimes conflicting, overflowing with surprises. Therefore, although I acknowledge that taste is not independent of one's class position or habitus, I do not want to make a Bourdieusian conclusion that using OkCupid belongs to a high culture whereas Tinder is a popular product. Nor do I wish to reproduce the omnivore model (DiMaggio, 1987; Fishman & Lizardo, 2013; Peterson & Simkus, 1992) and claim that there is now a cultural diversity regarding preferences rather than a low culture-high culture distinction. As the participants' preferences and legitimation display, what we call preference is not a cultural form of disposition but a performance with contradiction, incoherence, and tension (Hennion, 2001, 2007; Highmore, 2016a, 2016b).

Focusing on technological design and aesthetics, this chapter suggests rethinking users' taken-for-granted preferences and the concept of preference beyond the Bourdieu-omnivore binary. It exposes how individuals prefer some dating apps over others to find a date and how these preferences affected by design and its aesthetics, in a way, reproduce distinction. The following chapter will focus on mate preferences and the role of design and affects, and demonstrate how swiping as the contemporary mate selection is not only algorithmically shaped but also an affective practice.

Chapter 6³⁰

SWIPING: WHEN CHOOSING A MATE BECOMES APPIFIED

“[F]or millions of people, algorithms will make perhaps the largest decision of in their life: choosing a spouse.”
Christopher Steiner (2012, p. 214)

“You’ve got to find the one that truly excites you. That’s more difficult to put into words, although you know it when you see it.”
(The 52-year-old sales manager, Alan, quoted in Illouz [2012, p. 47])

6.1 “The Paradox of Choice”: Freedom or Burden of Choice?

Since the twentieth century, individual choice has become the main cultural frame for organizing personal freedom, “the chief trope under which the self and the will in liberal polities are organized” (Illouz, 2019, n. p.). The one with the ability to choose is understood as a free individual. With neoliberalism, such framing has been furthered by the “entrepreneurialization of the self” (Bandinelli, 2020; Senneth, 1998; Thrift, 2005), followed by an understanding that there are no more structures but only individuals. In other words, in the neoliberal order where individuals “have become intensely subjective beings” (Rose, 1999, p. 3), they are the ones who are primarily responsible for governing their lives. They, are forced to, “shape their lives through the choices they make about family life, work, leisure, lifestyle, and personality and its expression” (Rose, 1999, p. 10). These, including mate choice, are all first-order, “strategic life choices” that have greater significance in consequences for people’s lives than second-order and hence less strategic choices that are framed once the first-order decisions have been made (Kabeer, 2005, p. 14).

In the neoliberal order, where success and failure are individualized (Salecl, 2010; Scharff, 2016), choice becomes even more crucial since individuals’ success and failures in

³⁰ A version of this chapter will be published in *Emotions and Society*. See Cöbek (2022b).

life now depend on the very choices they make. This is where “the paradox of choice” (Schwartz, 2014) lies. On the one hand, choice is associated with individual freedom and empowerment. However, while some individuals enjoy the ability to make a choice, institutions, laws, rules, and norms constrain others’ ability to make strategic life choices. For example, in many countries, because of the abortion ban, women are denied the ability to make one of the major strategic life choices – whether to have a child or not. Therefore, women’s empowerment is fundamentally related to the ability to choose (Kabeer, 2005). This relationship has already been made in the twentieth century but became fully realized in the 1960s when women’s movements demanding equal pay and sexual liberation emerged (Illouz, 2019).

On the other hand, there is an abundance of choice. Individuals live in a “tyranny of choice” (Salecl, 2010) as they are bombarded with options and forced to choose one among many. Therefore, choice is not simply personal freedom but also imposed on individuals to make their way in every issue. They must choose which coffee to drink, which pants to wear, which course to take, which meal to cook, whom to date... This abundance of choice comes with the stress and anxiety of making a concrete choice. Hence, choice is both individual freedom and a burden. This paradox can also be seen in online dating. With the rise of dating technologies, choosing a partner, which was once primarily organized by social and cultural institutions, is now left to the individual choice; hence, social norms are replaced by one’s ability to choose (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1990; Giddens, 1992; Thwaites, 2017, 2020). This is both “‘liberating’ to a certain extent” and “a source of suffering for the subject, who is burdened with the responsibility of picking the best possible partner, and has only his or herself to blame if this endeavor fails” (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022, p. 2).

Individuals are provided with endless alternatives and options in the name of freedom of choice, but ultimately, they are left with the burden of making “the right choice.” Algorithms, in this regard, are here not only to present alternatives but also to help individuals “relieve” this burden. Tracking user behavior and turning them into data, algorithms predict individual preferences and desires (Seyfert & Roberge, 2016); hence, they determine and sort the options customized by user data. The more one moves online, decides, clicks, and/or swipes, the better the functioning algorithm(s) predict(s) preferences and determine(s) the alternatives. Since in today’s appified world, individuals live under the “dictatorship” of algorithms (Vuzharov, 2019, p. 83), individuals’ options, and hence, choices are architected³¹

³¹ The terms architect and architecture are used here intentionally rather than construct and construction as the former carries the possibility that what is architected may not go as architected whereas the latter is more static and resistant to surprises that might disrupt the construction.

by algorithms. As an appified form of mate choice, swiping is one of the practices in which the role of algorithms can be strikingly observed. Many studies on online dating draw attention to how algorithms choose before the individual and claim that, with the emergence of dating technologies, mate selection as well as love have become disembodied and algorithmic, and individuals act following the market logic (Badiou, 2017; Bauman, 2003; Finkel et al., 2012; Hardey, 2002; Illouz, 2007; Illouz & Finkelman 2009; Roscoe & Chillas, 2014; Sprecher et al., 2008; Tong et al., 2016). On the other hand, some studies underline the cultural laws of mate selection, arguing that, although online dating takes away some of the obstacles to social diversity, people still tend to choose individuals who share a similar racial, ethnic, class, political, and educational background (Alhabash et al., 2014; Bergström, 2022; Huber & Malhotra, 2016; Lee, 2016; Schmitz, 2017; Whyte & Torgler, 2017a, 2017b). Moreover, men and women engage in a “beauty-status exchange” (McClintock, 2014).

Following one of the major strategic life choices, this chapter focuses on and aims to understand swiping. Through a video reenactment technique, it makes a closer examination of the practice. Though it supports the above-mentioned studies’ arguments regarding the role of algorithms and the cultural laws of mate selection, it challenges them as the findings suggest that swiping is a complex, affective practice involving many things. In this regard, the things that affect individuals’ mate selection can be grouped under two processes. The first part of this chapter focuses on the pre-swiping process and how both one’s intersectional background (class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation) and algorithms architect individual choices. It also challenges the female love-male sex binary, reproduced in the mate selection literature, that women value socio-economic status whereas men prioritize beauty while choosing a partner. The second part looks at what happens during swiping and points to things that affect users’ swiping practices, such as mood, design, profiles, and the affectivity of images and text. Questioning the techno-social architecture of mate choice, it demonstrates how algorithms can fail to present the perfect results during swiping and how users can sometimes act in contrast to their socially architected criteria. In other words, it reveals that things may not go as architected. The final part criticizes the marketization argument that mate choice is reduced to the market logic by dating technologies and summarizes that swiping as an appified mate selection practice is not simply a techno-social activity but an affective performance full of contradictions, incoherence, and surprises.

6.2 *Pre-swiping: Architecting the Choice*

Swiping is, first and foremost, a product of dating technologies and their design. However, it does not mean that mate choice has completely become technologized and shaped by algorithms as algorithms, in the context of dating apps, are learning machines that track user behaviors, turn them into data, calculate the best options accordingly, and present them to the user. Users behave primarily following their intersectional background. In other words, depending on one's class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age, user behaviors are very much cultural. This means that users' mate choices are not independent but architected by these social and cultural factors as well as algorithms that learn from them. By focusing on the pre-swiping process, this part elaborates on the techno-social architecture of mate choice.

6.2.1 *Mate Preferences as Taste: "I Try to Find People a Bit Similar to Me"*

Mate selection is understood as a matter of taste, thus, a core mechanism of the reproduction of social distinction as preferences regarding food, music, literature, coupling, etc., are socially structured (Schmitz, 2017, p. 13). A large body of academic literature, overwhelmingly based on quantitative studies, draws attention to the structure of mate choice through the concept of homophily. That is, people tend to prefer partners similar to themselves in terms of race and ethnicity (Alhabash et al., 2014; Lundquist and Ken-Hou, 2015; McGrath et al., 2016; Tsunokai et al., 2014), cultural capital (Lee, 2016; Whyte & Torgler, 2017b), and even political view (Huber & Malhotra, 2016). On the other hand, as I have already thoroughly examined in Chapter 2 and elsewhere (Cöbek, 2021), studies on mate selection demonstrate significant differences among gender. While physical appearance is the primary criterion for both, the beauty-status binary remains dominant among men and women. In other words, women are more likely to value socio-economic status than men while the latter prioritizes beauty (Chappetta and Barth, 2016; Felmler and Kreager, 2017; McGloin and Denes, 2018; Peters and Salzsieder, 2018). However, in online dating, physical appearance as the primary criterion does not merely derive from cultural norms of beauty but is also supported by technological design. Tinder's image-centered design, for instance, incites users to choose their partners via photos.

The participants' criteria support the fact that physical appearance is the first thing users look at in the profile. They, sometimes timidly, indicate that physical attributes such as body weight and shape, height, hair, mustache, and beard are primarily significant in their mate choice. Nonetheless, their mate preferences considerably challenge the female love-male sex binary. For instance, the 30-year-old actress Melis using Tinder, described precise physical

criteria before swiping. She was looking for a guy who was not bald but tall and athletic-looking, with no mustache and beard. She later emphasized university. She did not simply mean socio-economic status with the university but more: “[University], I think, definitely affects people’s [stops for a few seconds to think] social environment, economic condition, and how they treat women.” Other female participants also gave importance to education, not in terms of economic situation but intellectuality and manners. As I discussed elsewhere (Cöbek & Ergin, 2021), since more women have access to education, their cultural capital criterion does not necessarily mean that they value their future partner’s socio-economic position but their cultural capital, which influences intellectual life, gender roles, and attitudes toward women. Similarly, the 30-year-old actress who was once fond of Tinder but now uses Bumble because of Tinder’s increased social diversity, İrem, also described particular criteria:

I am tall, so my primary criterion is his height. But I have so many preferences. What kind of movies he likes, how he talks, what he wears, how he dresses, where he hangs out, and how he spends his time and money? EVERYTHING is important. First sight is very crucial. But HEIGHT. If it’s 1.90, swipe right [laughing]. If it’s 1.70, then swipe left. ... I don’t want to see nudity. I like it when I see it, but it must be natural. I mean, he has jumped in a funny way. If it’s natural, it’s beautiful. If it says, “Hey, look, this is my body,” I don’t like it. ... No selfie, please. I’m not a selfie-person or selfie-in-front-of-a-mirror-person. ... He must smile in the photo. And also, let’s see his body. Don’t make any surprises. I mean, you don’t have to be naked but let’s see your height. For instance, you may be 1.90 cm tall but narrow-shouldered. Why shall I lose my time with that kind of person? I mean, I want to like that person. He must be the type that I shall like a lot. If he doesn’t, then I should like his intelligence. ... He shouldn’t try to prove something. Men shouldn’t scream. “I did this. Here is my body and my money.” Men should never scream. It’s not cool at all.

