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A Match Made in Heaven: Queer Christians and Dating Apps

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Abstract

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Dating apps pose particular challenges for queer Christians, complicating an already sensitive combination of social and cultural commitments, values and beliefs. Dating apps position themselves in the dating market in a variety of ways, however all function to help people meet other people for dates. Some apps are known for facilitating hookups or catering to queer populations, others are used more broadly and aim to facilitate long-term relationships. Dating apps, along with other social media sites, independently create and control the categories users interact with. On dating apps, users expect the app interface to enable them to represent their unique identities. However, dating apps are often designed with dominant populations in mind and end up excluding those who do not fit the model of their ideal user. Dating apps produce and control categories that are contingent and contribute to cultural knowledge about what identities are dateable, reachable, and even possible. Gender, sexuality, and relationship categories are contested and unruly, as are religious identities, even though they appear stable when offered as radio buttons or checkboxes on a clickable menu of options.

This dissertation explores the ways gender, sexual, and relationship diversities (GSRD) intersect with religious identities and are discursively constructed in the context of using

dating apps. I use Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as a methodological toolkit that views dating apps as cultural representations and social structures that interact with identity work. Technoculture is a matrix that positions white, middle class, straight men as the norm to which others are compared. CTDA examines technology artifacts, beliefs about technology, and users in-situ. I analyzed fifteen semi-structured initial interviews with queer Christian dating app users. Nine of the interviewees opted-in to follow-up with a self-study of their dating app usage. The nine self-study participants used their notes as the basis for elicitiation interviews. I also used the dating apps the paricipants in this study used. I signed up for and completed user profiles using an abbreviated technical walkthrough of ten of the dating apps mentioned in interviews. I interpret and discuss discourses of representing non-dominant identities in technocultural spaces after conducting qualitative discourse analysis of user interviews along with dating app walkthroughs.

Queer Christians navigate presumed discontinuity of being LGBTQ+ and Christian, choosing to embrace what seems a contradictory identity. Participants expressed the importance of making both their queer and Christian identities visible and reachable on their dating app profiles. Queer Christians who want to date other queer Christians are in a very thin dating market and turn to dating apps. However, Christian dating apps assume users are cisgender and straight or gay, limiting usability by queer Christians who are non-binary or bisexual or both. Dating apps that target queer users limit options for representing religious identities, offering limited or no filterable options for religious identification. Dating apps that do offer religion as a structured profile element, do not offer the nuanced and expansive religious categories found on Christian-based or Christian-targeted apps. Further, filtering for religion often requires payment for premium services. I discuss the ways technoculture informs the creation and implementation of dating app identity categories and matchmaking methods and how queer Christians often do not fit the categories available to them. Structured profile elements and questionnaires are used by dating apps to construct

knowledge about users and offer that knowledge to help users find "the one," their match made in heaven.

This dissertation makes an empirical contribution to information and digital studies, as it explicitly interrogates the technocultural aspects of queer identity work among a multiply oppressed group of users. In this work, I privilege the perspectives of queer Christians, contributing to a broader understanding of Christians in North America. By advancing our understanding of the ways technological solutions to diversity and inclusion are experienced among a multiply marginalized population, we gain insight into how dating app interfaces and identity categories shape users and shape worlds. Ultimately, my analysis reveals how queer Christians know and express gender and religious identities on dating apps, but dating apps do not allow for this complexity to be easily visible or searchable. Queer Christians wrestle with dominant narratives, deviate from social scripts, and resist condemnation to a life without hope for loving partnerships. Dating apps offer fine-grained means of seeking and finding a match made in heaven while simultaneously constructing a hell-hole of exclusionary, discriminatory, and oppressive binary categories. Still, queer Christians depend on dating apps, both to do queer identity work **and** to help them seek and find their match made in heaven.

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Paloma, who helps me believe in soulmates again.

&

To all the queer Christians and queer ex-Christians who are still looking for love.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND

In the beginning of the information age, we survived the predicted Y2K doomsday. Y2K was shorthand for the fear that a widespread programming shortcut would break the emerging digital infrastructure worldwide and cause global failures across transportation, banking, and utilities on January 1, 2000. It did not. Programmers made the necessary changes in major industries and failures that did occur were neither widespread nor catastrophic. Tech optimism was on the rise, and the growing informational infrastructure of the internet and world wide web were rapidly expanding. Early users of the internet and world wide web imagined communicating and connecting with others as a key feature for initiating and developing relationships (Inman et al., 2007). Using technology to seek and find romantic partners emerged and began to replace traditional ways of finding partners through local communities and relationships. Emerging technologies have changed romantic relationships in a variety of ways, including how we understand identity and the self (Castells, 1997/2010). New theories of the self have contributed to new understandings of identity, subjectivity, and agency, particularly around gender and sexuality.

How do people form their gender and sexual identities in an increasingly technological world? How do they decide what kind of romantic and sexual relationships they want to have? Online matchmaking technologies promise to help people find the best partners by predicting compatibility based on scientific research. Early matchmaking sites include Match.com, eharmony, and okcupid, which still exist today. Each of these sites use questionnaires in one way or another to match users. Match.com drew upon insights from sociologists and eharmony from psychologists. Eharmony claimed their matching system would know whether a couple were a good match better than the individuals they matched could (see Figure 1.1).

The typical approach to dating in our society is *badly flawed*. Most people make initial choices about potential partners based on very superficial observations and limited knowledge of the people they are dating. As a result, people begin to learn the important things about their partners *after* they are deeply involved in relationships!

eharmony was created by people who understand what makes relationships work. We put three decades of clinical practice and the study of thousands of married couples into a matching system that identifies people who could be *good partners for you*. Simply put, your matches are based on the traits we've found to be important through rigorous research of other people like you *who are happily married*.

We then help matched couples through the process of getting to know each other in a *safe, controlled, online environment*. **eharmony** presents you with people who are right for you from the "inside," eliminating those who are unready or unsuitable for the kind of relationship you're seeking. You then get to evaluate them from the "outside."

When you find that special spark with one of your matches, you can go forward with confidence knowing there is a good chance you've found your *life long love!*

Figure 1.1: eharmony About Us page, circa 2000

Paid online dating services like eharmony became the second most profitable online industry by 2007 (S. Lee, 2016). Mobile dating then challenged the web-based dating industry when Grindr and Tinder offered free services that catered to those who were looking for other dating arrangements. Both Grindr, a dating app for gay men, and Tinder, a dating app for straight people, quickly became associated with casual sex and hookups. Dating apps dominate online matchmaking and for many, online dating is the primary way of finding partners (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). However, for queer Christians, their gender, sexual, and religious identities complicate their social and cultural worlds. From "gay agenda" rhetoric to the "gays vs. Christians" debates, queer Christians are caught in the middle as they struggle to figure out who they are *and* who they want to date.

In 2014, I learned about the Gay Christian Network (GCN) through reading Justin Lee's memoir, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (2012). Justin Lee

was the founder and former executive director of GCN, and was raised Southern Baptist. In his memoir, he describes how he came out as a gay Christian rather publicly while in college. Afterwards, he received many emails from other gay Christians and eventually started GCN as an online forum. Lee attributes the formation and growth of GCN to the influence of the internet and the internet's ability to connect people who may not otherwise meet. GCN grew from an online forum to a global network, with more than 1,500 queer Christians and allies gathering annually for conferences.

In 2017, Lee and the GCN board of directors separated and the organization changed names to become Q Christian Fellowship (QCF). QCF moderates an online forum with over 4,500 registered users, hosts annual conferences, and produces educational video content aimed at "fostering self-acceptance, spiritual formation, and inward development through inspiring spiritual and theological dialogue" (Q Christian, n.d.). Some LGBTQ+ Christian bloggers speculated that GCN changed its name in part because "gay" no longer works as an umbrella term and represents privileged white gay men. The official conference announcement of the name change in 2018 stated that "we must leave behind a name that no longer reflects the totality of our diversity and limits our inclusivity" (Archuleta, 2018). The QCF Board intended the new name to reflect that they are a "fellowship of love for people of varying gender identities, sexual orientations, theologies and faith expressions." For some members of QCF, the Q means queer (which was at times considered a slur), and for others it means questioning, including questioning religious traditions that have excluded many QCF members.

Various denominations have voted for inclusion of queer Christians in all aspects of church life, from leading a congregation to partaking of sacraments, including marriage. Other denominations have split over the issue, and still others leave the decisions to individual congregations. As a result, individual experiences in churches vary widely and it is not always easy to discern where a church stands on queer inclusion. Churchclarity.com is a website to help people discover whether a specific church website has clearly stated their positions on LGBTQ+ people and women in leadership. While such resources are valuable

for queer Christians, full participation in church life isn't a guarantee, because even when a church explicitly states its doctrines, polity, and beliefs about queer inclusion on their website, a church that does not see regular participation by queer Christians often reproduces the same conditions of exclusion that are experienced in openly exclusionary churches. Meeting other queer Christians through organizations like QCF provides opportunities for community, learning, and social connections that are not available at many churches.

In some churches, queer Christians experience stigma and shame from discriminatory sermons, along with social pressure to find a heterosexual partner (Jordan, 2011; Roberts, 2020). Many Christian congregations have privileged and legitimated monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive, lifelong partnerships as the ideal, despite the diversity of relationships described in biblical texts. One example of this privileging is seen in the longstanding prohibitions on divorce and contraception in the Roman Catholic Church, which continue to this day. According to Pew Research Center, 65% of Americans identify as Christian (Center, 2021). That includes 42% Protestants and 21% Catholics, including Joseph R. Biden, the President of the United States at the time of this writing, only the second Catholic president in the history of the nation. However, during the Trump presidency, America saw an increase in visibility of white Evangelicals (17% of Americans) along with an increase in rhetoric associated with Christian nationalism, white supremacy, and male dominance. The Trump presidency is known for anti-trans, anti-homosexual, and anti-woman rhetoric and practices, as well as bible-waving and proclamations of holy war against opponents. At the time of this writing, over 30 states have introduced anti-trans legislation (Krishnakumar, 2021) leading to an “anti-trans crescendo through which we are living in the Anglo-American metropole” (Gill-Peterson, 2021).

