

# The Influence of Tinder on Perceptions of Attraction: Questioning the command of images regarding the dating app Tinder in self-representation and the representation of others

2018

Essay for BA Fine Art 2019, University of Southampton.



Figure 1 - Image of Tinder's basic app controls

Tinder is a dating app, originally created in 2012 for individuals to meet based on variable location settings controlled by the user. This essay aims to highlight the ways in which this app, as a platform to meet new people romantically, can be deceiving in outlining the character and physical appearance of users, thus distorting our decision-making based on our sense of attraction. As many dating apps have become increasingly popular, with Tinder leading the way, the dating world has been turned on its head. New rules, visual boundaries, and concealed information controlled by the algorithms and coding of a digital application can now decide who you see, when you see them and arguably even how you see them.

After creating your own profile to join the Tinder community, you are thrown into the workings of Tinder as you begin to sift through other profiles. Within seconds, profiles relative to your set limitations of gender, age, and location come to the front of your screen. With the app's quick method of tapping through pictures, this 'intuitive and swift'<sup>1</sup> design means the user can get through as many profiles as possible in a restricted time. The order of these profiles is based on Tinder's algorithms, and you cannot see other profiles without deciding whether you like the one in front of you. If a profile doesn't appeal, you swipe left on your screen, discarding them. If a profile does appeal, you swipe right, placing this person into an invisible folder unable to view unless they like you back and you 'match'. This alien way of seeking out connections romantically and sexually is part of the excitement and popularity of this application; With the fame of 46 million users since conception<sup>2</sup>, this way of finding dates has become the norm. The sets of rules and boundaries that Tinder applies now goes unquestioned in modern society. This essay aims to briefly delve into the impact this application has on our viewing of images.

<sup>1</sup> Tinder. (2017). *Tap Into a New Look on Tinder*. [online] Available at: <http://blog.gotinder.com/tap-into-a-new-look-on-tinder/> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Reviews, D. and Inc., C. (2017). *Tinder Information, Statistics, Facts and History - Dating Sites Reviews*. [online] [Datingsitesreviews.com](https://www.datingsitesreviews.com). Available at: <https://www.datingsitesreviews.com/staticpages/index.php?page=Tinder-Statistics-Facts-History> [Accessed 1 Jan. 2018].

The most important aspect of a user's Tinder profile are the images they choose to represent themselves. They are limited to six images or less only, and this will be the first thing others will see when coming across your profile. In six images, you are pressured to represent yourself as the most interesting, attractive, and distinctive self that you can be to receive as many 'right swipes' as possible to boost your chances of finding matches. These six images are therefore crucial in playing the game. Because images are more open to interpretation compared to text, the way you read them is completely relative to the individual. This idea is perfect for dating platforms; However, Tinder's methods that makes it so popular, creating swipe culture encourages less and less time spent analysing profiles. This means that the images you show must be interesting, to hold a gaze and long enough to be of intrigue, to encourage a right swipe.

The power of the image in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is unprecedented, the visual is taking over increasingly every day with the rise of social media. "*Visual images are dense with information, allowing performances to convey much more than the basic text*"<sup>3</sup>, and as such, we are communicating more through images than through text on mobile applications like Snapchat and Instagram. As technological advancements continue to increase, so will the platforms in which to show these images and influence the viewer. A selfie represents your own opinion of your 'best' self, captured in one moment. In the dating world, most will naturally prefer to show an image 'enhanced' through lighting, angles, and digital modifications of themselves to their true unaltered self. This approach where the image will never be adequate without management and post-production before showing to other eyes means that most/every image we see is not realistic. With the 'help' of default filters, a selfie can be more striking, and highlight features that will enhance senses of attraction. People are increasingly using images to suggest ideas and represent what they want to say without having to say it, using an expressive image rather than depicting reality. *Images can be used like words, we can talk with them.*<sup>4</sup> Feuerbach highlighted in his text *The Essence of Christianity* the human desire to see something 'better' than what it is, "*But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence*"<sup>5</sup>. This

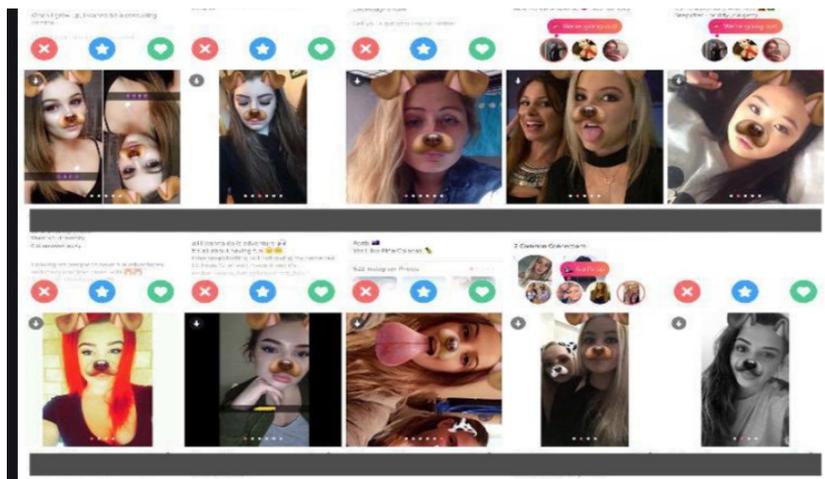


Figure 2 Online Experiment viewing 100 female Tinder profiles, saving all that include the popular Snapchat dog filter. 31/100 were found.