The participants listed some profiles they encountered the most, which they call “cliché.”³² In the case of women, for instance, men generally put a) photos with cars, either a selfie inside their car or a picture of him leaning on his car, or with an expensive watch like Rolex, b) half-naked selfies, primarily taken in gym, which expose his muscles, c) photos taken while doing more costly sports such as rafting, paragliding, or going surfing, and d) photos with profession symbols that expose his status (e.g., doctor, lawyer, police, and soldier). Because they find these kinds of profiles unattractive, their criteria are also an overt reaction to them. For example, describing what she looks for and does not look for in a man, İrem was referring to these profiles when she said, “Men shouldn’t try to prove something. They should never scream.” Similarly, Aslı described her criteria by saying she does not want a man from the above profiles. She explained:

[Because] they are the profiles that I encountered THE MOST. In a car, behind the wheel. What he tries

³² For a closer examination of these profiles and the affective reaction they receive, see Cöbek (2022a).

to show is that “Look, I have a car.” It’s not cool. Why shall I be directly interested in your car? Why shall I be directly interested in your economic situation? Here I am looking for someone with whom I can enjoy his conversation. I want to talk about pleasant things. I want to match with people I can talk to and share something. ... What interests me is not your car. I won’t be impressed by it, so I don’t want to give any credit to these people.

Both Aslı and İrem were overtly challenging the gendered construction of the expectation that women look for men with high socio-economic status. Aslı was not seeking a man with a car but a man with whom she could enjoy his conversation while İrem emphasized naturality in contrast to stereotypes, for instance:

I don’t like when he, who lives in Turkey, says, “I went abroad.” But if it’s a natural photo, then I like it. For example, a picture in front of Eifel Tower or Clock Tower isn’t cool. ... It’s unnecessary. We can solve each other in little detail.

Naturality was prevalent in women’s criteria. They were definitely not preferring the stereotypical profiles they described above but attracted to authentic ones:

I try to find people a little bit SIMILAR TO ME. Of course, this depends on how I define myself, but for example, when I see someone who has put a photo from a gym or in a car, I think, “What do I talk with him about?” Pilots and doctors are a little bit unattractive to me. I try to prefer people who put more NATURAL photos. I mean, it can be a photo taken by his friend in a café. ... More natural, with fewer selfies. I don’t have daily selfies, so I try to pick these kinds of people. I feel tired while looking at men continuously trying to show what they’re doing. He’s climbing a mountain, swimming, canoeing, and going to the gym. I find them a little exhausting. (Ayşenur, the 31-year-old Ph.D. student who has been using dating apps, first Tinder and now OkCupid, for five years)

I find [the above-mentioned profiles] very cliché. I see them as some kind of masculinity performance, and I am never attracted to them. I prefer more natural, more sincere profiles that do not pretend to be someone else. I look for honest, clever answers [in the bio]. (Eda, the 34-year-old journalist as well as a Ph.D. student who has been using OkCupid for three years)

The profiles they find stereotypical seem products of the female love-male sex binary. They are a type of self-presentation based on a gendered assumption that women are generally attracted to high-class and well-built men. As an affective reaction, the female participants’ unattraction toward these profiles and emphasis on naturality challenges the beauty-status binary and its gendered assumptions and expectations it does not eliminate.

On the other side, the male participants showed a similar reaction but in a different respect. They listed the profiles that they find stereotypical as they encounter them the most: profiles with selfies, mostly taken in front of a mirror, that expose her body, selfies from a high angle, with arm fully extended, selfies with duck face, photos with filters, pictures with evening dresses, and pictures where the woman looks at the camera over her shoulder. The male participants also began describing their mate preferences with an overt reaction against these profiles. Taner, for instance, knew what he definitely did not look for:

If the person uses filters TOO MUCH and has filters in all her photos, I find them unattractive. I don't like these kinds of profiles. If she gives the same or similar poses, I mean, from the same angle, exact composition, I don't like those, too. If she, let's say, has photos only in bikinis, I don't mind if there is a photo in bikinis, but if all her pictures are in bikinis, then I don't like it. I don't like makeup too much. If there is too much makeup, I don't like it either. (Taner, the 30-year-old working man who has been using both Tinder and OkCupid for at least two years)

The 33-year-old architect Berk, who has been using Tinder for five years, is also unattracted to these profiles. He finds them as if they were created in a studio, as if the person has put in a tremendous effort while taking them. For him, they are superficial and not sincere. Instead, he tries to look for, in his own terms, "the amateur soul" in the photos. Similarly, the 37-year-old freelancer Murat, who has been using Tinder for seven years, highlighted that he does not prefer "the profiles with duck face" but "those that look more like a human being, those that put more natural photos." The male participants do not simply look for a natural-looking image without any filter and/or too-much makeup, but they are also very much interested in a woman's cultural capital. For instance, the 29-year-old self-employed and graduate student Cenk, who has been using Tinder for four years, emphasized the adjective "self-developed" while describing his preferences. He overtly indicated that he is looking for "a woman who has a certain level of intellectuality and has a particular ability in cultural terms, who has developed herself." Education, or cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms, seems both important for women and men:

What she is doing in life, the schools she attended, her profession, and her physical characteristics are all part of this business. Of course, all is not required. It is okay that two of them might not fit my criteria; others are welcomed. I mean, I don't have such a requirement, but I have to see some particular things (Onur, the 31-year-old working man using Tinder, OkCupid, and Bumble)

Onur graduated from one of the top public high schools in Turkey. Therefore, he values women's educational background, looking for someone who shares a similar cultural capital. Similarly, the 26-year-old graduate student Önder, who has been using Tinder Gold for more than two months, finds educational status very important: "I wonder about her educational background. I don't want to be with someone with lower educational status than mine. I have a character as such." Their mate preferences emphasizing women's natural look and educational status challenge the female love-male sex binary in two ways. First, their attraction toward the natural look means that they are interested in a particular type of beauty which is an affective reaction against today's aesthetic regime. According to Han (2018), beauty is purified from flaws, wounds, and all kinds of negativities; it is reduced to consumption and subjected to sexiness in the contemporary aesthetic regime. Selfies where the face is purified from flaws and wounds through technological filters and selfies with duck faces, in this case,

are products of this aesthetic regime. People are expected to like these products, but the participants seem to generate bodily resistance against the aesthetic regime. Second, the significance of educational status in their mate preferences demonstrates that men are not simply attracted to beauty, but they are also very much interested in the potential partner's cultural capital.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the dominant presence of stereotypical profiles based on the binary shows that there are also people who are attracted to these profiles. As Aslı says, "All of these profiles have followers. Some people buy them." To put it differently, the participants' unattraction toward these profiles has class implications as all participants come from a middle-class background. Their affective reaction to stereotypical profiles shows their class position. Hence, in this context, naturality is associated with class and functions as a marker of distinction as the participants clearly position themselves in contrast to the profiles they specifically want to avoid.³³ In addition, homophily, "the propensity to form a couple with someone similar to oneself" (Bergström, 2022, p. 100), is prevalent in their mate preferences. Thus, resonating with class, their challenge to the beauty-status binary is based on homophily primarily architecting the participant's mate choices. It functions as a core mechanism for the reproduction of social distinction. However, in online dating, these preferences are architected not only socially but also technologically.

6.2.2 *When Technology Intervenes: "I Can Get to Know the Person as Much as the App Presents Me"*

In a world where there is an app for everything, preferences are not merely socially shaped but also appified. Algorithms produce knowledge about individuals by turning every person's act and information into data and creating an "algorithmic self." They then calculate alternatives and show them to users (Introna, 2016). Cardon identifies four types of calculations: audience measurements (e.g., Google Analytics) that quantify the clicks of individuals and determine the *popularity* of websites; the classifying algorithm (e.g., Google rank) that determines the *authority* of websites; measurements of *reputation* (e.g., Facebook's "like") that evaluates the *popularity* of people and products; and *predictive* measures (e.g., recommendation systems of Amazon and Netflix) that employ statistical learning methods to personalize information presented to the user (2016, p. 96).

OkCupid's algorithmic design is apparently based on predictive measures as it records

³³ As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, some participants even prefer OkCupid over Tinder to avoid these kinds of profiles.

users' information and behavior. It aims to personalize information based on the traces of their online activity. It uses a particular statistical technique called "machine learning" as it "*learn[s]* by comparing a user's profile to others who have acted or decided in a similar way" (Cardon, 2016, p. 102), guesses preferences and desires, and sorts the options accordingly. As the previous chapter demonstrated, OkCupid calculates both an "algorithmic self" and an "algorithmic other." It compares them to others' profiles to match. By learning from and calculating individuals' in-app activities, OkCupid is more likely to provide results with pinpoint accuracy than Tinder. The latter is more "black-boxed" (Pasquale, 2015) and seems to have both audience measurements and predictive measures. Tinder's use of the Elo Score Rating System shows that the app tries to determine users' popularity by calculating the numbers of their being liked and disliked. In addition, using predictive measures, Tinder presents similar profiles when a user likes a specific profile, a pilot, for instance: "Let's say, I have swiped a pilot right. Then, the app shows me pilot profiles a lot throughout the day. It has things like that. We don't choose, but the app automatically chooses that" (Melis). In a sense, because it lacks a well-specified algorithm like OkCupid, Tinder blurs social boundaries by presenting users with more socially diverse options – profiles from various backgrounds. This is Tinder's one primary style of repellency for some participants who have understood the lack of a well-specified recipe as a negative feature. They specifically refer to the socially diverse presentation through the example of "grocery owner" (*bakkal amca*). Because Tinder is very popular and lacks an algorithm that personalizes options, some participants, mostly women, prefer OkCupid to avoid seeing as well as being presented to the grocery owner in the neighborhood:

My criteria can be more limiting on OkCupid regarding mate choice and profile suggestion. I worked very hard to input data blow-by-blow. There is a match percentage there. I think it works. ... [As such] I have at least ELIMINATED the neighborhood's grocery or liquor store owner, etc., as options. (Ceren, the 42-year-old OkCupid user)

OkCupid is preferable to Tinder as it maintains social stratification regarding mate choice. The app presents "relational filter bubbles" (Parisi & Comunello, 2020), the results of the algorithmic calculation of possible profiles with whom the user shares similar tastes, interests, and opinions. Since these bubbles restrict individuals to "information that conforms to [their] ideas of the world" (Pariser, 2011, p. 52), the app reinforces the social architecture of mate preference.

Nevertheless, algorithms do not simply support the social and cultural norms and rules regarding dating. They sometimes act in contrast to users' preferences to do an experiment. For instance, just like Facebook, OkCupid performed some psychological tests on its users in

2014 (Fung, 2014). It removed text and photos from users' profiles and even lied to some users by showing profiles with a 30% match rate as if they were excellent matches. In other words, OkCupid intentionally arranged bad matches and sent users on bad dates. Unsurprisingly, the co-founder Christian Rudder defended this experiment, telling people that they're "the subject of hundreds of experiments at any given time, on every site" (Fung, 2014, para. 4). As Pettman draws attention, what is more troubling is that a group of people also defended this act by normalizing "that's the deal:"

We use social media platforms to communicate in new, fun, and convenient ways – for free. And in return, we sign the absurdly detailed legal agreements that reserve the right of the company to vacuum up our personal information and use it for their own purposes (2021, p. 70).

The OkCupid scandal demonstrates that, although algorithms reproduce social and cultural norms, rules, and laws since codes are written by people according to these norms and rules, they can be intentionally re-written in contrast to them to shape individual behaviors, ideas, choices, and strategies. It demonstrates the potential power of algorithms to intervene in socially architected mate preferences and users' dating experiences. Algorithms create a technofantasy that they know better and can manipulate this fantasy. Many studies draw attention to this power of algorithms over users' preferences and claim that mate selection, which once required a physical attraction, has been disembodied and become dominated by algorithms (Badiou, 2017; Bauman, 2003; Finkel et al., 2012; Hardey, 2002; Illouz, 2007; Illouz & Finkelman 2009; Roscoe & Chillias, 2014; Sprecher et al., 2008; Tong et al., 2016). It is true that algorithms, first and foremost, decide what one sees and does not see by promoting some profiles over others, and they also determine how one can see the other by framing the information one can put and get. As the 34-year-old engineer Aras, who has been using dating apps for six years, highlighted during the interview, one can "get to know the person as much as the app presents." In an appified world, what we call choice is not simply architected by one's social position and cultural norms but also shaped by algorithms. However, focusing on the on-swiping process, the following part questions this techno-social architecture of mate choice. It demonstrates how algorithms can fail to calculate the best matches, leading users to question this technofantasy and act accordingly, and how many other things are involved in mate selection, affecting the techno-social architecture of mate choice.