When queer Christians do come out, they often face exclusion from queer communities because of their faith (O'Brien, 2004). This “double stigma” impacts their experiences with finding people to date, including when using dating apps. When I attended the 2015 GCN conference, I heard a couple of gay men say that gay hookup apps such as Grindr did not serve their desires to have monogamous gay Christian relationships and there just weren't

very many gays using Christian dating apps. But where do queer Christians seek and find other queer Christians? Online, of course. However, being queer AND Christian means being in a very thin dating market, *without an app for that.*

1.1 Context: Seeking Partners Online

The millennia-old social practice of matchmaking has included a variety of approaches. Traditional ways of finding a partner in America have been facilitated through family, friends, church, or in the neighborhood. Between 1940-1960, roughly 10 percent of couples met through church. By 1960, that number declined to roughly seven percent and held steady until 2000. Since Y2K, meeting through church, as well as other traditional means, has been on the decline, with a significant rise in people meeting online (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). As of 2017, only 4% of couples met through church. Whether meeting a match through church or online, love is a central organizing concept in dating and marriage. Love emerged as the basis of marriage in the West during the 19th century after Protestant discourses of marriage as "the fundamental building block of society" took hold (Coontz, 2005, p. 134). Marriage and family as foundational to society is a concept that continues to circulate in debates about same-sex marriage today, including debates about who should or should not be included on dating apps.

Internet dating websites and mobile dating apps range from prioritizing location-based hookups (Grindr and Tinder) to facilitating matches for long-term relationships (eHarmony and Match), and targeting specific populations (Bumble and JDate) including a plethora of niche dating apps (FarmersOnly, Fitness Singles, Dig). In a longitudinal study of how couples meet and stay together, nearly 70% of same-sex couples surveyed reported that they met their partner online (Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012). Rosenfeld and Thomas report that meeting online is "dramatically more common among same-sex couples than any way of meeting has ever been for heterosexual or same-sex couples in the past" (p. 532). This is not surprising, as gay men were early adopters of using the internet to meet, with the Gaydar website being among the first online dating services (Mowlabocus, 2016). In a follow-up

report focusing only on heterosexual couples, Rosenfeld, et al. (2019) found 39% met online, which is an increase from previous years, but still not as common as among same-sex couples. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, meeting online increasingly shapes and forms societal dating practices, including understandings of gender, sexual, and relationship diversity.

Eharmony was one of the first websites that marketed themselves to Christians as having a matching algorithm based on Christian principles. The eharmony service became very popular among Christians after being promoted by Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian radio broadcast, in the early 2000s. The extensive questionnaire eharmony uses to match potential partners includes questions about religion, but it does not limit users to being members of any particular religion. Although eharmony is not exclusively a Christian dating site, it is based on Christian ideals for dating and marriage as long-term and monogamous. Dr. Neil Clark Warren, eharmony's founder and CEO for many of the 21 years they've been in business, is a white evangelical clinical psychologist with years of experience counseling couples. Before founding eharmony, he taught seminars based on his book, *Finding the Love of Your Life: Ten Principles for choosing the Right Marriage Partner* (1994). In 2000, Warren founded eharmony, which later developed and patented matchmaking systems and methods (Carter, 2017). Based on data from the eharmony.com matchmaking service, Warren (2005) offered a self-help book, *Falling in Love for All the Right Reasons: How to Find Your Soul Mate*, for those who "want to find love so true that you and your partner will be together, happily, for the rest of your lives." Warren markets his matchmaking website and book as offering a "scientifc plan that helps you find the soul mate of your dreams." However, in 2004, the company was sued for discrimination since their systems and methods excluded same-sex matchmaking.

1.1.1 eharmony's (in)Compatible Partners

In an interview on National Public Radio, Fresh Air host Terry Gross asked Warren why "gays and lesbians" were not allowed to use eharmony (2005. Warren responded that their matching systems and methods were based on research done with heterosexual couples only

and did not apply to same-sex couples. Gross countered that the research population was also largely Christian heterosexual couples, yet eharmony claims their systems and methods will work for Wiccan couples by virtue of Wiccan matching being included on the app. Gross pointedly asked if Warren's religion had anything to do with the company's exclusion of gays, which Warren categorically denied.

Warren's company was not the only one sued for discrimination of same-sex couples; Christian Mingle was also sued and both were forced by court-order to include options for same-sex attracted people (Kutner, 2016). In 2009, eharmony launched Compatible Partners, a gay matchmaking site, in response to discrimination lawsuits filed in New Jersey and California. The company kept the two sites independent of one another, however this led to a suit claiming discrimination of bisexual users. They conceded to allow bisexual users access to potential matches on both apps without additional costs. Compatible Partners' terms of service included a disclaimer about the research basis for their Compatibility Matching System. This disclaimer, which Warren voiced in the Fresh Air interview, was both formalized and emphasized as seen in their terms of service (See Figure 1.2). In 2019, eharmony merged Compatible Partners with their flagship matchmaking product giving gays and straights alike access to their Compatibility Matching System. As of this writing, however, the disclaimer for same-sex matchmaking is no longer included in their terms of service.

Initially, most online dating services were available for a fee. As newcomers to the internet dating arena, location-based hookup apps available on mobile phones challenged fee-based internet dating services like eharmony by offering their products to users for free. Dr. Warren of eharmony is openly heterosexual, and came out of retirement in 2012 because his company was struggling. He blamed debates over gay marriage for damaging his company when anti-homosexual Christians threatened his employees and stopped using the app after eharmony launched Compatible Partners (Beredjick, 2013). Whether eharmony lost customers because of an increase in popularity of free mobile-based apps or because conservative Christians turned to other Christian dating apps, we may never know. Either way, eharmony remains a contender in the dating app market, replacing meeting at church for many, and is available

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Figure 1.2: Compatible Partners Terms of Service (2019)

for queer Christians to use.

1.2 Problem: Meeting Queer Christians Online

The Christian dating app market has responded to demands of queer Christians for inclusion, but there are limits. Christian dating apps that were designed for heterosexual matchmaking and challenged by LGBTQ+ Christians who are seeking other dating arrangements reinforce both the gender binary and a binary that only heterosexual and homosexual people exist. What about queer Christians who do not identify as heterosexual or homosexual? What about bisexual, trans, non-binary, queer and gender non-conforming Christians? Where do they meet long-term partners? Which dating apps work best for them? And what about all of the Christians who identify with one or more of the growing number of gender categories available on Facebook and other social media sites (Bivens and Haimson, 2016; Bivens, 2017)? Dating apps pose particular challenges for LGBTQ+ Christians, complicating an already sensitive combination of social and cultural commitments, values and beliefs.

Within information and studies, there is a growing interdisciplinary subfield of research

on dating apps with researchers calling for studies that can lead to a better understanding of those users for whom apps offer both significant opportunities for connection and pleasure and increased exposure to stigma and violence (Albury et al., 2017, p. 9). Queer Christians are app users who face multiple exclusions, but they also need opportunities for connection through dating apps. To understand both exclusions and opportunities, I explore the intersection of gender, sexual, and relationship diversities (GSRD) with Christianity in the context of dating app usage, making an important contribution to information and digital studies. As a result, this dissertation was guided by the following overarching research question: **What can queer Christians' use of dating apps tell us about GSRD?** I also ask:

1. In what ways do LGBTQ+ Christians use dating apps?
2. What do queer Christians believe about the role gender plays in matching with other users?
3. In what ways do dating app interfaces shape user experiences for queer Christians?
4. In what ways do dating apps shape how queer Christians understand their gender and sexual identities?

The first three chapters of this dissertation outline the research objectives, theoretical foundations, and research approach that ground this dissertation. Chapters 4 & 5 presents the findings of this study. In Chapter 4, I present findings from study of how dating apps imagine, configure, and use GSRD and religion classifications in matching people. In Chapter 5, I present my findings of how queer Christians construct knowledge about their identities in the context of using dating apps. In Chapter 6, I discuss under-analyzed connections between gender, religion, and technology.

1.3 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the problem of queer Christians seeking to find other queer Christians to date. I have outlined the significance of this study and why it is important to develop further understanding of the complexity of GSRD among multiply marginalized people and their communities, specifically LGBTQ+ Christians. Dating markets continue to grow, with 250 million people using dating apps globally in 2020. Internet dating revenue is projected to reach US$3,241 million in 2021, with the lion's share of that revenue, US$674 million, generated in the United States where we find the majority of users (Curry, 2021). Queer Christians are seeking love online along with millions of others. As followers of Jesus, they are promised, "Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find" (*Common English Bible*, 2011, Matthew 7:7). When queer Christians search for partners online, will they find a match made in heaven?

Chapter 2
CONCEPTUAL FRAMES: QUEER CHRISTIAN IDENTITY WORK

Many perceive being queer and Christian as a contradiction. Queer Christians and their use of dating apps to find potential partners involves identity work that requires articulation of this contradiction (O'Brien, 2004). By identity work, I mean the process of self-understanding that is closely related to one's subjectivity and personhood. Following Steph Lawler in *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (2014), I use subjectivity and personhood as "slippery and yet necessary terms *embedded within* and *produced by*" social worlds. Social worlds include technology and society, of which dating apps are an extension.

2.1 Identity Work and Subjectivity

Theories of subjectivity address how people make sense of who they are and the processes by which people become subjects and claim identities. Sociologists draw upon post-enlightenment philosophy and cultural studies to theorize that subjectivity is a relational process that happens in the context of cultural norms which are often expressed through social scripts (Lawler, 2014; Shapiro, 2015). Social scripts convey socially accepted ways of understanding identities and interacting with others. Drawing upon Foucault, Butler discusses subjectivity as being like two sides of a coin, involving how we are seen and recognized by others as well as how we see and recognize ourselves (Butler, 2004). In Butler's account, norms limit what is recognizable, however, what is not recognized may open up possibilities for emergence. Whether an identity is taken up by a person or imposed upon a person, Alcoff (2006 theorizes that what is visible in and on bodies are significant factors, and for her, "identities are best understood as ways in which we and others around us represent our mate-

rial ties to historical events and social structures" (p. 287). As theorized from psychological perspectives, identity is something an individual has—an attribute—and is the product of psychological and cultural processes by which we autonomously construct and express our senses of self (Lawler, 2014). In contrast, subjectivity is how we situate ourselves—or become situated—in relation to power. We are "subjected" to/by power through economics, law, social norms, family circumstances, culture, history, technology, and the physical world generally. Subjectivity is part of the process that "naturalizes" power relations and our place within them.