<sup>3</sup> Mirzeoff, N. (2015). *How to See the World*. Penguin.

<sup>4</sup> YouTube. (2018). *John Berger / Ways of Seeing, Episode 1 (1972)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jTUebm73IY> [Accessed 4 Jan. 2018].

<sup>5</sup> Feuerbach, L. and Eliot, G. (1843). *The essence of Christianity*. London: Trübner.

statement from 1843 still echoes the drive of people today on social media, especially in relation to the selfie and the social persona of profiles.

As technology becomes more readily available for the public, so does the accessibility to alter images. Whether it be through simple cropping down and the use of filters on Instagram, to digital manipulation and images taken through snapchat filters that can completely distort a face, anyone and everyone can alter an image. It has always been commonplace to prefer an improved image of reality to reality itself; hence creating a mirage of reality itself.

Although an image offers an intense amount of information, the lack of information it can provide in describing a person's physical and personality features questions the ability to create an accurate representation of oneself. Barthes suggests in *"the image is re-presentation, which is to say ultimately resurrection, and, as we know, the intelligible is reputed antipathetic to lived experience"*<sup>6</sup>, explaining that an image cannot capture the lived experience and memory of one person in that moment. The added pressure on a dating platform of opinion, from the invisible eyes at 'the other end', can lead to representation that fits a certain trend in the current age more than fitting the personality of the true self.

It begs to question whether it is in fact possible to create an accurate depiction of yourself; it is impossible to understand a person through the limited information caged in 6 images and a 500-word biography, that falls victim to the very short attention span that Tinder encourages through its swipe system. Giddens takes a strong view about self-representation: *"Self-identity is thus no longer seen as something that is given but appears as something 'that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual' (ibid, pp.52)."*<sup>7</sup> suggesting the pressures of updating these profiles to the ever-changing personality of the individual it represents.

As Sontag states *"when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for firsthand experience..."*<sup>8</sup>, she highlights the issues regarding authenticity in the modern day through the pressure of the consumption of images. Highlighted in Tinder, authenticity becomes less important than a portrayal of an alter-ego to increase interest in the opposite sex. The image has the control to change the way we view dating and our own self-representation within that, forcing us to look at ourselves through the eyes of others. Tinder, within this surge of technology, has shattered the age-old expression 'love at first sight', where online 'first sight' isn't who we really are, manipulating our sense of desire. This has become acceptable now; knowing subconsciously that these people most likely do not look as what they appear. Forte supports with this view, explaining *"the image-world has increasingly come to substitute for the concrete world of actuality. People in our society have been trained to experience reality as a set of images, as a reflection of appearances"*<sup>9</sup>. Sontag's analysis into the image being a mechanical copy of reality speaks truth about how we operate alongside them today. Digital applications, games, and films have been influenced by this idea of mechanical reproductions of reality, and I argue that this has infiltrated the dating world as well. I argue that the profile of an individual using Tinder is not a representation at all, rather an alter-ego of who they wish to be. A

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<sup>6</sup> Barthes, R. (1964). *'Rhetoric of the Image' in Image, Music, Text*. Fontana Press; New Ed edition (27 Feb. 1987), p.33.

<sup>7</sup> Zhao, K. and Biesta, G. (2008). Lifelong learning, identity and the moral dimension: The 'reflexive project of the self' revisited<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Sontag, S. (1979). *On Photography*. Penguin Books, p.119.

<sup>9</sup> Forte, M. (2014). *Good intentions*. p.272.

quote from Virilio “*Virtuality dominating actuality and turning concept of reality on its head*”<sup>10</sup>  
echoes these ideas further suggests how this is becoming the norm in today’s visual culture.

## Introducing Tinder Gold – A First-Class Swipe Experience

28 JUNE 2017

UPDATE: Tinder Gold is now available to all iOS and Android users.

Get the gold treatment.

We know you. You live in a world where every moment counts—where speed equals success, you’re always on the go, and you can’t let anything slow you down. Especially your Tinder feed.