6.3 *On-swiping: Choosing the One*

Before closely examining the participants' swiping practices, I must note that two things were prevalent during swiping. First, the participants predominantly called the person on the profile

this or that. It is apparent that dating technologies have led users to see online dating as a market and treat profiles as products. Only a few of them felt alienated while describing the person on the profile by calling this/that as they were aware of themselves being seen as objects whereas others seemed to normalize such treatment – as if they were doing shopping. Kemal, for example, the 44-year-old man, said he prefers OkCupid because it makes mate choice easier through filters and questions, or, in his words, “little boxes that promote the product.” These boxes help him explore different aspects of individuals or “product specifications.” And many defined online dating as a market. These views support the dominance of the market metaphor in online dating experiences (Erjavec & Fiser, 2016; Heino et al., 2010; Pananakhonsab, 2016). The market metaphor shows the power and role of design in individuals’ ways of seeing, looking, perceiving, and judging. Dating technologies are thus criticized for bringing economic logic into dating, structuring it as a market, and turning individuals into commodities (Badiou, 2017; Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2019; Lardellier, 2015; Salecl, 2010). However, as I demonstrate below, the fact that dating technologies brought the market logic into dating does not necessarily mean that individuals embrace this logic while swiping though they treat profiles as objects.

Users’ quick movements during swiping were also striking. Their decisions were so fast that I had difficulty following their swiping. Although OkCupid’s design, which provides more information than Tinder, slows mate choice down a little, both users decide very quickly. This acceleration primarily derives from the swipe logic that turned Tinder into a worldwide trend and was later embraced by other dating apps. That is, people swipe profiles very quickly because choice is simplified by the swipe feature, which reduces the very practice of choice to a yes or no binary and a quick thumb movement (David & Cambre, 2016, p. 7). Such an acceleration also stems from choice overload. Since users are overwhelmed by an abundance of choice (Palmer, 2020), they tend to reject the profile on display and pass to the next one (Pronk & Denissen, 2020). To say it differently, choice overload intrigues the idea that “there is always a better one than you match” and hence, produces the fear of missing out (fomo) (Bankov, 2019, p. 9), which turns swiping into a storm.³⁴ Because some participants passed profiles too quickly, it was sometimes challenging to follow. One participant, the 34-year-old OkCupid user Talat, explained that he was accustomed to acting rapidly because of the swiping logic while looking for a hookup partner, the 37-year-old OkCupid Premium user Bora put an emphasis on no time to waste for hooking up.

³⁴ Abundance of choice can even be seen in the name of a dating app: Plenty of Fish. A user is one of plenty of fish in the ocean.

However, acceleration is not simply a technological outcome but also affective. In other words, the first thing the participants look at is the physical look and its affectivity. The 30-year-old Tinder user Gizem prefers Tinder over OkCupid as she describes the app as first and foremost physical:

I don't want to give too much information there. ... I mean, I look more physical. I myself decide if he's perfect for me. Later I try to get to know him to have an opinion about him when I meet him face to face. I mean, I use the app for that first impression. Also, what are you going to do when you have all the information package of the person you've never met before? What are you going to do next? Read his book then [laughing]. ... [Tinder] is a physical app. We evaluate people according to the first impression, I mean, their vivid gestures in ten seconds, their looks. There is such a fact, I think. [On Tinder] It is also as such. I mean, you just do it via technology.

Users decide quickly because a) swiping is simply based on a thumb movement between yes or no that encourages people to act fast, b) there is an abundance of choice which intrigues the fomo-encouraging idea that there is always a better one, and c) swiping decision is also dependent on the affect. This challenges the disembodiment argument as the participants generally decide according to the first bodily impression of the profile. Before elaborating on the affectivity of profiles, it is worth mentioning other things that affect not only users' acceleration but also swiping decisions, namely one's mood and the affectivity of algorithms.

6.3.1 *In the Mood for Swiping: "With Excitement at That Moment"*

When I asked the participants to open the app and swipe a few profiles, they generally emphasized the influence of mood on their mate choice right before swiping:

It's a very spontaneous decision, with excitement at that moment. You don't even pay attention. You respond very viscerally and spontaneously in your leisure time. ... Also, you aren't the same person whenever you open the app. Let's say, one night, you have a few drinks, and you get bored. So, you might have a high degree of tolerance. You say, "Three photos are the same. So what? Let's give it a try," or you sometimes say, "What is this? She smokes and has put the same photos. Pass." And then I pass. (Aras)

I sometimes regret liking it. Very bizarre. I sometimes say, "Why have I liked this one?" (Selma, the 32-year-old white-collar woman using OkCupid)

It changes over time. Sometimes I can be very picky. Sometimes I swipe right very fast. ... In the first three or four years, I used it without picking. ... I could deform my criteria to reach more people. Sometimes. But for example, I was very picky until the last five or six months. But now, my speed increased again. I realized later. I mean, a match is made, and later I am like, "Why did I swipe this right?" (Onur)

From time to time, there are such moments that I swipe right the persons who don't fit my principles, that I would normally never want to match, because of my current state of mind. It is human nature. Human nature is a dynamic, changing thing. According to my mood, for example, sometimes I get angry

with one of the persons who fit my principles, or something happens. Then, I swipe not the persons I definitely want but those I DON'T want. This is a bit of the person's current mood and state of mind. But I generally swipe right the persons who fit my principles. (Cenk)

The structural explanations of mate preferences (e.g., Schmitz, 2017) generally fail to regard the very fact that Cenk has underlined: Human nature is dynamic. Individuals' affective mood influences their choices, preferences, strategies, judgments on what is beautiful, etc. They tend to like people similar to themselves, but there is always the possibility that this tendency can be interrupted by their mood. To put it differently, although mate choice is both socially and technologically architected, users' preferences might not go as architected because of the users' current mood. Since the participants generally use these apps when bored and/or lonely, they might bargain with their techno-socially architected criteria to have a match more quickly, depending on their situational boredom and the current degree of solitude. They might become less picky to be able to talk to someone, especially during both global and local lockdowns, and hence, to pass the boring and/or alone time. Therefore, swiping is never the same, depending on the moment it occurs. "With excitement at that moment," one can be affected by a thing in a person, hence, like the profile, but later, that thing might lose its charm, and the person can regret it, as Selma experienced. This dynamic understanding of swiping supports and reinforces, as the previous chapter underlined, the definition that preference is not a cultural form of disposition but a performance with contradiction, incoherence, and full of surprises as it is very much dependent on the encounter, or in Spinozian terms affection, between the human and the thing (Hennion, 2001, 2007; Highmore, 2016a, 2016b).

The participants were generally very picky during swiping. They mostly swiped the profiles left and liked very few of them. Their swiping decisions might have been affected by the research, the researcher's presence, and their awareness that they were swiping, at that moment, for the study. In other words, it is crucial to acknowledge that since mate choice is a performance, the participants' swiping practices also reflect their self-performance in the researcher's presence. Thus, swiping is situational.

6.3.2 *The Affectivity of Algorithms: "It's the App's Glitch"*

With its simple image-centered design, Tinder leads users to look primarily at the image. The participants became interested in the profile if the person's physical appearance fitted their criteria. Bodies generally must be tall (mostly in the case of men), and they must obey the societal standards of body weight. In addition to these physical attributes, the participants became interested in the profile if the profile was not one of the cliché profiles mentioned above. More specifically, laughing, smiling, or grimacing, the participants generally passed

the profiles that they defined as “stereotypical.” If they find something not stereotypical but authentic and physical attributes convenient, they look for other textual information to get to know the person more.

When it comes to OkCupid, things change. The apps’ idiosyncrasy and affectivity lies in the match percentage it provides. Some users of the app, first and foremost, put a greater value on the match percentage, in other words, the homophily percentage. They have certain different thresholds:

Match percentage is important. It must be at least 90%. If I were interested only in his type, then I would use Tinder. So, the match percentage is crucial. (Serra, the 27-year-old white-collar woman).

I don’t look much at the ones below 70%. When I look, I immediately look at the questions on religion. Because I don’t believe in God, whether he believes or the questions regarding sexuality or first date matter. But specifically, I look at the questions regarding religion and politics. ... But I try not to look at the profiles below 70%. I must like TOO MUCH to look. I must be very attracted to that person, I mean. (Çağla, the 25-year-old intern)

The match percentage affects users’ swiping direction and acceleration. For example, Aras got very curious about a profile when he saw 91%. The match percentage led him to get to know her more; hence, he stayed on the profile and visited the agree and disagree sections. The participants were generally more interested in the disagree part, which provides the issues they disagree with. When Aras learned about her smoking habit, he stopped examining the profile and swiped her right. In contrast, some participants immediately passed the profiles with lesser match percentages:

Someone named S. [She is pointing the profile to the camera]. I am looking at him [After a few seconds of silence, she raises her voice, moves away from her phone screen, and looks at the web camera] 50 PERCENT NOO [She is grimacing, shaking her head no]. I don’t get along with this at all, so there is no point in pushing. I am passing it directly. (Eda)

Eda’s assumption, based on the match percentage, that she would not get along with the man shows the prominent role and influence of algorithmic calculation in users’ mate choice. Similarly, Serra passed all the profiles below the 90% threshold, and the 22-year-old graduate student Didem passed a profile immediately because of the 71% match. These demonstrate the algorithm’s capacity to affect. While a high match percentage increases its affectivity, a low match percentage diminishes. As such, algorithms not only affect the pre-swiping process through relational filter bubbles but also affect the on-swiping process through the match percentage. They have social power (Beer, 2017; Gillespie, 2014) as algorithms influence users’ ways of seeing, perceiving, sensing, and approaching the profiles, hence, their mate choice. Nonetheless, the match percentage can be very deceptive, as some OkCupid users drew attention:

I don't care [the match percentage] because there are too many questions. Some people have answered a lot of questions. But I have, let's say, answered 20 of them. One day I tried. I mean, I continued to answer questions while I was looking at a profile. I saw how the percentage has changed [She is smiling]. When I continued to answer more questions, I saw the match percentage with the profile increasing. It decreased in some profiles. So, it doesn't sound meaningful to me (Nefis, the 43-year-old unemployed white-collar woman).

On OkCupid, the match percentage was very important to me. I was VERY excited about it. I thought I could meet people similar to my lifestyle and my worldview. For instance, I have a 92% match with someone. I look at him and see that he has answered only nine questions. I realized that the algorithm calculates a percentage through the total amount of answered questions, which is nine. He then wrote an intro, saying, "We have a high match percentage." But in Turkey, questions are as such: Do you clap when the plane lands? Seda Sayan or Müge Anlı? Do you brush your teeth? Because of these questions, 92% don't actually mean anything (Ayşenur).

Because I'm an engineer, I look at this match percentage by trying to understand the algorithm. Let's say, for instance, we have 70% match and 95% match. But when I look at the questions, I see that I agree with the ones I value most with the former. When I realized that, the match percentage didn't mean anything anymore. Before, I thought, "There is no point in looking at the profiles below 85-90% because we probably look at the world from different perspectives." But I realized it hadn't been so. I tried once or twice. I mean, I looked at why we have a 50% match. As far as I understood, people don't care about answering the questions. They just write their names and then start using the app. So, the algorithm finds nothing in common between us, and the application then says, "You are not compatible." But we actually don't know. The algorithm has to put a number there. So... But well, if it's HIGH, then it interests me. But if it's low, it's NOT THAT REPELLING (Aras).