Knowledge about gender, sexuality and religious identities are often institutionalized in law, education, religion, technology, social services, etc. and codified in social scripts (Shapiro, 2015). Institutionalized knowledge about gender, sexuality, and religious identities govern individuals, groups, and populations and constitute specific *regimes of truth*. I use govern in the sense of control, influence, and regulation. Regimes of truth are not deterministic or sovereign rules that are externally imposed on people's thoughts; rather they are often taken-for-granted and ubiquitous. *Rules* within a society may become formal or informal cultural norms. For example, an informal rule about clothing associated with specific genders produces knowledge about a person's gender that renders them recognizable or not. A formal rule about marriage includes laws about who can and can't marry (e.g., regulating such attributes as age or gender), and allows couples recognition in relation to rights and privileges.

I draw upon Foucault's notion of discourse as patterns of knowledge that govern subject formation (Mills, 2003). Regimes of truth establish distinctions between discourses considered true and those considered false and include how true and false are authorized as well as who is authorized to speak truth. Regimes of truth regulate the place of the subject in discourse—both those who speak and those who are spoken about. Truthful knowledges—religion, science, law, social justice, politics, culture, and technoculture—comprise contemporary heterogeneous regimes of truth. In other words, the rules that govern ways of knowing and being particular to a given domain authenticate the *truth* of a claim to

knowledge and membership. Games of truth involve playing by the rules of knowing and being known within and through a particular domain. A given game of truth is identified by assessing who is qualified to speak the truth, to whom do they speak, what topics are speakable, how truth is practiced and why. Further, the relations between truthful practice, power, and places of subjects in discourse are part of games of truth.

Pre-enlightenment theories of the self were organized around authoritative knowledge given to subjects by a higher power such as the Christian God or a sovereign king. A person's sense of self was, as such, given to them by God and predetermined according to God's will. The self was imagined to be a reflection or product of God's handiwork and was contained within a person (Shapiro, 2015). In Western post-enlightenment culture, there are many different ways that humans develop knowledge about themselves. The locus of authority shifted from religion to science, and knowledge about the self shifted from revealed by God to constructed by various means. Whether drawing upon philosophy, cultural theory, or sociological theory, new theories of identity posit that identities are products of multiple and competing discourses and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1988).

In America today, games of truth about identities are bound up in neoliberal discourses producing neoliberal subjects with emerging gender and sexual politics. Neoliberal discourses "stress the efficiency, welfare, and freedom of the market, and self-actualization through the process of consumption" (Gill, 1995). Neoliberal discourses also have impact on Christian churches in America where evangelical megachurches market biblical manhood/womanhood (Piper and Grudem, 1991/2006 and sexual purity (Sellers, 2017 to promote growth and prosperity (J. Johnson, 2018). To participate in the *game of truth* of being recognized as a Christian and tell a story that does not fit biblical manhood/womanhood is to be unintelligible under the terms of reference that the overarching regime of truth has for biblical Christians. Such unintelligibility threatens the efficiency of the Christian dating market where Christians seek and find partners within church communities contributing to church growth.

Examining discourses is especially helpful in understanding gender, sexual, and religious

identities and how queer Christians understand themselves. Foucault also theorizes that individuals, on their own or with the help of others, use technologies of the self in relation to technologies of power (Foucault, 1988). Technologies of the self involve ways individuals conform to and/or resist technologies of power to transform themselves. Technologies of power and knowledge production through religion and medicine demand sex to speak truth, and for us to speak truth about sex (Foucault, 1976/1985). Truths about sex and truths sex knows about human relations circulate and dominate understandings of gender and sexuality today. The types of discourses queer Christians accept and make function as true is integral to understanding queer Christian subject formation. In the next section I explore theories of gender and expand upon how people claim and construct knowledge of gendered identities for themselves.

2.2 Gender

Gender is a phenomenon with varied histories, and theories of gender are usually informed by feminist thought and sexuality studies. Gender subjectivity involves how we are seen and recognized by others as well as how we see and recognize ourselves as a man or woman in society. How we "see" gender is codified in social scripts that reinforce norms which limit what is recognizable. Transfeminist and queer studies scholars in particular have developed perspectives on gender that challenge essentialist formulations of gender that locate gender as determined by genitals. Queer and transfeminist theoretical lenses highlight gender as a cultural phenomenon that in Western contexts relies on mutually exclusive binaries of male or female, masculine or feminine, man or woman. Cisgender is a concept used to describe those whose gender is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth. The concept of "gender assigned at birth" involves medicalized knowledge about gender as connected to a visual assessment of reproductive capacities based on external genitalia. Cisnormativity is the ways society, through institutions, norms, practices and structures of understanding, privileges aligning gender identities with sex/gender assigned at birth, in line with the existing gender binary. Queer and transfeminist scholars attend to the ways people deviate

from and transgress norms of binary gender. Transgender emerged as an umbrella term for a variety of trans identities and names a politics stemming from awareness of three key ideas (Enke, 2012, p. 5):

1. Binary gender norms and hierarchies are established and maintained through violence against those who visibly deviate from them.

2. Many humans—in their gender identities and/or gender expressions —do not conform to conventional gender expectations or moral judgments about what kinds of gender "go with" what kind of body.

3. Gender variation itself is intensely valuable as one facet of the creative diversities essential to wise and flourishing societies.

Finally, gender is inextricably linked to sexuality and is theorized as fundamental to the self and operating visibly on the body (Alcoff, 2006). In an "excessively materialistic society, only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth" (p. 6). As in "gender assigned at birth", what is visible on the body at birth is what is considered true about a person's gender. This concept frames my interrogation of how gender is visibly marked in dating apps when users become commodities of their own design in order to enter a dating market. For populations that don't fit the ideals put forth by app designers, their lived experiences clash with technological mechanisms that construct particular forms of "desiring users"(Hardy and Lindtner, 2017). As Alcoff argues:

> What I can see for myself is what is real; all else that vies for the status of the real must be inferred from that which can be seen, whether it is love that must be made manifest in holiday presents or anger that demands an outlet of violent spectacle. Secular, commodity-driven society is thus dominated by the realm of the visible, which dominates not only knowledge but also the expression and mobilization of desire and all sorts of social practices as well. (p. 6)

Queer visibility is relevant to this study, as well as Christian visibility. I draw upon Gray's (2009a) insight regarding queer as "the action of identity work," which involves "the collective labor of crafting, articulating, and pushing the boundaries of identity" (p. 21). In what ways are queer identities articulated in order to make them visible? In what ways do queer Christians navigate this visibility when using dating apps? Queer encompasses identities in tension with normative presumptions that individuals are heterosexual and cisgender. However, for some LGBTQ+ Christians, queer is considered a slur. In this work, I refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning people in aggregate as LGBTQ+ people at times. However, Barker proposes that "the acronym LGBT represents a particular white western understanding of sexuality and gender. As we have seen we need to be cautious not to impose this on people of different cultural backgrounds who may not understand sexuality as an identity, for example, or may have more diverse gender options available to them" (Barker, 2017, p. 13). Following Barker, I primarily use gender, sexual, and relationship diversity (GSRD) to connect gender and sexuality with relationship arrangements. Relationship diversity includes same-sex marriage, hookups, non-monogamy, etc. Further, I acknowledge the white male privilege of using gay as an umbrella term and use it in this dissertation when referring to others' use of the term, as in the discussion of the Gay Christian Network (GCN) and when used by participants.

The complex configurations of gender and sexuality have often been overlooked or purposefully ignored for political purposes (Wilchins, 2014; Ward, 2008). Identity politics that are organized around just one aspect of identity fail to account for these complexities. In seeking liberation for oppressed people, I attend to multiple oppressions in my work, drawing upon intersectionality as an important concept for thinking about the complexity of identities. Intersectionality is a way of looking at the intersections of identity that may result in increased experiences of marginalization and multiple axes of oppression. Located in the work of black feminists, intersectionality offers a necessary alternative to reductionist and essentialist notions of race, class, and gender (Combahee River Collective, 1986; Hill Collins, 2016). Intersectionality is not a quick fix to understanding complexity even when taken as an

approach to analyzing relationships of inequality and power broadly (Nash, 2017). However, intersectionality is important to this study as it spurs examination of the multiple oppressions operating at the intersection of religion and gender while also considering racial politics and class struggles as part of the matrices of complexity in identity work. In the next section I discuss literature on sexuality and the significance of this concept for this study.

2.3 Sexuality

Sexual subjectivity involves institutionalized knowledge about identities, bodies, and desires. Entanglements of sex and gender are evident in many ways, including variations in terminology used on identity documents, medical records, census forms, and registration for many online products and services. In some contexts, sex and gender are conflated and used interchangeably; in other contexts, the two are differentiated along the lines of nature vs. nurture with sex (nature) referring to biological characteristics, such as genitals and chromosomes, and gender (nurture) referring to social roles and a person's sense of self, which are considered socially constructed. Sexual subjectivity involves making sense of sex *and* gender, bodies *and* desires, and various regimes of truth governing sexual interactions with others. In this section I explore the intersections of gender and sexuality and their relations to dominant heterosexual orientations. I discuss the theory of a gendered eroticization of the self (Bettcher, 2014) and the concept of social straightness (Ahmed, 2006) in relation to sexual subjectivity and identity formation.