That’s why we created Tinder Gold, a members-only service, offering our most exclusive features: Passport, Rewind, Unlimited Likes, five Super Likes per day, one Boost per month, and more profile controls—as well as our new Likes You feature, so that you can see who likes you before you swipe. Think of it as your personal Swipe Right concierge—

Figure 3 – Tinder’s explanation of premium account benefits

The app controls whose profile you see and in which order. If users are paying for premium insights, which statistics suggest 24% of all users are, their profiles are pushed closer to the beginning of your swiping session. Because many users become bored, tired, and low after swiping so many profiles, the best chance of sparking attention will be as soon as possible. The app, providing certain users with privileges because of the consumption of their products, is now arguably manipulating its users through the chronology of profiles that people swipe through. Barthes explains this method used in advertisement ... “*the more technology develops the diffusion of information, the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning*”, directly corroborating with Berger’s views on the impact that viewing order has on our visual experience “*The meaning of an image can be changed according to what you see beside it or what comes after it*”<sup>11</sup> Profiles can also appear more than once with premium privileges, as well as if users ‘swiped right’ to you when you swiped left, giving you a fresh look at a person who you have already seen, again altering your view of the profile. These tactics are used by Tinder to throw as many profiles at you to boost likes, matches and therefore increase data statistics; *this direct way that Tinder as an app attempts to affect our decisions, echoes and supports a statement from Losh to conclude in her research “that machines are starting to do our seeing for us, using their defaults that we may not understand to shape our perception*”<sup>12</sup>

It is not just something to question the ability to form an accurate persona of yourself in a profile, but how much Tinder as a platform is contributing to distorting your choices in ‘choosing’ of other people. The idea of ‘swiping’ users is a primary issue that can psychologically affect the way we view people. This ‘swipe culture’ theory gives the illusion that as a user, you can pick from the bunch and discard others who you do not deem attractive. Saving the representations of people that meet your

<sup>10</sup> Virilio, P. (1994). *The Vision Machine*. Indiana: British Film Institute Publishing, p.63.

<sup>11</sup> YouTube. (2018). *John Berger / Ways of Seeing , Episode 1 (1972)*. [online] Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX\\_9Kk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk) [Accessed 1 Jan. 2018]. 19.30mins

<sup>12</sup> Mirzeoff, N. (2015). *How to See the World*. Penguin.

standards by 'swiping right', the profile then vanishes until and unless they 'like' your profile back. Only then can you engage in conversation to further build an idea of what they are like. This method arguably de-humanises the profiles that appear on the site, seeing profiles as a name and a few images, rather than the person themselves. According to an observational study in 2017, "*these new habits and behaviours revealed new perceptions and trends in how interactions and relationships can become more disposable, sterile and standardized in the described context*"<sup>13</sup> This is just one example of how the dating world is changing rapidly due to this increase of technology and its influence on society today.

The inevitable reason we go to the trouble of downloading these dating apps, creating a new profile for oneself and organising through other profiles for potential romantic links may be due to societal pressures and advertising enforcements on the idea that you need the love and companionship of another. The social pressures of needing a romantic relationship pushes the apparent necessity for technology specifically aimed at dating. But the uncontrollable reality that has occurred with these applications, and a reality that Tinder is infamous for, is the ability to provide instant sex with a stranger. It is used as a digital one-night stand when engaging in basic conversation with a sexually appealing stranger can lead to arranging a convenient time and place to sustain each other's sexual needs. The technological advancements that made an app like Tinder possible is now being used in an animalistic way and is a key drive for people to alter their images, profiles, and representations of themselves. As alcohol can affect the appearance of an individual before a one-night stand, the use of Tinder in this way has provided a digital duplicate.

To conclude, it is questionable whether dating apps like Tinder are beneficial or detrimental to relationship building of today, but it is safe to say that the use of apps like this have changed the way we view others romantically and sexually in a way we have never experienced before. The uses of Tinder have morphed, alongside the trends of visual culture that it works in conjunction with since its employment into civilization in 2012. These original ways of forming communication based on a mutual approval of physical appearance has opened doors to use this technology in ways unintended primarily on Tinder's creation. With the introduction of Tinder and apps similar, new forms of constructing relationships have been introduced into society. But with technological advancements comes more opportunity for visual distortion and manipulation, and with the help of a society that consumes masses of imagery, social trends and pressures have contributed toward this desire to manipulate a representation of oneself in a way that isn't possible in 'the real world'.

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<sup>13</sup> [ieeexplore.ieee.org](http://ieeexplore.ieee.org). (2017). *Interaction mediated by a swipe culture: An observation focused on mobile dating applications - IEEE Conference Publication*. [online] Available at: <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/7975868/?reload=true> [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].

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Figure 1 - <http://blog.gotinder.com/tap-into-a-new-look-on-tinder/>

Figure 2 - Imgur. (2016). *Experiment: 100 swipes, encountered 31 dog filters* [online] Available at: <https://imgur.com/r/Tinder/ofn0saH> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018].

Figure 3 - <http://blog.gotinder.com/introducing-tinder-gold-a-first-class-swipe-experience/>