As impressive as it is, the match percentage is deceptive. The algorithm calculates the match percentage based on the number of questions answered. For example, one user has responded to only 20 questions while another has responded to 150 questions. The algorithm can only calculate their match percentage according to 20 questions. If both parties have mostly given the same answers to these questions, they then have a high match percentage. This match percentage is even more deceptive when users do not respond to more abstract issues (e.g., ethics, politics, sexuality, religion, environmental and social problems) that can hint at one's ideological position but more concrete questions (e.g., favorite food, holiday spot, TV series).

Many studies highlight human deception and how people lie about themselves to attract potential partners (Blackwell et al., 2014; Ellison et al., 2011; Lemke and Weber, 2017; Toma & Hancock, 2012). To increase their match chance, people tend to give misleading information regarding their physical appearances, such as height, weight, and hair. However, there is also an algorithmic deception. Unless the coder aims to conduct an experiment, as in the OkCupid scandal, algorithms do not intentionally lie about the match percentage; however, calculations can be misleading, as the examples demonstrate. The participants' realization of

this technological illusion is crucial in two ways. First, these moments disrupt the technofantasy that algorithms know better than humans. Such a realization temporarily suspends the social power of algorithms. Second, in contrast to the studies that reveal this social power of algorithms over the individual (e.g., Beer, 2017; Beuscart & Mellet, 2016; Gillespie, 2016), the participants' experiments on the algorithm demonstrate how individuals are not simply passive audiences subject to algorithmic measures and calculations, but act on the algorithm and shape the calculations (Wang, 2018).

The social power and relevance of algorithms are not only interrupted and suspended by misleading calculations but also by the very mistakes algorithms make. For instance, during swiping, Ayşenur encountered a 44-year-old man's profile and said, "44 is above my age limit. I don't know why he has been presented to me. My maximum age limit is 38." She passed the profile because of his age and moved to the next one:

Someone named I. [Few seconds of silence, she is looking at her screen, examining the profile] Well, [the photo] is natural. He's outside [He is in a restaurant or café with a Bosphorus view, not looking at the camera but at sea]. "I'm a kind and honest person" is written in the self-summary. We have an 84% match percentage [Few seconds of silence, she is clicking on the profile to see other information]. Gluten-free [she is smiling]. It's okay. Some people write their diets. [She is moving away from her screen] Look, for example, an 84% match is based on 16 questions. And the questions are like, "Do you smoke?", "How important is religion in your life?" These don't mean ANYTHING to me. People answer these without thinking. Also, we have the same answers in the disagree section as well. But the app has put them under the disagree part. I don't know why they are in the disagree section. These things happen sometimes. I can't understand. For example, he has written liberal left. I have also written so. Or, he has replied no to the question regarding the astrological sign. Me, too. Same answers, but the app put them under the disagree section. I can tell you that I will say "Absolutely no" to this because 16 questions are not my criteria. I'm going to say no, so I'm passing [She is swiping left and moving to the following profile].

Çağla also experienced the same algorithmic failure during swiping. She was looking at an Italian man's profile. She was very attracted, so she wanted to explore him more. She clicked on the disagree button to see the questions they had disagreed with. It seemed that they had four disagrees, but both gave the same answers to two of these questions: "It's the app's glitch." Tinder users experienced similar errors. The app presented them with many profiles that fit neither their age nor distance range. Such experiences with glitches question the technofantasy and social power of algorithms. They affect "the algorithmic imaginary," which is understood "as the way in which people imagine, perceive and experience algorithms" (Butcher, 2017, p. 31). The moments when users realize misleading calculations and experience algorithmic mistakes disturb both the power of algorithms as code, its power of promoting particular visions and ways of seeing the world, and the power of the *notion* of the

algorithm, “evoked as a part of broader rationalities and ways of seeing the world” (Beer, 2017, p. 7). What is more, such algorithmic glitches might be intentional. As Beer (2017) and Courtois and Timmermans (2018) underline, algorithms are not designed to be too perfect; otherwise, people would achieve their goals and never return to using the app. Therefore, users must be pretty satisfied rather than completely satisfied. Regardless of its intention, it is crucial to consider both the (mis)leading and the failed role of algorithms in mate choice before jumping to the conclusion that algorithms dominate preferences. Nevertheless, whether misleading or not, its function is no greater than the role of profiles’ aesthetics.

6.3.3 *The Affectivity of Profiles: “Absolutely No”?*

As I quoted above, Gizem sees swiping as first and foremost bodily because, as in the offline world, “we evaluate people according to the first impression, their vivid gestures in ten seconds, their looks.” Aras’ emphasis on spontaneity echoes her argument that dating apps are physical. Despite their techno-socially architected mate preferences, the participants decide very spontaneously – according to the affectivity of the image. And because affect occurs so sudden, I often had difficulty following the participants’ swiping. For instance, the 29-year-old graduate student Cihan, who uses both Tinder and OkCupid, passed a profile with a selfie where the woman, who is seemingly from Central Asia, is smiling at the camera, as soon as he saw her:

F. [He is moving to the following images very quickly and shaking his head no] Neeeee [He clicks on X, passes F., and moves to the following profile.]

Why didn’t you like her?

The former? That? [returning to her profile] I mean [re-clicking on her pictures quickly] because of her physical attributes, I guess. I didn’t find her face attractive, so I didn’t like her.

He re-clicked on X quickly and passed to H., a profile with a close selfie from a high angle. The woman’s fleshy lips and make-up immediately draw attention. She is wearing a deep cleavage top or a bra, maybe. Cihan looks at her photos quickly: “Frankly speaking, she seems very low. I mean, she looks like a person with no particular cultural degree. And YOU CAN TELL [swiping left and passing the profile] from the photos.” Similarly, Gizem passed a profile with a selfie where he, having a five o’clock shadow, does not smile:

That [Pointing the profile to the camera]. Well, I didn’t see it as suitable for me very much, so I swiped left.

Why isn’t he suitable? Could you explain more?

Well, I didn’t find it attractive as a type. Frankly speaking, I didn’t like [She moves to the following profile, talking about him].

Eda was also swiping the profiles very fast. For instance, she encountered a profile named B.

He is wearing a kitchen apron; hence, he seems to serve cooks to his friends or family. Someone seems to have taken his picture from the table as he looks at the camera from above, smiling and lifting his single eyebrow. He has brown hair, a light mustache, and a beard:

We have B. I click on B. But [Eda is grimacing] I didn't like his type. I'm directly passing [She is pointing his image to the camera.]

Okey, could you describe more why you haven't liked him?

Well [grimacing], he's not my type. I mean, I didn't like him physically. Also, he has a very ridiculous expression on his face. I mean, not silly [few seconds of silence], but not a self-confident one. You can't tell what kind of expression this is. I don't even feel like moving to his second image, so I am directly passing.

She then encountered the profile named F. He has tattoos on his arm, hand, fingers, neck, and face, and he is smiling at the camera. He is making the love-you gesture or "rock on" sign to the camera. He is wearing a sweatshirt and a white cap, sitting inside a place: "[Pointing the profile to the camera] Here he is. He's not my type at all. I mean, he's a rapper [bursting into laughter]. Thus, [grimacing and shaking her head no] NO. No, F. I'm passing." The 37-year-old manager Bora, who uses OkCupid Premium for hooking up, was probably the fastest among the participants. I was fascinated by his speed:

A woman named N. Well, she's very beautiful. Blonde. She's at a café, eating [A few seconds of silence. Bora looks at his camera, not talking, taking a deep breath].

What do you think about this profile?

I've already messaged her and said, "Enjoy your meal" [smiling]. Now, let's immediately look at the following profile [He is very severe and silent, looking at his screen. His eyes are moving up and down very quickly]. For example, who's this? A. She writes that she's looking for a short and long-term relationships. She has four photos. This is also a lovely woman.

How are her photos?

In one of them, she's at the beach, at the office in the other, driving in the next one, and probably at home in the last one.

How have her photos made an impression on you?

For example, I liked the one at the office [It is a selfie where she does not smile but simply looks at the camera. She has dark, long hair, wearing a black shirt or dress].

Can I look as well? [He's pointing his screen to the camera] What is your decision about this profile?

I've already messaged her [smiling].

You're very fast.

OF COURSE. Let's not miss these.

Although one has particular criteria, mate choice is first and foremost based on the affection between the person and the image, i.e., the image's capacity to affect. Thus, as Gizem highlights, swiping is primarily a bodily decision. As sensation occurs before cognition (Berlant, 2011b; Massumi, 1995), the body acts and decides just a few split seconds before

the mind. These swiping examples demonstrate the body's capacity to affect and be affected. What is more, the participants often had difficulty explaining their fast decisions. For instance, the 26-year-old Tinder user Mert passed the photos of a profile very quickly and immediately told me that he did not like the profile and would like to pass. I asked him to describe why: "Because I don't know. How can I say how I decide, well [silence], [puffing, umming and ahing] first of all, [he suddenly stops], frankly speaking, the photo didn't ATTRACT me. She's not my type. I don't know." Similarly, İrem passed the profiles so quickly that she did not even allude a few seconds to look at the second image. She encountered a profile named S. that apparently had a photo from a touristic, historical place. Having a beard and a goatee, he is not smiling but knitting – probably because of the sun. İrem described the profile as "the profile that I would swipe left just by looking at the first photo, without looking at other photos." When I asked her why, she said, "He's not my type, Gözde. I mean, not my type, not my style. We're coeval. But he's NEVER my type. What else can I say?"

Such difficulties support affect theories that because affect, the body's intensity or force to affect and be affected, precedes consciousness and thus cognition, it is resistant to narrative and cognitive capture (White, 2011, p. 15). It is challenging to express sensation, which occurs before cognition, in words. Therefore, affect scholars generally define affect, in contrast to emotion, as precultural, non-conscious, non-intentional, and something impossible to capture (Tomkins, 1962; Massumi, 1995; Clough, 2000).

Nevertheless, that cognition follows affects does not necessarily mean that the latter is precultural and absolutely resistant to cognitive capture. That is, the participants' quick decisions based on sensation are not precultural but nourished by their techno-socially architected preferences. For example, as I quoted above, Cihan passed the profile named H. too quickly as he sensed that F., representing a stereotypical profile that the participants mentioned above, is from a lower class. Similarly, the 27-year-old Ph.D. student Serkan, who uses both Tinder Plus and OkCupid, was swiping on the desktop:

C. 22. [Reading her bio right under her name] "I'm leaving here empty" and a face with stuck-out tongue emoji [He clicked on the profile, moving down]. Now, frankly, this [highlighting the sentence he just read with his mouse] irritates me. I didn't like her first photo [She seems to be in an event, posing to the camera on the red carpet]. She is very far away. She looks tired a little [moving to the next photo]. The second photo is a too-close selfie [She is barely smiling to the camera. Her hair is long and balayage.] [He is passing to the next image very quickly]. In the third picture, she is in an ordinary place [She is sitting on a plastic chair, looking at the camera and not smiling] [Serkan is passing the photos quickly and returning to the main picture]. I didn't like her very much. I found a little [re-looking at the photos very fast]. Frankly speaking, she probably hasn't gone to college. I sense it as such. I got such an impression, so [clicking on X] I don't like it.

Sensation does not simply occur before cognition but is very much affected by one's technosocially architected preferences. Images create a sense perception that moves bodies toward or away from the image. The aesthetics of an image is also its capacity, intensity, or force to move the body, and aesthetics are socially as well as technologically shaped by events, institutions, norms, rules, laws, and algorithms. Both Cihan and Serkan moved away from the profiles that create an image that the person is from a lower class. Therefore, sensation is not precultural but intervened in by culture even though it occurs before cognition.