Dominant theories of sexual orientation locate desire toward an "other" as a defining characteristic. For example, heterosexual desire is directed toward an opposite-sex partner, homosexual desire is directed toward a same-sex partner, and bisexual desire is directed toward same/opposite-sex partners. Bettcher (2014) theorizes a gendered eroticization of self as an important way to think about sexuality and sexual orientation. It's not just the gender of object choice that is important in conceptualizing sexuality, it is also a "core gender-inflected erotic self" that directs desires in a particular direction. The theory of a self that *has* gender as a constitutive element disrupts theories that make distinctions between

gender identity and sexual orientation, thus blurring the line that separates them. For Bettcher, "the theory includes a specific 'interactional account' according to which sexual attraction possesses a structure comprising the eroticized other ('the source of attraction'), the eroticized self ('the locus of attraction'), and the erotic interactions between the two" (p. 606). Bettcher's theory of "erotic structuralism" offers a reconceptualization of sexual orientation in general and sexual subjectification specifically. Erotic structuralism also rejects standard ways of viewing sexual orientation that do not account for experiences of trans people. Further, erotic structuralism situates orientation not just as desire directed toward an object, but desire directed from a subject.

A phenomenological approach to understanding sexual orientation conceptualizes sexual subjectivity as becoming rather than being, taking into consideration what others appear as sexual objects in a predominantly straight world (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed offers the concept of social straightness as a critique of heterosexuality as a given or natural orientation and way of being in the world. For Ahmed, "sexual orientation comes to be understood as integral to the subject, as a matter of its identity." The significance of thinking of straightness as an experience of becoming rather than of being is important to consider, as compulsory heterosexuality produces more than straightness. As a mechanism of culture, straightness may carry with it whiteness and other attributes that are assumed to be passed on through a family lineage. Using this concept of social straightness, I question the ways that dating apps make normative genders and normative sexualities more reachable than others. This view of sexual orientation is useful in understanding straightening effects of technocultural spaces.

Ahmed draws upon Said's *Orientalism* (1978/2003) in her conceptions of queerness and identity. Said, in his introduction to the 25th Anniversary edition of his seminal work argues that we must oppose that which seeks to herd together diverse people under falsely unifying rubrics. In 2003, Said proposed that "we are today abetted by the enormously encouraging democratic field of cyberspace, open to all users in ways undreamt of by earlier generations of either tyrants or of orthodoxies" (p. 25). His hope was for a more humane future than the

past he analyzed, including the processes of inventing ”others” that he described. However, this notion of a democratic field of cyberspace has been disturbed by scholars who study and expose the ways historic systems of oppression and othering are reproduced online (Benjamin, 2019; Hoffmann, 2019; Noble, 2018).

Cyberspace extends beyond borders of nations and divisions between East and West. Discourses of sexuality circulate globally even though “the study of sexuality has often been bound by disciplinary constraints” (Grewal and Kaplan, 2001). Grewal & Kaplan argue that the emergence of global sexual identities is best explored from “an interdisciplinary and transnational approach that addresses inequalities as well as new formations” (p. 664). Therefore, in this study, I keep in mind the inequalities that extend beyond the US context as dating apps circulate in a global marketplace. Early dating apps were built upon a heteronormative ideology that includes “the belief that there are two separate and opposing genders with associated natural roles that match their assigned sex, and that heterosexuality is a given” (van der Toorn et al., 2020). A queer analysis of sex and gender locates the ways heterosexuality has become a given in society, taken for granted as the way things are in relation to the concept of heteronormativity (Berlant and Warner, 1998). Heteronormativity is the ways society, through institutions, norms, practices and structures of understanding, privileges heterosexuality. Alternatively, queer culture building aspires to create “not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture” (p. 548).

The possibility of dethroning the heterosexual couple from the default ideal couple marketed by many dating apps informs my analysis of dating apps and websites. However, I also keep in mind the privileging of certain types of queer dating arrangements that may contribute to a domesticated queer public. Built upon the idea of heteronormativity, homonormativity, rather than resisting the demands of compulsory heterosexuality, functions to normalize homosexuality within the terms of an existing social order that privileges marriage and family (Duggan, 2002). Homonormativity has entered the lexicon of queer culture and

activism and when combined with American exceptionalism contributes to a homonationalism that exports a sense of pride in being a nation that accepts homosexuality as normal (Puar, 2007). In the next section, I discuss queer Christian identity, not as a social category, but in terms of formation which includes becoming, producing, and reproducing. Drawing upon concepts explored already, I discuss Christian notions of subjectivity and identity in relation to gender and sexuality.

2.4 Queer Christian Subjectivity

The intersection of queer and Christian identities is a relatively recent possibility. This is not to say that LGBTQ+ Christians did not exist in the past, but rather the processes by which a person came to understand themselves, and then to identify themselves as queer and Christian, emerged as the result of specific historical and cultural configurations. Foucault argues that the homosexual emerged as a "personage" in the 19th century (Foucault, 1976/1985). However, the term homosexual did not appear in American Protestant bibles until the 20th century (The Reformation Project, 2019). In this section, I examine feminist and queer theology in relation to the ways Christians understand their gender and sexual identities as well as the social structures involved.

Members of religious communities look to their religious myths to authorize their preferences, their social patterns, their decisions and indeed, their identities (Prentiss, 2003, p. 5). Myth is a narrative that makes truth claims for itself and this narrative is not only seen by the community as credible, but as authorizing and used to legitimate beliefs, values, and behaviors. A dominant narrative in Western Christianity has been that homosexuality is unnatural and is a sinful lifestyle choice (Hopkins, 2012). In this dominant narrative, Christianity and homosexuality are incompatible. Queer Christians have often felt condemned not only to darkness and despair, but to damnation and destruction in hell. However, their truth cannot be hidden. Many are claiming their LGBTQ+ Christian identity even though it seems contradictory. This contradiction is often accompanied by "double stigma" (O'Brien, 2004) from within their religious communities and within queer communities. Such con-

tradiction often leads to an articulation of self that shines brightly and radiantly through resilience and reflection. O'Brien observed, "this contradiction is experienced as a source of insight and as an occasion for articulating a self that these individuals perceive as stronger, more purposeful and, in many cases, indicative of the true meaning of Christianity" (p. 192).

Articulations of authentic selves are relevant to queer Christians in a variety of ways. Karen Keen (2018), a Christian blogger and author of *Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships*, blogged: "When I saw the search terms someone recently used to find my website, I couldn't help but smile sympathetically. They had typed 'karen r. keen, is she a real Christian?'" (Keen, 2019). Authenticity in Christianity is constructed around a variety of beliefs, depending on the community, but many include beliefs about sexuality and gender that raise questions about what it means to not only be a "real Christian", but also what it means to be a "real man" or a "real woman." Additionally, purity culture has created religious sexual shame that encourages some Christians to wait to explore sex and sexuality until they find their match made in heaven, only to find sexual frustration once they marry "the one" (Sellers, 2017; Roberts, 2020).

Early theorizing about sexuality and gender among scholars of Christianity in America focused separately on sexuality and gender. Feminists offered critiques of patriarchy and male-centered perspectives on religion that are important to understanding the development of queer theologies. I draw upon a feminist definition of religion as beliefs and behaviors, derived from a common worldview, that answer people's significant and important questions (R. M. Gross, 1996). Religious worldviews often address questions about the nature of reality, offer purpose for human existence, and regulate who is considered a religious follower and who is not. Many aspects of religious worldviews become unconscious presuppositions. Religious worldviews are often considered mythic not only in their authorizing capacities, but also in the ways they "imply a given social and cosmic order and function in society to connect paradigms of the past with possibilities of the future" (Coupe, 2009).

Many historic Christianities share the view that women and men are essentially different and that God designed and intended differences between men and women for particular

purposes, including different reproductive capacities, social roles, and spiritual authority. This order to gender and sexual relations is imagined as a given—an unquestioned assumption about reality. Related to this view is the belief that since the biblical creation narrative describes Adam being created first, that men and masculinity more closely represent God. Much like the idea that the firstborn has a privileged family position, the idea that "man" was created before "woman" is used to justify men's authority over women, thus centering men and masculinity as the ideal human. Feminist scholars and theologians have illuminated many of the ways patriarchy and androcentrism function in historic Christianity and offer necessary correctives (E. A. Johnson, 1992, J. Johnson, 2018). One corrective to the influence of heteropatriarchy and androcentrism in Christian theology suggests a complete flip of the script to privilege women and feminine images of God, holding to a view that we cannot assign any human notions of gender to any of the members of the Christian trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit) (E. A. Johnson, 1992).

Feminist biblical scholars and theologians conceive of sex difference as less importantly about reproduction, but rather more importantly about the plurivocal direction of eros and the diversity within unity of the trinity (Loughlin, 2007; Trible, 1978). Some early theologians held to an androcentric view of humanity that not only imagined male as a default mode of being human now, but also in the life to come; e.g., all those saved would be male in the new heaven and the new earth. Other early theologians imagined gender gone completely, along with marriage and sexual relations for reproductive purposes. Further, "many early Christian theologians believed that gender and sexuality were, at best, temporary accommodations for the purpose of producing enough people to fill up heaven with the appropriate number of inhabitants, rather than intrinsic, important, permanent parts of what it means to be human, as most people now believe" (Tonstad, 2018, p. 6). Tonstad argues that queer theologies at their best need to give up "the fantasy that someone else is a self or has a selfhood that is fully integrated, whole, and authentic, rather than dispersed, fragmented, or in movement" (p. 115). Tonstad wonders if queerness is about "reckoning with the ambiguity of human experience and relationality and the inescapability of conflict" (p. 115).

Building upon the work of feminist theologies, Patrick Cheng (2011), a queer theologian, describes the work of queer theology along three modes of producing knowledge about god and humans:

> First, queer theology is LGBT people "talking about God." Second, queer theology is "talking about God" in a selfconsciously transgressive manner, especially in terms of challenging societal norms about sexuality and gender. Third, queer theology is "talk about God" that challenges and deconstructs the natural binary categories of sexual and gender identity.

Queer Christian theologies combine queer theory with the study of God, particularly God's relations with humans and human relations with one another (Cheng, 2011; Tonstad, 2018). For Tonstad, queer theologies go beyond apologetics. Queer apologetics involves using biblical texts to justify and argue for queer inclusion in churches and seeks to reconcile being LGBTQ+ and being Christian out of the realm of contradiction. Queer theologians welcome paradox and contradictions and view queerness as evidence of the transgressive nature of God. God transgressed the boundaries of divinity and humanity, of life and death, in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, and thus set the stage for challenging and deconstructing binary categories (Cheng, 2011).