Such an intervention, or "the structure of digital partner choice" (Schmitz, 2017), can be seen when the participants like a profile. For instance, Serkan, who had just passed a Tinder profile that he associated the woman with the lower class, encountered an OkCupid profile that created the opposite aesthetics:

Z. 24 [A brunette woman with curly hair is smiling to the camera while watching the sunset] [He slowly moves the page down to read her self-summary]. Molecular biologist. Well, she's obviously a SMART person. Old snowboarder. That's cool. "Mid-day beer drinker." I also love mid-day beer [Moving up again to see her photos]. Well, the photos are pretty nice, too. I mean, [pointing to the third picture, a selfie from an outdoor event like a music festival, with his mouse] in that photo, I especially like her smile. Well, the first photo is the wrong choice, I think. If I were her, I would put this [pointing the selfie with his mouse]. Anyway, that's [moving the page down to see other information] her choice. [Being surprised] Oh, she's a MASTER student. Good, I also have academic interests. She wants short and long-term dating [moving up again]. Therefore, I like it. We also have a 96% match. That's a good ratio [clicking on heart].

Serkan generally liked the photos unless "the person pouts, looks aggressive, or makes a duck face." On Tinder, which mostly lacks textual information, he swiped the profiles according to their aesthetics while on OkCupid, he valued the match percentage and other textual information along with photos while making his choice. In the former case, C. also had a selfie that, in fact, she smiled, but the profile did not move Serkan; for him, she looked like a lower-class individual. In contrast, the sense of similarity attracted him to the latter. He was significantly affected by her master's in molecular biology at one of the top universities in Turkey, associated with intelligence and mid-day beer. He sensed that he might share similar tastes and cultural capital with Z. His swiping decision was based on both the image's and text's affectivities. In both cases, homophily has a dominant role in his decisions.

The 31-year-old Yade, who had been working in an aid organization until the pandemic, was very much attracted to a profile that she found sympathetic:

Someone named B. [He is playing piano in the picture] He's 28 years old. I'm looking at other photos. He seems like a genial person; look [pointing the profile to the camera, showing his photos]
What do these photos tell? What kind of an impression do they make on you?
I think he's sympathetic. I mean, that (the first image), okay, he probably finds himself cool. We all do.

I mean, we try to put such an image as the first photo. But this [showing the second image] is genial [The man simply poses to the camera on the stage, and at his back, there is a woman who is not actually a part of the picture]. I find it very sympathetic that someone irrelevant to the moment is doing her thing during the photo shoot. I mean, he hasn't put a selfie with the best pose, but he's saying, "Well, I'm like that." That's NICE. But of course, he has put some photos where he posed [showing the third picture where he poses to the camera with a dog]. I like images with animals. I myself have one. I just don't like the photos where the animal looks unhappy. Also, he doesn't look that good in these photos, but he has still put them. I think this is a very sympathetic thing. [Showing a picture that he plays saxophone] As far as I understood, he's interested in music. I mean, he doesn't only play piano but also wind instruments. [Few seconds of silence, reading his self-summary] He makes jazz covers of İbrahim Tatlıses. That's interesting, I think. We have a 96% match, and we disagree on 16 issues. He finds smug people attractive. He won't find me, I guess. Maybe I'm also smug. I also look at this question very much: Do you mind typos? Because I make typos very much [smiling]. I try to understand how much he is bothered [smiling]. But here, there are also other things that we disagree with. For example, is it possible for someone to be too nice? I always say no to that, but people always say yes. I don't know how much important this question is. For example, do you smoke? I smoke, but this person doesn't. I say LET HIM THINK. For me, these disagreements are [shaking her head no] NOT important. So, I will like this person [pointing her screen to the camera and clicking on heart].

Like Serhan, who has been attracted to molecular biology, mid-day beer, and snowboarding, Yade was attracted to his cultural capital. His musical talents and jazz covers of İbrahim Tatlıses interested her. But the most alluring thing for Yade is his friendliness as well as the naturality of the images. Except for the first image, which is apparently put there on purpose to impress others, for Yade, the second one looked natural, as if it was taken not intentionally, like the photos with cars, watches, or the ones with bodies on display, but spontaneously. As I discussed above, naturality or authenticity is the primary criterion of the participants. It is, first and foremost, an affective reaction to the socially constructed gendered binary and today's aesthetic regime.

Similarly, Mert was using Tinder on the desktop, swiping very quickly. After passing a profile that he found her with too much make-up, he encountered Y. A dark selfie where her face was barely seen welcomed us. She was apparently sitting where night lights reflected mainly on her forehead and background. She was sticking her tongue at the camera. Mert pointing to the tongue:

For example, the tongue is salient. There is a piercing on the tongue. I like it. She sat in the backseat. She probably doesn't like driving. There are lights that look like a disco ball. It's nice. That light [circling around the photo with his mouse] means night. When it's night, there's that light.

During swiping, he normally passed the first picture quickly, clicking the right arrow to see other photos while telling his feelings toward the profile – until Y. When he started describing the first image slowly, I realized that he liked Y. Passing to the next photo where she is front-

sitting with backrest on a camping stool, sending a kiss to the camera and making a victory sign, he continued to describe:

Regisseur [chair] is directly a plus point for me. [Smiling] I mean, I spend a lot of time with it. For example, in that photo, there is a wristband. She has gone to an event. Probably, I'm going to swipe this right. I mean, I'm going to like it. Also, I very much like this. What I mean is that most of the girls don't want their bellies to be out in the photo. But her belly's been out a little, and she hasn't cared. She hasn't even thought about it. I like THAT NATURAL thing, the I-don't-care thing. It's an attribute I'm looking for in a girl. [Moving to the following image. It is a gif where she sticks her tongue at the camera to show her piercing] She lost me a little [smiling]. I guess I won't like her [smiling and moving to the following picture where she sits on a sunbed with a whiteish dress, posing to the camera]. Sunbed is NICE. I don't know. I will like her. I won't lie just because we're on the video record. It's a profile that I definitely swipe right.

Mert also found a similarity that attracted him: the regisseur chair. His affective attachment to the object moved him toward the girl in the photo. Moreover, the way she poses to the camera on the regisseur chair was also alluring for Mert. People generally tend to pose carefully, paying attention to posture to hide the flaws such as one's belly. On the other hand, her posture creates such aesthetics that she does not care whether her belly is out, alluring for Mert. However, it is important to note that her body is in "normal" shape, and her belly is out a little. In other words, if Y. was not thin and her belly was entirely out in the photo, would he still like her? As an affective reaction to the stereotypical profiles as the products of the beauty-status exchange and the aesthetic regime, the participants' attraction toward naturality and authenticity does not eliminate but negotiates with norms, rules, laws, and terms of beauty and partner choice.

Nevertheless, the participants do not simply choose potential partners according to their techno-socially architected criteria, but they decide according to their assumptions regarding the other's decision of themselves. For instance, İlke, the 27-year-old graduate student working in an NGO, is very tall and plus-size according to the socio-cultural norms of beauty and body shape. She avoided liking the profiles that attached their Instagram accounts during swiping as she found them unattractive. When I asked why, she said: "I feel that the way these people communicate with someone is based on physical appearance. Therefore they prefer to display themselves, and they expect me to have a particular physical appearance that fits their criteria." Similarly, the 29-year-old engineer Ercan, does not have a well-built, athletic body like the bodies exposed through a half-naked selfie in front of a gym's mirror. As he said several times during the interview, the Tinder Gold user had difficulties matching with someone. He believed that women did not want to match him because he did not have an athletic body and money. His swiping decisions were highly based on his assumption that "she

won't like me:"

D. [She is posing as if she is in a catalog shooting] is 28 years old. She's a model. I would say, "She won't like me," and swipe left. [Passing to the following profile where the woman only wears a bra, posing to the camera] She looks fake. Oh, she has an Instagram account. In the past, when I'd just started to use the app and when I was naive, I would look at her Instagram account and second photo. I would say, "She's nice, doing exercises." Now I say, "she won't like me," and swipe left. [Moving to the next profile where the woman poses to the camera from a wine yard with a glass of wine in her hand] I think the same about this lady, too. ... These [He is grimacing] have apparent aims. I would hang out with these women if I had a top model BMW and a well-built body. But now I swipe left because they won't like me.

Similarly, both Gökhan and Taner had the sense of "she won't like me" toward some profiles. Photos where the woman wears an evening dress or spends her time in a high-end place, such as places with the Bosphorus view, created the sense perception that the woman in the picture would prefer someone with a higher socio-economic status than themselves. The judgment of "She won't like me," a kind of aesthetic judgment based on the profile's aesthetics, derives from the participants' imaginaries, expectations, assumptions, beliefs, and ideas shaped by institutions, laws, norms, and events. It demonstrates that swiping decisions are not simply shaped by their techno-socially architected mate preferences but also their socially constructed and gendered assumptions regarding the other's choices. It is no coincidence that such judgments predominantly pertain to male participants as they are more likely to have difficulties matching than women.

So far, I have demonstrated the structure of mate choice: how swiping is affected by algorithms and socio-cultural preferences or how culture and technology intervene in affect. However, swiping is not simply structural; it is also affective as bodies respond to the structure of partner choice. To put it differently, the participants not only act according to their criteria but also against them. For instance, as a Tinder, OkCupid, and Bumble user, Onur, for whom cultural capital is very crucial, ranked the dating apps in the previous chapter: Happn, where 90% of its population is lower-class; Tinder, where more than 50% of the people there are now lower-class; OkCupid that more high-quality people use; and Bumble, where, in contrast to Happn, 90% of its population is high-class. He later divided the online dating "market" into two pools: a standard one with lower-class profiles and an above-average one with high-class profiles. While swiping a few Tinder profiles on his desktop, he encountered a profile named E. who had two similar selfies from the same angles and smiles. The former is a selfie with a teddy bear while the latter is a high-angle selfie with an evening dress. Onur called the profile "standard" when he immediately saw these selfies:

E. Well, [seeing her second selfie] she's from the standard pool. I can tell immediately. [Circling around

the image with his mouse] I can tell from the photo she has taken, her head and position, her dress which seems to be an evening dress. She's not from the other pool that I feel close to. But [clicking on her profile to see her bio] it's interesting that she's from Mimar Sinan. I have friends from there. My brain right now wants to like THIS to increase the chances [smiling].

Well, is Mimar Sinan alluring, or are you also attracted to her pho-

Noo. Her photos are standard. I mean, they didn't attract my attention as others. But if I talk to her, I may find out that she's a painter, and the conversation may develop. So, I can give her a chance to like me by liking. [After liking the profile, "IT'S A MATCH" appeared on the screen] As I predicted [smiling and clicking "BACK TO TINDER"].

Onur passed all the profiles he called standard – until E. Onur was first not attracted to E. because her look, angle, and the position looked standard for him. But Mimar Sinan, Turkey's oldest and top fine art university, moved him, creating aesthetics that "she could be an artist." Her cultural capital immediately moved her from the standard pool to the above-average one where Onur positions himself. As Ahmed (2014) shows in different contexts, this is an overt example of how the text moves bodies. It demonstrates the context-dependent power of the text over the image. In this context, its power stems from homophily and the affectivity of cultural capital. Onur established a relationship between his cultural and social capitals and hers. However, it is also important to note that his swiping decision might derive from his "picky mood," as he said above. If he had been in the opposite mood, he might have passed E. But aiming to increase his chances, Onur lowered his criteria and wanted to give E. a chance, and it was a match.