Queer Christian apologists make a variety of arguments that queer Christian theologians reject. For example, some suggest viewing Christ as symbolically multigendered, which queer theologians argue reduces gender to the realm of the symbolic. However, Tonstad suggests, "that's mostly different from how gender is encountered in lives. In our lives, we are and we encounter people of many different genders and none. That's how we experience gender: in our bodies and in our relations with others" (Tonstad, 2018). This concept is in line with queer and transfeminist scholars who have worked to decouple sex and gender from essentialist, heterosexist, heteronormative notions of the body and identity without denying the material relations of sexed bodies and embodied gender identities.

However, notions of biblical manhood/womanhood and sexual purity underpin ex-gay

ministries that attempt to "help" gay people change their sexual orientation, or at least to abstain from sex and remain "pure." Ex-gay ministries expose Christian ideologies that contribute to normative understandings of gender identities and are limited in their effectiveness (Erzen, 2006). In June of 2013, a prominent ex-gay ministry, Exodus International, closed their doors and offered an apology to the gay community for their use of conversion therapy, a therapy designed to "pray away the gay." Ex-gay movement members believe that heterosexuality is God's intent and this has a significant effect in many churches where LGBTQ+ people only encounter straight Christians. Understanding ex-gay rhetoric is important to this study as many queer Christians have been exposed to such thinking in one way or another.

Anti-gay and anti-trans rhetoric of conservative Christians in America package heteronormativity and cisnormativity as sacred, spiritual, and evidence of being saved. For many conservative and evangelical Christians, straightness is counter-cultural to profane and worldly queerness. Ex-gay ministries work to mobilize Christians to battle in harmful "us vs. them" culture wars that place queer Christians in the line of fire. However, queer Christians are resisting, and their resistance is not futile. Queer Christians are producing queer coming-out memoirs, queer Christian self-help books, and guides for Christian parents of LGBTQ+ youth. As more queer Christians come out and more denominations take official positions on issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion, queer Christian groups are both multiplying and dividing. At the intersection of gender and sexuality, a culture war has moved from being an issue between "the church" and "the world" to one of today's most divisive issues *within* Christianity (Hunter and Wolfe, 2007).

The first dividing line is between those who believe it's not ok to be LGBTQ+ and that being ex-gay is a possibility (Side X) and those who believe it's ok to be LGBTQ+ (Sides A & B). Among those who believe it's ok to be LGBTQ+, another dividing line has been drawn. The two sides of this intra-Christian culture war are "Side A" representing those who support same-sex marriage and relationships and "Side B" representing those who promote celibacy for Christians with same-sex attractions. Side A and Side B Christians share in the belief

that it is possible to *be* queer and Christian at the same time while Side X Christians believe you can be either Christian *or* queer, not both. These "sides" are broad generalizations that are made within queer Christian communities that evolved in conversation with GCN and Justin Lee's *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (2012).

Queer Christians are shaped and formed by competing and often contradictory values, beliefs and cultural commitments. Many are only exposed to popular queer apologetics or self-help resources and do not read queer theology or hear queer theological concepts preached from a pulpit. Tonstad (2018) argues that queer theology should avoid apologetics and "Christians should stop arguing over issues of sexual morality altogether, and instead should allow the discernment of the individual conscience before God to rule" (p. 38). Debates within Christianity about being queer and Christian, as well as diversities of positions among queer Christians about what kinds of queer relationships are allowed, make it challenging for queer Christians to find other queer Christians to date. In the next section I discuss technoculture and the ways technology as culture contribute to understanding GSRD, including ways Christianity is part of a technocultural matrix.

2.5 Technocultural Theory

Technocultural theory positions culture and technology as intertwined, resisting instrumentalist views of technology that focus on what people do with technology or what effects technology has on society (Brock, 2018). Additionally, technocultural theory positions technology design and use as influenced by ideas of "progress, religion, the future, modernity, masculinity, and Whiteness" (Dinerstein, 2006). Feminist theories of technology have contributed to technocultural theory in positioning technology as culture and interrogating the roles technologies play in gender power relations (Wajcman, 2010). Deleuze (1992) posited that we are transitioning from societies of discipline (Foucault, 1988, 1975/1995) to societies of control, which Cheney-Lippold (2011) argues can be seen through algorithmic inferences, including inferences about gender identity. Even though most dating apps require users to explicitly state their gender, inferences occur opaquely when a user is put into a dating pool.

Societal norms are increasingly embedded in menu-driven identities that often function to uphold dominant ideologies. For example, limited menu options for race ignore the lived experiences of various forms of racial and cultural hybridity (Nakamura, 2013). In the case of gender and sexuality, having limited menu options serves heterosexist ideologies. I wonder, though, who and what ideologies do the proliferation of gender options serve?

The idea that gender is socially constructed often carries the meaning that gender identity is fluid and malleable. Further, it is sometimes imagined that people can choose their gender from a drop-down menu and change it at will. Such imaginations reflect a social illiteracy (O'Brien, 2016) that may be complicated by the growing menu options offered on social media sites. Facebook allows users to "construct" their own gender by typing any word or phrase into a blank text field that offers suggestions from their list of 50+ genders once the user starts typing. However, by requiring users to start typing, the programmers of this function assume that users already know their gender identity. Queer activists and others celebrated Facebook's technological arrangements of gender categories as progressive since users can select more than one option and can change it at any time. Or at least the users *think* they can change their gender option. Studies have shown that Facebook and other social media sites that offer extensive gender options resolve the user's choice into a binary classification of man or woman for the purposes of marketing (Bivens, 2017; Bivens and Haimson, 2016). Facebook uses predictive analytics to also infer sexuality from a user's behavior, making it possible that Facebook could predict a person is queer before they come out (Kosinski et al., 2013). Once Facebook predicts a user's gender and sexuality, they sell that information to those who want to market to Facebook users.

Meanings associated with gender and sexuality develop out of group processes, so they should not be treated as discrete, fixed variables. Concepts of GSRD are constantly undergoing change on the macro and micro levels while at the same time are deeply embedded in personal, institutional and technological practices and beliefs. Social identity categories for GSRD offered on dating apps embed cultural beliefs into technological practices. This study explores the technological arrangements of GSRD on dating apps and the ways they manage

and shape user experiences, contribute to cultural meaning making of identity categories involved in subject formation. In the next section I discuss specific studies of dating apps, dating app users, and the dating market.

2.6 Dating Apps as Technocultural Artifacts

Dating apps are technologies involved in culture making. I discuss a few key studies of dating apps that inform my analysis and contribute meaningfully to my understanding of dating apps as technocultural artifacts. Businesses design platforms as a foundation from which others can operate, providing hardware and software for websites and apps to run on. Dating apps run on a variety of platforms and provide a service for people to find dates, as well as a place for advertisers to target specific demographics. Dating app software includes the user interface as well as the sorting and matching systems underneath the interface. Dating apps do not provide hardware to users directly. However, they do provide the hardware that stores and processes user data that is then served up to users and advertisers on apps. Users run dating services on whatever platform they use to run other apps and websites.

2.6.1 Dating App Data

An emerging area of research focuses on the data aspect of online dating, which includes categories of identity as data fields. Albury, et al. (2017) use the term "data cultures" to describe the diverse data collected, stored, and used by online dating services. First, data cultures are cultures of production that include "persistent and interoperable data points" that are often linked across platforms and involved in shaping identities, such as logging in to a dating app using Facebook (Duguay, 2017). Second, data cultures are a cultivation of data that includes the various forms of data and ways they are created, transformed, connected with other data, and shared with or mined by others. Third, data cultures are a datafication of culture that includes algorithmic logics that determine matching and other internet dating interactions that are algorithmically determined. Finally, data cultures exist in relation to cultures of use that encompass the ways users encounter, experience, exploit,

and evolve data structures and the ways they manage and contest ethical and safety concerns relating to use of their data. Although some of the collected data is used to inform matching algorithms, like geo-location data in geo-social dating apps (Grindr and Tinder), much of the data collected is used for commodification of the user to allow for targeted behavioral marketing, creating further layers for analytic purposes unknown to users.

Even though internet dating algorithms are hidden from users, power users have developed optimizations and hacks to exploit internet dating to their advantage and game the system. Such gamification contributes to the market logics of internet dating and privileges primarily men, though women game the system as well. Hacking of matchmaking science is a potential safety concern for targeted users (Albury et al., 2017). Such hacking and gamification could present significant risks for queer users and further exclude them from internet dating sites that were not designed with them in mind. It is difficult to discover what dating apps actually do with data, as social media platforms independently control their categorization systems (Bivens and Haimson, 2016). However, the ways users interact with the categories presented to them informs our understanding of the ways platforms and apps are involved in shaping culture and shaping users.

Studies of dating apps used by LGBTQ+ populations initially focused on Grindr as a novel technology in the midst of understanding the long-term global HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many studies of Grindr primarily focused on measuring the safety of sexual encounters in relation to HIV and sexual practices (Albury et al., 2017). Grindr uses geo-location to help users find other users nearby and platform studies of Grindr have explored ways men seeking sex with men negotiate gay culture in the context of online dating (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015). With the possibility of co-presence, Grindr simultaneously operates among digital and analog selves and the emergent properties of this co-presence disturb notions of online/offline selves (Crooks, 2013). However, the possibility of co-location and co-presence are limited for rural queer people (Hardy and Lindtner, 2017) and may pose safety risks in places where being gay is illegal. Both risk and desire are mediated through dating app interfaces and data sharing, which contribute to constructions of desiring users.

Sociotechnical configurations of internet dating are theorized as involved in constructing gender and sexual subjectivities. As queer Christians negotiate seeing and being seen through dating apps, they inevitably encounter risk and desire in many forms. Some studies of dating apps focus more on content created by users than the configurations of app interfaces, however, it is not possible to completely separate them as apps offer both possibilities for self-expression and constraints. In the next section, I discuss a few studies of LGBTQ+ users, including user aspects of some of the studies discussed in this section.