Similarly, in the previous chapter, İrem separated Tinder and Bumble in terms of quality. She harped on that she would never desire to like a Tinder profile, so we should look at Bumble instead. I could not resist; we agreed to look at Tinder first and later a few profiles on Bumble. She was passing Tinder profiles immediately – at first sight. They were not her type, she said. She was not excited at all about Tinder and the profiles there. Then we moved to Bumble. She immediately got excited, smiling: "Oh, we're going to my place." In the first profile she encountered, İrem said, "For the first time, this is a profile that makes me want to look at the second photo." He was sailing a boat, which drew her attention. I asked why, and she described:

It seems fun. He is apparently fine and rich. We may have a thing. I'm not a "gold-digger." I mean, at least he went aboard once. Do you understand? I also have friends with boats. I also go aboard [bursting into laughter]. That's why, I mean. Please, don't misunderstand me. I'm not a "gold-digger." It just can't be with a poor one. I don't want to say he looks rich because I wouldn't like him if he showed his wealth. It's a fragile line, Gözde. Do you understand? I mean, for example, if it were a photo with a luxury ship, it would repel me. I'm against it. I can't swipe right. So, it's a fragile line. He got my attention because, apparently, we have similar lives – maybe. [Moving to the next photo] FOR

EXAMPLE, he has a photo with the Pisa Tower, as if he was punching it. Look [showing to the camera]. A bit funny. But I don't like photos taken abroad. [Moving to the next image] He tries a yoga position [showing the camera. He was on a rock with his swimsuit, doing the position]. It's wrong. He couldn't do it right. But look [showing the following image to the camera. Wearing a slim T-shirt and jeans, he clearly has a well-built body. He poses in front of a building that is obviously abroad]. His body is quite well [smiling]. BUT AGAIN, A PHOTO TAKEN ABROAD. I don't like these photos at all, Gözde. They're repelling. But [She is surprised, her eyes get bigger] it says Küçükçekmece. Now I wonder about this guy. Although his height is 1.80, just because I got curious, I'm going to swipe this guy right. [Swiping] Oh, we got matched.

İrem has rigorous criteria regarding physical attributes. A man must be tall, at least 1.90 cm, and have a well-shaped body. He must be both socio-economically and culturally in a good position. He must avoid showing off, or in her own words, "he shouldn't scream." M. did not fulfill her criteria in two ways. He wasn't tall enough, and he had two photos that had been overtly taken abroad. Nevertheless, Küçükçekmece drew İrem's attention as she moved there from Cihangir because of the pandemic. While Küçükçekmece is a county far away from the city center, Cihangir is one of the historical and living neighborhoods of Taksim full of high-end restaurants, bars, and cafés, where many celebrities, such as writers, actors, or actresses, live. İrem got interested in M. as she wondered what someone who sails a boat was doing in Küçükçekmece. On the other hand, Gizem encountered a few profiles that fitted her criteria but passed them due to a lack of bodily attraction:

S. [It is a selfie taken inside a car of a bold man with a beard and mustache wearing a t-shirt on which there is a cat]. [Taking a deep breath while looking at the profile] Well, this actually looks like a normal, proper man, I mean, closer to my type. [After a few seconds of silence while examining the profile, she takes a deep breath] but I'm not attracted to this. I swipe right people I find physically attractive. I mean, I want him to excite me. This guy seems a proper man. He puts his natural photos. It's nice, but I'm going to swipe this left. [Moving to the following profile where the man poses to the camera at the top of a mountain with a mountain view] M.T., look [Showing to the camera, taking a deep breath] He's also normal. It says movies, sports, reading, wine, and arts. Well, these are things I like, too, but this isn't attractive to me either, so I'm swiping left [smiling].

Gizem shared similar tastes with these profiles where there was no show-off but natural photos, and naturality was very important for Gizem when choosing a mate. However, she passed these profiles as she could not feel physically attracted to them. She was clearly swiping profiles according to the bodily attraction at first sight. Depending on the profile and its affectivity, the participants sometimes acted according to or against their criteria. These examples show the body's intensity to affect mate choice. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that affect, the body's capacity to act and to be acted upon, does not eliminate the techno-socially architected mate preferences but temporarily suspends them.

Depending on one's mood and mate preferences, algorithms, but more importantly, the affection between the person and the profile, which produces a "‘visceral response’ and intuitive intelligence" (Berlant, 2011b, p. 53), swiping is predominantly a spontaneous act. In other words, it is not a static disposition but an affective practice full of reproduction, contradiction, incoherence, and surprises, all of which rely on and arise through the affection between the user and the profile. Swiping is an affective performance in which bodies are affected by and affect the structure of digital partner choice.

6.4 *Swiping: Marketization of Partner Choice?*

Many scholars criticize that as dating technologies brought the economic logic into dating and structured it as a market, romantic love, sexual behavior, and choosing a spouse, which all require a bodily attraction, became rationalized and disembodied (Badiou, 2017; Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2007, 2019; Lardellier, 2015; Zakelj et al., 2015). Mate choice as a life choice is not all that different from consumer choices such as choosing a car (Salecl, 2010, p. 8). Just like all other digital experiences, choosing a partner is dominated by algorithms (Vuzharov, 2019). In *New Laws of Love* (2022), Bergström strikingly establishes a strong filiation between those criticisms and the critiques of earlier matchmaking services (e.g., personal ads and matchmaking agencies in the nineteenth century). The former echoes the latter that matrimonial agencies and personal ads have turned marriage into a market (p. 27). According to Bergström, such an extreme similarity in terms of critique derives from the very fact that "dating services *make explicit the term of partner selection* and, in doing so, challenge our representations of love" (p. 28, emphasis original). That is, people have always been selective since the emergence of partner choice, desiring particular people with specific physical and social attributes. They have been, and still are, generally attracted to those with the desired physical and social qualities, and dating services, from personal ads to dating apps, expose that love is not blind at all. Although the structure of partner choice is prevalent in swiping, such a structural argument does not fully explain how people choose their partners via dating apps. In other words, the predominantly quantitative studies supporting the structure of mate choice fail to consider the spontaneity of swiping, that is, the very act of mate choice. Choosing a partner is not a static disposition but an activity involving many things.

First of all, mate selection does have terms. One's physical appearance and economic, cultural, and social capitals play a significant role in swiping. Individuals evaluate profiles according to specific criteria based on their social position. In other words, people look for

partners similar to themselves, and people who “obey” the cultural norms regarding physical and social attributes, that is, individuals with well-built bodies and high economic and cultural capitals, are more desired than others. What is more, these socially pre-architected criteria are supported by algorithms. Especially in the case of OkCupid, people input their data regarding their preferences, and algorithms calculate the best options according to these data and determine which profiles are promoted to the user. Therefore, pre-swiping is both socially and technologically framed.

However, as I have demonstrated above, the techno-social framework of swiping does not necessarily mean that swiping is absolutely structured. That is, although the terms of swiping are pre-architected by one’s intersectional background and algorithms, depending on the profile, they are either reproduced or suspended during swiping. Hence, even though the propensity to find a partner similar to oneself is dominant in mate choice, swiping is, first and foremost, a spontaneous activity. It is spontaneous because a) one’s current mood affects their decisions. The participants can be very picky or bend their criteria, depending on their mood. They might like a profile that does not fit their preferences, and b) the affection, i.e., encounter, between the participant and the profile that produces a visceral response and intuitive intelligence is decisive. Depending on this visceral and intuitive knowledge, the participants swiped the profiles a) sometimes according to their criteria, b) sometimes against them, and c) sometimes according to their assumptions regarding the other’s preferences. Hence, a swiping decision is primarily based on one’s mood as well as the affectivity of the image and text, which refers to what an image and text can do. The examples quoted above show both the body’s capacity to affect and be affected. Furthermore, since swiping is an appified mate choice, match percentage can be effective. The participants using OkCupid mainly value the issues they disagree with their counterparts. Some OkCupid users are rigorous regarding match percentage, as they swipe left immediately if they have a low match percentage, such as 70%. However, algorithms sometimes fail to calculate and promote false options. Such glitches demonstrate how swiping is not absolutely dominated by algorithms.

Last but not least, the marketization critique is partly true as the participants mostly view online dating as a market and profiles as products and behave them as objects by calling “this” or “that.” They also decide very quickly. However, this acceleration does not simply derive from the swiping logic, which reduces mate choice to a yes or no binary and a quick thumb movement, but also from affect. The bodily attraction at first sight is very much decisive in swiping. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge that the swipe design is based on the affect. What is more, acceleration is closely related to what the participants call “waste(d)-

ability” – the ability or “right” to waste people as well as to be wasted.

6.5 *Waste(d)-ability: Match, Chat, Date, Match, Chat, Date...*

After swiping a few profiles together, the participants and I discussed a broader influence of dating technologies on intimate and social relationships. They all agreed on a specific impact of dating technologies that they named “the ability to waste and be wasted”:

I couldn't say no to people. I was SEEING someone just because I couldn't hurt him. So I thought, “Use at least a dating app to meet someone you've never met before and DO NOT CARE about him [smiling] and do what you want.” ... Now I can say no. I mean generally. But I was negatively affected by the app for some time. I started degrading people. I don't care about them, I mean. I was treating them not as a person but as a THING. They felt hurt and humiliated. Then I said to myself, “This is not me.” I mean, I have never HURT anyone in my life, never humiliated. No matter who. I became this kind of person because of the app. ... I started treating OTHER people as such, too. But there is also a positive change. ... I gained self-confidence with this app (Selma, the 32-year-old white-collar OkCupid user)

People are ready to waste each other. So, I think that dating apps have generally corrupted people (Çiğdem, the 28-year-old white-collar OkCupid user)

People started wasting each other very easily. I mean, they build more superficial relationships. But this is also an effect of Facebook and Instagram. It is easy to meet someone on Tinder. Therefore, instead of giving an effort to the person in your life or solving your problems with the person, you just swipe right or left. ... This corrupts us more. (Gizem, the 30-year-old, self-employed Tinder user)

They imbue us with the idea that a relationship is worthless. Let's say you're with Leyla. You get bored with her two days later. Müjgan enters your life as if you go to a store and buy some sugar. Then, Ayşe comes. You know that you can choose and meet someone among them. So, you can very easily eliminate Leyla (Engin, the 39-year-old engineer using OkCupid)

We commodified. I mean, people can suddenly delete each other. In the middle of a conversation, you might be blocked. I did the same thing. I didn't like her answers to some questions, so I deleted her. It is very easy to waste and consume (Bülent, the 44-year-old OkCupid premium user)

Thousands of people FLOW here in front of you. They FLOW. Right left, right left, right left. It turns into something like Facebook's timeline. It loses its meaning (Talat, the 34-year-old OkCupid user)

Their narratives support the commodification critique: Dating platforms have brought economic logic into dating by structuring it as a market; hence, they generated a marketized way of seeing. In online dating, people see and treat each other like products, and choosing a spouse is reduced to a consumer choice. As such, dating technologies foster waste(d)-ability – the ability to waste as well as be wasted. The waste(d)-ability derives from several things. First, there is an abundance of choice in online dating. As in other fields, people are provided endless opportunities that intrigue fomo – the fear of missing out a better date than one matches. Therefore, dating technologies not only facilitate matching but also unmatching

through the abundance of choice. Disconnection is also facilitated via an unmatched button. People can easily disengage from each other by simply clicking the unmatched button or not replying. This facilitation caused by the choice overload and the unmatched button leads bodies to be “caught up into a kind of feedback loop” (Bandinelli & Bandinelli, 2021, p. 189) – swipe, match, chat, maybe date, unmatched, and return to swipe.

Second, the abundance of choice is supported by the lack of time to waste. In a 24/7 capitalist order, people have no time and energy to waste:

The increase in options fosters impatience. People are more impatient with each other. This is positive in my opinion because people don't have to stand each other. A woman does not have to stand me, and neither do I (Berk, the 33-year-old architect using Tinder)

I think that [dating apps] promote more the idea that “There is much fish in the sea, so why should I waste my time with this?” (Didem, the 22-year-old graduate student using OkCupid and Bumble)

Waste(d)-ability is also encouraged by a temporal lack. Because their leisure time is very limited, people do not want to waste it with mismatches or bad dates. Due to endless opportunities and a temporal lack, people are ready to waste each other. They disengage from each other during chatting through the unmatched button or even during dates. For instance, the 30-year-old actress İrem told me about her “date:”

By the way, I lost a lot of time. I mean, I had many trash dates. I met a guy, Gözde. I sat somewhere in Cihangir, ordered a glass of wine, waiting for him. He came, looking very different from his pictures. His hair turned grey. I don't care; it can be white. And his eyes were brown. I found out that he was wearing colored contact lenses in the photos. You should have informed me about this. Dating a guy who wears colored contact lenses is [laughing] HORRIBLE. He sat with me. I gave him a chance because he might be smart. I mean, maybe he had reasons. But the conversation was shallow and did not interest me at all. The guy wanted to order something, but I said, “Could you not give an order? I want to spend the rest of the night alone.” He got angry. SO WHAT? You should have informed me about your contact lenses, for example. How could you disappoint me? ... It was a trash date for me. Get ready, dress, put on make-up, and then disappoint. That night was trash for me.

Similarly, another 30-year-old actress using Tinder, Melis, ended the date before the meeting even had turned into a date:

As soon as I went to the meeting place and saw him, I thought he wasn't looking like the person on the profile, and I didn't want to sit with him. I immediately said, “I have a thing,” and left. I did this on my first date, but my friends told me that this was rude.

The matches and sometimes even dates melted into the air before they were realized. In an appified world with choice overload and a lack of time and where people are turned into commodities, people waste and are wasted by each other. Dating technologies indeed encourage waste(d)-ability. However, they are not the mere cause of waste(d)-ability for several reasons. First, in the neoliberal order dominated by the choice ideology, life is reduced

to individual choice and centered around the self. In other words, there are no more structures but only individuals who shape and govern their lives through their choices. Such individualized and even egoistic understanding of life based on personal choice is supported by 24/7 capitalism, where time evaporates before it is felt and before one even has it. Therefore, waste(d)-ability is not simply caused by dating platforms, but it is part of a broader evolution of social and intimate lives because dating technologies are themselves a product of this very order. Second, as Talat indicated, dating technologies provide a place similar to Facebook's timeline or Instagram's feed. Numerous people flow in these social media platforms where people consume and are consumed by one another. Hence, waste(d)-ability is not simply an impact of dating platforms but a broader social media effect – the reification of people caused by social media platforms. What is idiosyncratic about dating technologies is or, if necessary, what they can be blamed for is their very private nature which reinforces waste(d)-ability. They privatize intimacy as “[o]nline dating occurs *outside* one's social circle, and often *out of sight*” (Bergström, 2022, p. 80, emphasis original). As Selma mentioned, people can easily disengage from those with whom they do not share a social setting. The private nature of online dating with the unmatched button releases the burden of explaining to the person why they are not interested. It paves the way for liberation from this social responsibility. With dating platforms, not explaining or replying has become a technologically constructed norm (Christensen, 2021, p. 441).

Lastly, although online dating favors short-term relationships, people form couples via dating apps. People have long-term relationships with and marry partners they meet via dating technologies. Leyla, for instance, met her husband Mecnun on Tinder while some participants had long-term relationships. Therefore, jumping to the conclusion that dating platforms have caused the banalization of sex and the decay of love would be misleading. It is important to examine dating apps' influence on social and intimate lives from a broader perspective. More importantly, how technology, culture, and affect interact with each other must be considered. This chapter focuses on the practice of swiping, demonstrating how swiping is not a pre-determined but an affective activity. It places the impact of dating technologies, waste(d)-ability, within a broader impact of social media platforms. The conclusion elaborates on Bergström's suggestion (2022) that online dating as an industry must be distinguished from online dating as a practice and the critical role of affect in the technology-culture interaction.

Chapter 7

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY, CULTURE, AND AFFECT: ONLINE DATING AS AN INDUSTRY AND A PRACTICE

The movie named *Zero Fucks Given*, directed by Emmanuel Marre and Julie Lecoustre in 2021, introduces the audience to an antagonist who uses a dating app. Cassandre is a flight attendant working in a low-cost airline named Wing Airlines. As someone who has recently lost her mother, she tries to overcome her grief by taking on extra hours to work, partying, hooking up with someone she finds via a dating app, or simply doing nothing in her leisure time. At first glance, one might see how dating platforms facilitate casual sex activities and turn dating into a market as Cassandre consumes each person she has met on the app like a product. In this sense, her story supports the dominant critiques that dating, or more specifically hookup, apps structure dating into a market logic and foster short-term relationships, hence turning sex into a mundane activity.

However, the story moves beyond the commodification of intimacy and the banalization of sex. Cassandre is a working woman who spends most of her time between flights and overwhelmingly socializes with her co-workers. She works in the service sector, which is predominantly based on emotional labor, as she must constantly manage her emotions for customer satisfaction. She almost has neither space nor time to meet new people other than customers as well as co-workers. Viewing her story as such draws a different portrait of online dating. Dating apps are more than a tool that favors short-term relationships and commodifies intimacy. In the 24/7 capitalist order where socialization has become limited to private settings, they are almost the only way to meet new people for either short or long-term interests. To say it differently, dating technologies are, first and foremost, the tools to reach intimacy in a confined space dominated by work and overwhelmed with repetitive activities. They offer a temporary escape from the pressures and monotony of life. They play a more critical role in a time of pandemic when people across the world have been locked down for almost two years. Online dating is not simply an industry that aims to commodify and make a

profit out of peoples' practices of intimacy, but it is also a practice through which people experience intimacy. Therefore, as Bergström (2022) strongly argues, it is crucial to separate online dating as an industry from online dating as a practice.

7.1 *Online Dating as an Industry*

The idea of individual freedom is intertwined with the idea of personal choice. In other words, capitalist logic associates personal freedom with individual choice. Hence, the choice ideology is the very basis of capitalism. The online dating industry is one of the many markets founded on this relationship between freedom and choice. It is an industry that provides individuals with the tools to practice their freedom of choice, helping them choose their potential partners. As an industry, online dating has significant characteristics that require attention.

First, online dating is an unequal and hierarchical industry like other markets. There are giant and big fishes and small fishes eaten by the former. Although over 5000 dating apps are available in the market, very few of them share the profits. For example, Tinder, OkCupid, Bumble, Happn, and Hawaya are the popular dating apps used in Turkey, Match Group owns Tinder, OkCupid, and Hawaya. It is the giant fish of the market, owning many other dating apps, such as PlentyofFish, Meetic, Pairs, etc. The company leads the market, makes the greatest profit, and acquires local products to increase its revenue. Hence, online dating as an industry is the same old story of how small fishes are eaten by big fishes, which are swallowed by giant ones. Match Group, in this regard, represents the Moby Dick of this market while many other smaller companies struggle to survive against the domination and gigantism of Match Group. It is a lucrative business, especially for Match Group.

Second, like other digital markets, the online dating industry is unequal because it relies on paid subscriptions (primarily for men) and free data provided by users. Its profit or surplus value stems from a broader exploitation of workers – workers of these companies and users as workers who produce data. The latter's personal information and in-app activities generate Big Data regarding intimacy, love, sexuality, desire, mate preferences, dating, flirting, etc. Through datafication, the online dating industry has the power to shape dating practices, and such power brings the "right" to conduct experiments. As the OkCupid Scandal has shown, algorithms not only determine the best options for users and present potential partners to them, but they also have the power to manipulate these results and hence determine the experiences users have and will have in the future. They determine users' visibility as well as invisibility. A user can be a popular option among many results or completely hidden from

the results provided by the algorithms.

Third, the online dating industry's power to determine users' (in)visibility and the best options for users not only creates a competitive field between companies but also encourages a competition between users – mostly heterosexual men. Aiming to match with perfect partners, they struggle with each other to be visible on the feed and top of the algorithmic queue. Because online dating is predominantly a masculine market, where the population of men exceeds that of women, men are more likely to have difficulties matching and competing to attract women. As I discussed in Chapter 5, predominantly men are directed or forced to buy subscriptions to negotiate with this power of algorithms. The industry provides male users with paid features (e.g., booster, unlimited like), offering the opportunity to increase their visibility, hence their matching chance. Therefore, some men, those able to buy a paid subscription, become more privileged than others. In this regard, the online dating industry's revenue derives not only from users' free data production but also from the competition between users, which produces inequality between users who can afford paid subscriptions and those who cannot.

Fourth, online dating is a lucrative business also because individuals are forced to use them because of various factors, as I elaborated in Chapter 4, such as 24/7 capitalism, along with the appification of almost everything, which aggravates the problem of meeting new people physically and turns the use of dating apps into an imperative. The online dating industry feeds on this obligation. However, and fifth, it turns this sense of obligation into a fun game. Despite different well-specified recipes or algorithms, the entire industry rests on the swipe design, which reduces one of the major life choices, mate choice, into a yes-or-no binary. Users are presented to each other as if they are purchasable commodities in a customized feed, and they “purchase” each other by swiping right or left. The swipe logic turns the individual responsibility of choosing one's own partner into some kind of a game, hence attracting individuals to use dating platforms. In other words, the online dating industry not only structures dating into a market logic but also gamifies it. It is, hence, no coincidence that the toilet is one of the popular time zones and places where users swipe and are swiped by others. In addition to Bergström's argument that online dating owes its success to the separation between social and sexual spheres (2022), the online dating industry's idiosyncrasy rests on the datafication as well as gamification of dating.

Lastly, online dating as an industry is both fascinating and fastening. It is fascinating as it facilitates meeting new people and connecting people worldwide. Dating apps save time and energy, which are required for physical interaction, the sources that are scarce in today's

24/7 capitalist societies. Just with a quick thumb movement, users can match and chat with others and arrange a date while, in Nefis's words, sitting on a couch. The online dating industry is also fastening as it fastens individuals to their smartphones or other smart devices. As an industry aiming to make a profit, online dating attracts one's attention and captures it through constant notifications, updates, new features, etc. As part of the attention economy, it intrigues the fear of missing out and ensures regular usage. As such, it fastens users to their devices and mostly creates addictions – just like Candy Crush, to which some individuals are addicted while some are simply enjoying the game. Hence, it might be claimed that the online dating industry produces an addictive relationship between users and dating apps; however, as I discussed in Chapter 4, online dating emerges as a compulsory practice because of the structural changes in life conditions and material as well as affective factors.

Online dating as an industry turns dating into a market, and the swipe logic that dominates the field turns it into a game in which individuals are both objects and subjects simultaneously. As a game, online dating has its own rules, terms, norms, and laws that shape dating practices. However, online dating as a practice cannot be reduced to dating practices structured and governed by these rules because it is not simply shaped by them but also negotiates with and challenges these rules of the game.

7.2 *Online Dating as Practice*

Online dating is a competitive industry where companies fight for the greatest share of the revenue while users “purchase” each other and sometimes even fight for a match. The rules of the game are simple: like or swipe right those you are interested in, pass or swipe left others, report or block profiles who violate the rules, such as spam, fake, and/or aggressive profiles, and unmatched those you lose your interest in and return to swipe. In other words, keep swiping and have fun.