2.6.2 Dating App Users

Self-presentation is a concept developed in the field of sociology and used in analyzing how people construct and present themselves in online social contexts, including online dating. Self-presentation in social contexts involves social actors crafting impressions for the sake of others and ultimately to benefit themselves in making social connections. Impressions are managed depending on the social context and connection desired with particular audiences in mind. In the domain of online dating, impression management functions to facilitate connections ranging from hook-ups to long-term relationships and involves forming an impression of attractiveness and desirability (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015; Hardy and Lindtner, 2017). Studies have examined the contents of structured elements of profiles as well as free-text elements to understand the ways users of dating apps present themselves to online dating markets (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Fullick, 2013). Queer youth exploring stigmatized LGBTQ+ identities have found social media sites with user profiles helpful in their identity development. Even though social media spaces promote healthy identity development, such explorations also involve risk (Hatchel et al., 2016). Queer dating app users also experience risks and tensions in creating their user profiles.

Grindr presents challenges of self-presentation in the context of a location-based, real-time dating app (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015). Users navigated their identifiability differently based on context. Birnholtz, et al. analyzed structured data and free text written in by users from 69,950 unique individual profiles with profile data collected in college towns

located in the midwest and southeast regions of the United States as well as major urban areas in the United States and Canada. This study isolated some tensions related to identifiability and stigma, particularly those associated with sex and sexuality. Additionally, Blackwell, et al. conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 Grindr users. They sought to understand the ways self-presentation relates to impression formation in the context of what they call "co-situation" or the layering of virtual and physical spaces. They argue co-situation presents challenges to visibility and identifiability, as well as access to cues about normative behavior.

Challenges and tensions identified in these studies may allow future work to pivot the analysis more broadly toward normalization that invokes the terms of an existing social order in which homosexuality is still stigmatized. Both of these studies focused on the users, while including an analysis of the ways the platform interacted with, transformed, or constrained their techniques of self-presentation. Mobile apps have been studied in relation to stigmatized behaviors of men seeking sex with men (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015). Such studies contribute to growing acceptance of gay behaviors and practices, like using Grindr to facilitate hookups. Normalizing same-sex matchmaking incorporates same-sex couples into the existing social order and may contribute to queer culture building. However, such normalization and domestication of same-sex matchmaking may also contribute to a growing homonormativity and homonationalism (see Section 2.3). Alternatively, such theorizations could further resistance to terms of existing social orders by illuminating their normative features and that dating services reinforce sexual and gender norms in particular.

Intersectional analyses of race, ethnicity, class, and religion on dating apps are essential in understanding the ways users experience multiple marginalizations. An intersectional analysis of Grindr culture, for example, looks at the ways European immigrant users experience exclusion and discrimination through elements of the app interface, in profile discourses, as well as in private messages between users (Dhoest et al., 2017). No matter their country of origin, diasporic gay men navigate social, cultural and material contexts when making decisions about disclosing or concealing sexual identities (Dhoest and Szulc, 2016). Queer immigrants use dating apps in their new context for more than dating (Shield, 2019). Shield

found that queer immigrants often use Grindr to help them discover safe spaces in hostile cultures. They also use Grindr to find friends and recommendations for LGBTQ+ friendly establishments. Facebook users in Muslim-majority countries use the internet to navigate forbidden intimacies (Rochadiat et al., 2018). Muslim American women use online dating and find ways to navigate challenges of maintaining cultural courtship practices and religious identity in a non-Muslim majority context (Sotoudeh et al., 2017). Such intersectional studies inform my work, as they attend to the complexities of GSRD among already marginalized populations.

2.6.3 The Dating Market

Dating sites require users to develop a complex and evolving literacy of self-presentation that involves both promoting and gendering the self (Fullick, 2013). Identities are reflexively produced in relation to specific social and cultural contexts, and in terms of market logics. Users who construct and promote a desirable self, according to accepted gender norms, get better results. Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, including language and communicative practices, situates Fullick's analysis of self-presentations of gender in the free-text portions of dating profiles. From this analysis, she discovered gender is in a state of flux after comparing the online dating profiles with print and online personal ads. Although Fullick's work focuses on heterosexuals dating, her insights into the provisional nature of gender performativity through text are relevant to my study. Further, the promotional nature of dating profiles as an extension of earlier personal advertisements situates internet dating within the context of consumer culture. The self-promotional aspect of online dating is important to this study of queer Christians, who are in a very thin dating market.

The experience of such a narrow market for queer Christians raises many questions. For rural queer Christians, the local market takes on a different shape than for those in urban settings. Even though they may not find another queer Christian locally, the genre of realness invoked in dating apps "authenticate[s] queerness through the textual and visual rhetoric of LGBTQ visibility that is (seemingly) real and tangible somewhere" (Gray, 2009b). How do

searching and filtering function to give users hope of finding a match made in heaven? What is the relationship between search algorithms and self-presentation? What is the relationship between self-presentation and market logics, or between matching algorithms and market logics? Considering self-presentation as the commodification of the self on an open market informs my study. I also consider how dating apps package users as goods to consumers (who themselves are also users). Further, dating apps foster competition and construct scarcity. For many queer Christians, the scarcity of other queer Christians in their everyday worlds is already apparent, however, dating apps may make such scarcity more tangible, depending on whether other queer Christians are made visible and reachable.

2.7 Summary

Previous studies of dating apps inform this study's approach to the analysis of dating apps and users. The complex interactions of online dating interfaces, algorithms, and users in constructing identities requires an interpretive analysis of material and semiotic aspects of technology, as well as users in conversation with extant offline cultural and social practices and beliefs. I use the concepts explored in this chapter as the framework for my analysis of how queer Christians' use of dating apps informs our understanding of gender, sexual, and relationship diversity (GSRD). In this sense, queer Christians using dating apps are doing queer identity work (Gray, 2009b).

Chapter 3
MATCHMAKING: WALKTHROUGHS AND INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, I briefly describe my worldview and how it informs my study. My worldview is the starting point of my research agenda and the basis of my methodological choices. Conceptual frames discussed in Chapter 2 reflect my orientation in selecting my methods for this study. Here, I describe the methods I have chosen and how they work with regards to my data collection and analytical frames. I provide detail on how I collected and analyzed the data, followed by a brief discussion of limitations to data collection and analysis.

3.1 Transformational Worldview

Inspiration for this study involved my own lived experiences using dating apps as a queer person of faith and those of other queer Christians who were intentionally looking for changes in the dating app market to enable better opportunities to search for dates. As a queer person studying queer people, I draw upon phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of queer Christians using dating apps as they direct their desires for finding partners through technologies available to them. Phenomenology opens up such lines of inquiry "as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2). Cultural norms, through repetition and validation, have powerful effects on bodies and worlds. Cultural norms often flow from institutions and other forms of knowledge production that work together to form oppressive structures in society, including those that marginalize people who hold diverse gender and sexual identities.

Following Foucault (1976/1985, 1988, 1975/1995), power relations are not limited to co-

ercion and oppression, but involve resistance as well. Power relations produce knowledge, constitute subjects, and make resistance possible. Groups, institutions, social movements, and individuals are all embedded in webs of power relations. Transformation of oppressive structures in society is possible, and liberation from oppressive regimes of gender and sexuality is worth pursuing. Mechanisms of control for gender and sexuality contained within dating apps are imbued with power/knowledge that shape users and their experiences. I believe that dating apps and dating app companies can be transformed to do critical cultural work and resist oppressive structures. I intend to inform dating app designers and users of my research findings so they can better evaluate the role dating apps play in shaping bodies and worlds. Through understanding, dating app designers can change their approach to designing interfaces and algorithms to allow multiply marginalized populations access to their goods and services in ways that do not further marginalize them. Further, many queer Christians have been subject to compulsory heterosexuality enforced through Christian institutions, sometimes violently. However, systems of oppression, such as compulsory heterosexuality, can be resisted and transformed when they are better understood. To further transformation in these realms, I have chosen Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as my methodological toolkit (Brock, 2018) to help me understand power relations involved when queer Christians use dating apps.

3.2 Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) is a critical approach to studying the internet and new media technologies in concert with studying users in-situ (Brock, 2018). CTDA differs from sociotechnical and social informatics approaches in that it keeps power relations at the fore, tracing connections between technologies, users, and culture, while privileging the perspectives of the group under study. CTDA resists normative and analytic traditions of social informatics and interprets technology artifacts in concert with technology discourses. For example, a social informatics approach to the “problem” of trans and gender-non-conforming people representing their gender on dating apps might investigate

app interfaces, find that they do not afford accurate representation for this marginalized group of users and suggest more gender fields be added to solve the "problem." This kind of approach to social informatics is often employed in user studies, and may be a contributing factor in how Tinder and Grindr added new gender identity fields in the past few years (Tinder, 2016; Grindr, 2019). Alternatively, a CTDA analysis problematizes the concept of gender and seeks to understand the ways dating app interfaces produce gendered users in the first place. Further, CTDA integrates into the analysis what technology designers believe about gender and what users believe about technology.

There are two requirements that make this toolkit flexible and applicable to this study:

1. Theory should draw directly from the perspective of the group under examination;

2. Critical technoculture should be integrated with the above perspective.

For the first requirement, I am studying queer Christians with diverse experiences of gender and sexuality, as well as diverse Christian upbringings and current commitments. In the previous chapter I outlined concepts related to gender, sexuality, and Christian identities and use those in my examination of the data I collected. For the second requirement, I integrate the critical technocultural theories explored in the previous chapter in my analysis of both platforms and users. Data appropriate for this kind of analysis were collected from the realms of artifact, practice and belief (Brock, 2018). CTDA resists the "normative turn" of social informatics and privileges the point of view of the population under study. Interviews of queer Christian users offer complex empirical data on how they articulate themselves in and about dating apps. As Brock explains:

> CTDA's examination of computational artifacts, the ways their interfaces create users through metaphor and practices, and the beliefs expressed by users of those interfaces/artifacts integrate symbolic, material, and discursive aspects of the ICT under examination. (p. 1016)

Finally, CTDA is considered multi-modal rather than mixed-methods and offers a "holistic analysis of the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" (Brock, 2018, p. 1025). Brock offers suggestions for interface analysis and defining the bounds of data collection, but CTDA is flexible enough to use in concert with other compatible data collection methods. One method that is particularly compatible with CTDA is the walkthrough method, which considers the technology of apps and the cultural meanings involved (Light et al., 2018). I combined an abbreviated walkthrough method with user interviews to explore connections between form, function, and belief, and meaning of gender, sexuality, Christian identities and dating apps.

Discourses structure the ways we experience and perceive the world around us. Similarly, discourse is involved in relations of power (transmitting, producing, undermining) that contribute to structures of oppression as well as strategies of resistance (Foucault, 1976/1985). From a discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Wodak, 2001), discourse involves both written and spoken texts. It is, however, not limited to language and language use, but considers sociopolitical and historical dimensions, social practices, and context. DHA (which informs CTDA) is concerned with social problems, not specific linguistic elements. Building upon DHA, CTDA considers technology artifacts as texts, extending the field of analysis to include analysis of technology interfaces and online discourses. Reading dating app interfaces as text, along with transcriptions of interviews, and triangulating with extant texts about "material, economic, historical, and cultural factors leading to the design and use" (Brock, 2018, p. 1023) of dating apps provides the corpus of texts I analyzed to reconstruct discourses circulating about queer Christians and their dating app usage. Key principles of CTDA that inform this work include: a focus on relations of power, dominance, and inequality; a problem-oriented approach; and solidarity with dominated groups (Amoussou and Allagbe, 2018). Discourse is key to CTDA and is reconstructed by the discourse analyst from the relevant corpus of texts.

3.2.1 Applying CTDA to data

I relied primarily on an abbreviated walkthrough method, interviews, and discourse analysis to answer my research questions. Foucauldian discourse analysis is a particular approach to understanding phenomena focusing on rules governing what true and false statements about that phenomena are conceivable and utterable, rather than speculating on individual or collective meaning making. Critical discourse analysis also goes beyond meaning making and attends to power relations within and between social practices, forms of subjectivity, and ways of producing knowledge about subjects and practices (Foucault, 1988). In my analysis, I examine dominant discursive frames, and attend to how those frames shape individuals and communities subject to them. Contemporary and historical discourses about gender, sexuality, and Christianity shape the formation of GSRD identities and dating practices. An understanding of how discursive frames are formed in the context of dating app usage opens the way for contestations and change. Applying CTDA to my data helps me to see regimes of truth and games of truth at play as participants interact with dating apps.

Dating app usage is the social practice I analyzed, not the practice of dating. However, dating app usage is shaped by dating discourses and practices. Further, I analyzed queer Christian subject formation in the context of dating app usage. I explored participants' processes of identity work through in the initial interviews, including a brief discussion of their beliefs about dating and dating app usage. Building on this, I enrolled as a user for 10 dating apps and used them, recording my experiences. While using the dating apps, I read the interfaces as text and took notes on my experience, producing knowledge about dating app usage which is different from the practice of using dating apps. I later re-read the dating app interfaces as texts and analyzed them.

Participants used dating apps prior to and during the self-study, and kept records of their usage, including enrolling for the first time on a never-before used dating app. They produced knowledge about their own dating app usage in the form of notes and screen recordings and descriptions of their experiences during a second interview. I did not collect

their notes, screenshots, or screen recordings, and only used them for elicitation purposes during the interviews. Elicitation methods help interviewees recall their experiences in more detail, especially when visual data are involved (Pink, 2013).

The walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018) offers a systematic approach to studying mobile apps, including dating apps. The method involves collecting and assessing data related to the app along the following lines of inquiry: environment of expected use, technical walkthrough, and evidence of unexpected practices. Data related to the environment of expected use are drawn from extant materials in circulation, mostly on the internet. Data from a technical walkthrough involves the researcher taking the position of a user and engaging with the app interface from enrollment through everyday use to un-enrollment or leaving. The primary place that users interact with choosing gender and sexuality categories on dating apps appears during registration and setting up a user profile.

In Duguay's study of Tinder (2017), she examined relations between various actors involved in constructing authenticity on Tinder paying special attention to the role of technology in networks of relations. The walkthrough method focuses on analyzing platforms as technological artifacts and does not engage with users, user experiences, or user perceptions including Tinder's chat and matching features, nor does it involve analysis of users behavior. In order to incorporate insights of users, Duguay analyzed related media, online discussions and user profile observations. Duguay employs a sociological theory of self that offers useful concepts of identity and authenticity related to sociocultural interactions and discourses.

By combining sociological concepts with the walkthrough method, Duguay offers a hybrid theoretical approach to examine authenticity claims of platforms. In her analysis of Tinder, she found that Tinder's use of Facebook for logging in to the app is employed to assure users that they are connecting with "real people" which is equivalent to authentic (p. 356). She argues that Tinder's marketing positions itself within the confines of normativity and authenticity by the ways "Tinder depicts users as embodying life-styles that reflect dominant discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and status, which shape notions of attractiveness, safety and, ultimately, authenticity" (p. 358). Expectations of normativity and authenticity are

reinforced through the technological features of the app integrating Facebook profiles as well as the mobilization of media, bloggers, and discourse about Tinder as an expert system circulating in popular culture.

Building on Duguay's exemplary research, I combine analysis of abbreviated walkthroughs of dating apps with analysis of narratives of user experiences and perceptions. My conceptual frame for analysis is informed by theories of gender, sexuality, and religious subject formation outlined in Chapter 2. I selected ten dating apps from a list of apps used by participants. I conducted technical walkthroughs focusing on the registration process and other ways of interacting with gender, sexuality, and religion categories as well as filtering options on the app. I describe in detail my data collection procedures and my analysis in the following sections.

3.3 Data Collection

In this section, I describe the activities of data collection including walkthroughs and interviews. The Institutional Review board at the University of Washington determined this study was exempt from full review. I used an Apple iPad running iPadOS 13/14 to download dating apps and screen recorded my activities using the apps. I stored the recordings on a secure University of Washington server. For the interviews, I used Zoom meetings software licensed through the University of Washington and recorded the interviews to the University Zoom Cloud storage and used Zoom's automated transcription service. I archived recorded interviews, transcripts, and participant consent forms on a secure server. Figure 3.1 details the data collection process for this study.

3.3.1 Dating App Walkthroughs

Exploring an artifact first offers a foundation for exploring practices and beliefs, though all are co-situated. Since it was unclear at the start of this study which dating apps queer Christians actually use, I conducted a pilot study of Compatible Partners, eharmony's now defunct product designed to match same-sex users. This pilot study informed my

DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY	ADDITIONAL INFO	AUT 2019	WIN 2020	SPR 2020	SUM 2020	AUT 2020	WIN 2021
Pilot Studies							
App Walkthrough	Compatible Partners						
Test Interview Prototol	Interviewed four people at QCF Conference						
Recruit Participants							
Flyers at QCF conference	Distributed flyers to pilot subjects and posted on bullitin boards						
Twitter	Tweeted link to sign up for study and asked queer Christian influencers to re-tweet						
Recruitement Website	Linked recruitment website to tweets						
Background Interviews							
Interviewed 16 Participants	Conducted over Zoom as planned, however, Pandemic slowed participation						
Diary Studies							
Track dating app usage	Self-study documented with self-selected method of keeping notes						
Elicitation Interviews							
Interviewed 9 Participants	Interview led by participant based on self-study notes						
App Walkthroughs							
Record Dating App Registration	Recording includes searching for app in app store, reading reviews, downloading app, signing up, reading terms, completing required profile data						
Record Dating App Usage	Recording includes viewing match profiles, changing profile elements, visiting community spaces						

Figure 3.1: Data Collection Timeline

interview protocol and procedures for walkthroughs. Bumble, eharmony, Facebook dating, Grindr, Her, HILY, Hinge, okcupid, Taimi, and Tinder make up my sample of dating apps. This list was constructed from interview data with a diverse group of queer Christians who were currently using dating apps. For my background research into each app, I was interested in changes to gender fields on sign-up pages and profile pages that took place since the launch of the platforms, as well as public commentary on gender-related data fields. Along with names of dating apps, I used the following search strings to gather information about expected use of gender-related data: gender, inclusion, redesign, update, sign-up, and dating profile. I also joined reddit groups for dating apps studied, including r/Tinder, r/Bumble, r/grindr, r/lolgrindr, r/ChristianDating, r/HERapp, r/eharmony, r/okcupid, r/okcupidLGBT, r/FacebookDating, r/hingeapp. HILY and Taimi dating apps did not have reddit channels. I constructed the environments of expected use from information gathered during background research along with a review of in-app marketing materials, marketing emails received, and web presence. In order to explore change over time, I used internet archives to view historical records of dating app websites; no such archive is available for mobile apps ("Internet Archive: Wayback Machine", n.d.). I limited my analysis of expected use to marketing materials on the iPhone app store along with the website landing pages, about pages, company blogs, internet archives, and data gathered from background research.

I conducted technical walkthroughs on a device running iOS. I abbreviated this process by focusing on enrollment, registration, and setting up a user profile. I did not engage in everyday use of the app after completing the technical walkthrough, nor did I go through determining how to unenroll from the app. The primary places that users interact with choosing gender and sexuality categories on dating apps are during sign-up and setting up a user profile. I compared data inputs for demographic information encountered upon enrollment on each app, focusing on gender-related data as well as religion. Walkthroughs allow analysts to make a close reading of an app interface as text and identify discourses built into the platform architecture. During technical walkthroughs, I collected data through

detailed field notes, screen shots, screen recordings as well as audio and video recordings of thoughts that emerged while using the app. Recording the experience allows for a close reading that attends to icons, menus, as well as other visual, textual and auditory elements of the interface. I gathered evidence of unexpected use through elicitation interviews, which I describe in the following section. I limited my collection of extant materials related to the app's vision, operating model, and governance to materials produced by the app provider and available through the app interface. Advertising about the app and within the app, descriptions in app stores, terms of service, rules and codes of conduct, revenue sources, and marketing emails are other types of materials I collected and archived for analysis.