The swipe design and these rules encourage particular attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and gestures. First, Tinder is understood as a hookup app because of its swipe design which turns mate choice into a yes-or-no game. Thus, the app creates such aesthetics that Tinder is a fun platform where people look for nothing serious as the general goal is to hook up. In this regard, users are expected, and expect from each other, to behave as such. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, this cultural aesthetics creates gender inequality as mainly heterosexual male users treat their counterparts as hookup objects. Second, this unequal expectation and attitude do not simply derive from the relationship between technological design and its socio-cultural

understanding, but it also stems from the very swiping design, which leads users to treat each other as objects. Like in social media platforms, dating app users are not subjects but simply profiles to be swiped that include some pictures and other textual information. The swipe design and different feed designs, such as Instagram and Facebook, reify users. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the reification of individuals brings the ability or “right” to waste as well as be wasted by people. Therefore, it is no surprise that ghosting has become the norm in online dating – the practice of ending contact with the other person without warning, informing, or justifying this decision and ignoring any attempts made by that person. Suddenly disappearing has become the general behavior when one loses her/his interest in the match. Reification and waste(d)-ability favor short-term relationships rather than long-term and more serious ones, supporting the social understanding that dating apps are for hookups. Cassandre’s story in the movie also supports the reification argument and the marketization critique: She swipes, matches with someone, chats with him to arrange a hookup meeting, hooks up, says goodbye, and returns to swiping.

Nevertheless, her story covers only part of the online dating portrait because, as I underlined in Chapter 3, there are numerous uses of dating platforms in terms of motivation, intention, expectation, and goal. Some individuals do aim to find a long-term or romantic partner while some do seek short-term relationships, such as one-night stands, hookups, and fuck buddies. Having an open relationship with their partners, some want to have different sexual experiences with others whereas some use them with their partners to fulfill their sexual desires and fantasies. Some want to socialize with others to adjust to the city they have moved while some prefer to socialize with foreigners to practice their second language and know a different culture. Some prefer to use dating apps while traveling to know the city they are visiting and not to spend their vacations alone. Some want to alleviate their boredom by simply looking at the profiles and having fun with them while some seek to only talk to someone to alleviate their feelings of loneliness – especially during the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some, mostly sex workers, use dating apps as a workplace whereas some aim to attract more followers to their Instagram accounts. In sum, individuals use them for various motivations, intentions, expectations, desires, and goals, which cannot simply be reduced to dating practices. Instead, I suggest using the concept of intimacy as they are practices of intimacy. The term moves beyond the notion of dating. It is everywhere and circulates everywhere, registering as intensities of attachment (Berlant, 2000). An intimate relationship refers to an interpersonal relationship that is not limited to physical intimacy. Intimacy can be physical, emotional, affective, digital, social, cultural, and political. An intimate relationship

can be an intellectual attachment where both parties enjoy the exchange of their different and similar ideas, opinions, and thoughts. In this sense, all these various uses of online dating that require attention show that dating apps are technologies of intimacy through which individuals can practice intimacy in a world where building an intimate relationship with others in physical settings is becoming more challenging every day.

The concept of intimacy encourages more than a focus on different practices and uses of online dating, drawing attention to different attachments to dating apps, feelings, affects, and emotions. For some people, especially those who receive many matches, dating apps boost their self-esteem and self-confidence whereas they lower self-esteem and self-confidence for those who have difficulty matching. Therefore, some have lots of fun, while some get frustrated, hurt, and disappointed. As I showed in Chapter 4, dating apps, which turn practicing intimacy into a game, become boring in most cases. They create different and sometimes contradictory affects, feelings, and emotions. For instance, dating apps are both alienating and empowering. They are alienating because users are simultaneously subjects and objects in these platforms. Hence, they approach others as objects while being treated as objects. They are wasting as well as being wasted. They are ghosting as well as being ghosted by others. In short, they are reifiers as well as subjected to reification. On the other hand, dating apps are empowering, especially in cultural settings predominantly regulated and governed by heteronormative and gendered codes, rules, terms, norms, and laws. In the Turkish context, women feel empowered as they can be the subject of the gaze rather than the object of the male gaze; they have the power to say no and block those unwanted profiles or possible harassment. Technologies of intimacy provide more, though limited, freedom for women in heterosexual intimate relationships that are generally unequal (see also Aydoğan, 2020; Deniz, 2020).

As technologies of intimacy, dating apps are also associated with freedom for LGBTI+ individuals (Narin, 2018; Soybakış, 2019). In the Turkish setting, where access to dating apps specifically designed for non-heterosexual individuals is mostly banned and practicing intimacy in physical places is more restricted, dating apps play a significant role for these excluded social groups in overcoming those restrictions. They offer the opportunity to practice any type of intimacy from which they are excluded. To put it differently, individuals do not have the same relationship to intimacy, and dating apps intervene in these unequal relationships by providing a space for those who are excluded from practicing intimacy or positioned as subordinates in intimate relationships. Focusing on merely the economic and technological side of online dating, the marketization critique, which generally stems from the

Anglo-American contexts, neglects these political, social, cultural, and affective aspects of online dating. The Turkish case demonstrates how online dating is not simply about the economy of intimacy but also involves the socio-cultural politics of intimacy.

It is important to avoid taking technology as an autonomous agent and delve into how technology and culture shape each other. In this regard, Bergström's distinction between online dating as an industry and online dating as a practice is a crucial intervention to this taken-for-granted consideration of technology as an independent agent. For instance, she (2022) shows how online dating is an industry dominated by male technicians and shaped by their notions of love, sex, intimacy, and gender, prioritizing male customers' desires, expectations, needs, and desires. In this thesis which aims to overcome the existing binaries regarding heterosexual online dating (love-sex and beauty-status) and avoid creating a new binary, I suggested another dimension to these binaries, the technology-culture interaction and the industry-practice separation, and introduced affect. In the context of online dating, not only is the industry governed by the social, cultural, and professional norms regarding dating, but also the practice is both a techno-socially shaped and affective activity. For example, as I deliberately showed in the previous chapter, swiping as the contemporary mate selection practice is not simply dominated by algorithms or socially constructed, but its techno-social structure is open to challenges driven by affects, such as mood and sensation. *Sıkıntı* is another example of how technology, culture, and affect interact with each other. As I accentuated in Chapter 4, not merely smartphone technology but also the evolution of social life has paved the way for the emergence of dating apps. Structural changes in life conditions, e.g., physical as well as spatial entrapment (*sıkışmışlık*) and lack of time and energy, changes in dating norms due to technological developments, and collective affects such as boredom (can *sıkıntısı*) and the sense of entrapment have turned physical interaction with people into a structural problem (*sıkıntı*) and online dating into a forced practice.

For future research, it is important to consider the economic, political, social, cultural, technological, and affective aspects of online dating. It is crucial to acknowledge that dating apps are not simply technical worlds dominated by algorithms but also social, cultural, and affective worlds within which users make their way. In other words, as I highlighted in Chapter 2, it is vital to examine and observe the relationship between milieu and trajectory. That is, as technologies of intimacy, dating apps create intimate public milieus – the social, symbolic, material, and affective worlds which involve rules, norms, terms, and laws. Meanwhile, users take journeys through these milieus and make their ways within them to pursue needs and desires or to endeavor to find a room to breathe beneath social constraints. Trajectories are not

simply shaped by the rules, norms, terms, and laws of milieus but are also responding to and, hence, shaping them. From this affective perspective, in a life that passes between different flights, Cassandre tries to find a room to breathe via technologies of intimacy, suspending the social constraints of life.



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Appendix A: The Participants' Socio-demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	City	App (old)	Using since/for	The user finds the research via
Ercan	M	29	BA	Engineer	Istanbul	Tinder Gold	Summer 2020	Tinder
Önder	M	26	BA	Graduate student	Istanbul	Tinder Gold (Happen)	2 months	Tinder
Çağla	F	25	BA	Intern	Istanbul	OkCupid (Tinder, Bumble)	3 years	The posts
Serkan	M	27	MA	PhD student	Istanbul	Tinder Plus, OkCupid	Years	The apps
Melis	F	30	BA	Actress	Istanbul	Tinder	-	Tinder
Mert	M	26	Open college	Employee in a private company	Istanbul	Tinder (Bumble)	2012	The posts
Aras	M	34	BA	Engineer	Istanbul	OkCupid (Tinder)	5-6 years	The posts
Yade	F	31	BA	Resigned recently	Ankara	OkCupid (Tinder)	A couple of years	The posts
Ceren	F	42	BA	Manager doing master's	Istanbul	OkCupid (Tinder)	5 years	The posts
Ayşenur	F	31	BA	PhD student	Istanbul	OkCupid (Tinder)	5 years	The posts
Eymen	M	33	BA	Working in a foreign company	Istanbul	OkCupid Premium, Tinder Premium	1 year	The apps
Bora	M	37	BA	Manager	Istanbul	OkCupid Premium	3 years	OkCupid
Onur	M	31	BA	Engineer	Istanbul	OkCupid, Tinder, Bumble (Happn)	5-6 years	The posts
Murat	M	37	BA	Freelancer	Istanbul	Tinder (OkCupid, Happn)	7 years	The posts
Taner	M	30	BA	Working in a call center	Ankara	OkCupid, Tinder	At least 2 years	The posts
Reha	M	31	BA	Working in a private company	Istanbul	Tinder, OkCupid (Happn, Circle, Cuddler, etc.)	4 years	The posts
Cihan	M	29	BA	Graduate student	Istanbul	OkCupid, Tinder	7 years	The posts
Didem	F	22	BA	Journalist doing master's	Istanbul	OkCupid, Bumble (Tinder)	2 years	The posts

Nefis	F	43	BA	White-collar, currently unemployed	Çorlu	OkCupid (Bumble)	First in 2009. Then since January 2020	The posts
Salih	M	32	BA	Currently unemployed	Istanbul	OkCupid, Tinder	7 years	The apps
Ahmet	M	27	MA	Graduate student	Trabzon	OkCupid, Tinder (Connected to Me, Tagged)	5-6 years	The posts
Tuana	F	27	BA	Self-employed	Istanbul	OkCupid, Tinder	4 years	The posts
Gizem	F	30	BA	Self-employed	Istanbul	Tinder (Bumble)	More than 2 years	The posts
Cenk	M	29	BA	Self-employed doing master's	Çorlu	Tinder (Badoo)	3-4 years	Tinder
Kemal	M	44	BA	Journalist, currently unemployed	Istanbul	OkCupid (Siberelem)	2010	OkCupid
Berk	M	33	MA	Architect	Istanbul	Tinder (OkCupid)	5 years	Tinder
Talat	M	34	BA	Employee in a private company	Istanbul	OkCupid (Tinder)	8 months	OkCupid
Şahin	M	51	MA	Retired	Istanbul	OkCupid (Siberelem, Badoo)	3 years	OkCupid
Engin	M	39	MA	Engineer	Istanbul	OkCupid	April 2019	OkCupid
Hakan	M	35	-	Self-employed	Istanbul	OkCupid (Tinder)	5-6 years	OkCupid
Sanem	F	33	MA	Employee in a private company	Istanbul	OkCupid	July 2020	The posts
Çiğdem	F	28	MA	White-collar	Izmir	OkCupid (High Five, Netbook, Tinder, Inner Circle, Bumble)	2015	The posts
Bülent	M	44	MA	Employee in a private company	Istanbul	OkCupid Premium (Tinder)	June 2020	OkCupid

Selma	F	32	BA	White-collar	Istanbul	OkCupid	March 2020	The posts
Leyla	F	28	MA	Employee in a private school	Istanbul	(Tinder)	4 years ago, now married	The posts
İlke	F	27	BA	Employee in an NGO	Ankara	OkCupid	2018	The posts
Aslı	F	25	BA	Recently graduated	Adana	Tinder (OkCupid)	2018	The posts
Serra	F	27	BA	White-collar doing master's	Ankara	OkCupid	2 years	The posts
İrem	F	30	BA	Actress	Istanbul	Bumble (Tinder)	2015	The posts
Eda	F	34	MA	Journalist doing doctorate	Istanbul	OkCupid (Premium, Inner Circle)	September 2019	The posts