I used my institutional email address and a Google Voice phone number when one was required for registration. I created an Apple ID using my institutional email address and used Apple ID when it was an option for registering the dating app on my device. The iPad I used was erased of any previous data, updated regularly, and connected to the Apple ID I had set up with my institutional email address. Because data tracking through various means is common and unpredictable, I avoided using personal devices, emails, or phone numbers in order to limit my app use in this study from interacting with my personal data as much as possible. This was a problem when I first signed up for Hinge, as they would not allow me to register using my uw.edu email address and only offered Facebook as an alternative sign-on method. However, when I made another attempt to register, they had upgraded their product to allow for sign-on using Apple ID.

3.3.2 Recruiting and Interviewing Queer Christians

I recruited participants from my existing network of queer Christians. I am connected to queer Christians and queer Christian organizations online primarily via Twitter and Facebook. I posted a call for participants with a link to my research recruitment website on Twitter and sent direct messages to a few queer Christian social-media influencers specifically asking them to retweet my research call, which they did. I also posted my call for participation on a Facebook ExvangeLGBTQ+ Private group with 1.1K members. Ex-

vangeLGBTQ+ is a subgroup of a larger Facebook group called Exvangelical. Exvangelical is a private group on Facebook with 9.9K members offering community for those who have left evangelicalism/fundamentalism. ExvangeLGBTQ+ members identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and part of the Exvangelical community.

I conducted twenty initial interviews with nine participants agreeing to become research partners and do the self-study and elicitation interview. Four participants were part of a pilot study, with initial interviews conducted in person at the 2020 QCF Conference. One participant opted out of the study once we entered the Covid-19 global pandemic. Six other participants agreed to the self-study, however, they did not complete the self-study and elicitation interview before the study period closed. I excluded the four pilot-study transcripts as well as the transcript of the participant who asked to be removed from the study. I conducted my analysis on the fifteen initial interviews and nine elicitation interviews included in the study.

For the initial interviews, I had three guiding questions:

1. How do you identify on the LGBTQ+ Christian spectrum?

2. What are you looking for in your ideal date?

3. How do you think dating apps will help you find your ideal date?

With the first question, I was able to get a sense of their perspective on being a gender and/or sexual minority in a Christian context as they narrated a bit of their personal history. They then integrated their past with the present and provided insight into how they arrived at seeking someone to date. With the second question, I discovered what type of relationships they were looking for and what they imagined for their future. Many of the participants mentioned resources that helped them to understand being queer and Christian.

I participated in online forums and community groups affiliated with QCF and kept summary field notes about my experiences. I attended two QCF annual national conferences, one in Florida in January of 2019 and one online in January of 2020. I also attended The

Reformation Project's annual national Reconcile and Reform conference which was held on November 7-9, 2019 in Seattle, WA at Plymouth Congregational Church. I kept field notes from each of these events and reviewed archived keynotes. I subscribed to a weekly podcast hosted by Matthias Roberts, a gay Christian white psychotherapist in Seattle who is the author of *Beyond Shame: Creating a Healthy Sex Life on Your Own Terms,* (2020). Roberts' podcast is *Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Belonging.* I used these sources to inform my understanding and analysis of my participants perspectives.

At the end of each initial interview, I asked which dating apps the participants were currently using and invited them to participate in a self-study and elicitation interview. The protocol for the elicitation study was designed to encourage them to think critically about their use of dating apps (Markham, 2019), and to give them an opportunity to experience choosing gender and sexuality options instead of trying to recall what they selected in the past. Encouraging participants to think critically about their dating app usage includes a strategy of disruption to help them reorient their experience from one of consumption to one of producing knowledge about their consumption. This approach draws upon an action/participatory research approach that places critical thinking as one of the goals of research and improved digital or data literacy as one of the outcomes. People often use technology and accept the defaults and options offered as normal. In order to reorient their thinking, I asked participants to disrupt their usual dating app usage by signing up for a new dating app for the first time during their self-study.

The self-study protocol I asked them to follow is:

- Tracking: Closely attend to every aspect of your dating app use for 72 hr, using different forms of tracking, chronicling and logging methods.

- Restarting: Register for the first time on a dating app of your choice. Do not use Facebook to register, if that is an option, but go through the app's registration process.

  – While registering for the first time, take a screen recording or screenshots of your

experience.

  - For 48 hours after registering, only use the new dating app.
  - Closely attend to every aspect of your dating app use, using different forms of tracking and logging techniques and tools.

- Reflecting: After each stage, write or record reflections in the form of a brain dump.

- Interpreting: After you've collected and saved your experiences with dating apps for about one week, spend some time asking yourself some of the following questions:

  - What does it all mean?
  - How will these apps help me find a partner?
  - What kind of partner do I hope to find on which app?

- Repeating: After developing your initial interpretations, you may repeat your observations of your dating app use as many times as you want, however, only one time is needed for the interview.

I requested research partners avoid using Facebook as a sign-in method. Using Facebook as a sign-in method is more common now than it was when Duguay (2017) studied authenticity on Tinder. Other ways apps allow users to sign-in include using their Apple ID on iOS devices or using their Instagram login credentials. I made this request so users would not bypass gender identification options. Using Facebook as a sign-on allows the app access to user data that it then uses to complete portions of the user's dating profile leaving fewer decisions for a user to make, and fewer steps to complete before encountering matches. However, I wanted participants to critically think about those choices in this study.

Interviews provide researchers an opportunity to go in-depth into a topic of study and allow participants to explain processes of subjectivity. As described above, I conducted semi-structured interviews in two stages with the second interview using an elicitation technique

based on participants' self-study of their own dating app usage. Using materials the user collected from their self-study helped them to minimize recall bias and provided participants with privacy in relation to information about other users they encountered in their dating app use. Participants narrated experiences with interface elements as well as seeking and finding matches. Elicitation materials assisted participants in articulating relationships between phenomena and formulating ideas. Participants brought materials such as screenshots and notes collected during their self-study and I asked them to guide the interview using the materials they brought.

3.3.3 Complementary Method

By combining the walkthrough method with user interviews, I explore the ways queer Christians perceive their needs and desires, how they narrate their identities, and how they are shaped through their use of dating apps. I consider participants who completed the self-study and elicitation stage of the research as "research partners" to acknowledge that knowledge production is a joint process and an active collaboration between researcher and research participants. The nine research partners were given a protocol for the elicitation study that was designed to encourage them to think critically about their use of dating apps (Markham, 2019). I invited research partners to think critically about their dating app usage, take notes and screenshots, and reflect on their overall feelings and interpretations. This approach complements the walkthrough method as it brings together researcher and participants in the questioning of gender categories, the research practices that, in part, create them and the power relations engaged in recognizing and constituting gendered selves. In this sense, participants became research partners as we each were "walking" and "talking" through our experiences of using dating apps.

3.4 Data Analysis: Walkthroughs and Interviews

Combining data from my technical walkthroughs with user interviews allowed me to attend to user experiences and knowledge production in-situ. Since participants used multiple

dating apps, the associations between user interview data and data collected using technical walkthroughs is indirect. This study is meant to be reflective of the experiences of the participants and of the technology examined and used. This study does not propose to generalize about dating apps or queer Christians; rather I describe specific instances of dating app usage by queer Christians, including the perspective of researcher as user, and I offer a critical analysis of the discourses embedded in those experiences. Through my analysis of walkthroughs, initial interviews, and elicitation interviews, I generate insights about the ways interface design, cultural gender norms, and sexual subcultures interact in queer Christian subject formation.

3.4.1 Brief Description of Users

Participants ranged in age from early 20s to early 40s, however, this data was not explicitly collected but participants often communicated their age during one or both of the interviews. For example, one participant said, “I came out two years ago when I was 19.” Of the fifteen participants, two participants identified as Black, three participants identified as mixed/biracial, and fourteen participants either identified or were perceived as white. In this case, I did not explicitly collect this data and compiled it based on how participants described themselves in the interviews or how I perceived them. All of the mixed/biracial participants described their race specifically, and three of the white participants mentioned their whiteness in one way or another. Both Black participants mentioned their Black identity mostly in relation to their experiences with their families of origin. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant and recorded which dating apps they discussed in their interviews. Most participants mentioned using at the most three or four dating apps at any one given time, though a few mentioned they’ve “tried them all” or had tried so many that they could not name them all. Table 3.1 includes basic details collected from the interviews. Ethnoracial identities were not always explicitly identified by participants and were coded as perceived identities. White participants did not mention race as often as non-white, which is consistent with the notion of whiteness being an unmarked category (Chambers, 1996). In Table 3.1, rows

shaded yellow indicate research partners who participated in an initial interview, self-study, and elicitation interview.

3.4.2 Brief Description of Dating Apps

I chose ten apps to study from the apps users were currently using at the time of the first interview or used for the first time during the self-study. (See Figure 3.2.) Of the ten apps, seven target primarily straight users, with options for diverse genders and same-sex matching. Grindr is designed for gay men and has diverse gender options. Her is designed with lesbians in mind and offers diverse gender options, and Taimi promotes itself as the "World's Largest LGBTQ+ Platform," and proclaims to be unique advertising that "We are the first LGBTQ+ platform that offers several services wrapped into one. Taimi is a social network, dating app, and live streaming service." This advertised uniqueness is diminishing as other platforms integrate similar services, some in response to the Covid-19 global pandemic. Each app has unique features and positions in the dating app market. For example, Bumble was designed to empower women and for heterosexual matches, the woman messages first. Hinge is the app "designed to be deleted" privileging finding long-term partners over hookups. Business analysts rank Tinder as the ruler in the US dating app market followed by Bumble (Curry, 2021). Figure 3.3 illustrates the most popular US dating apps by audience size (in millions).

3.4.3 Interface and Interview Analysis

I began my data analysis with an iterative process of reading interview transcripts and watching the screen recordings of dating app enrollments to familiarize myself with the narratives and social scripts of dating app usage. I edited the automatically generated transcripts while listening to the interviews. I took screenshots of key features of apps during my first iteration watching the app screen recordings, which I used in addition to screenshots to capture the experience of enrolling in the dating app service. Aspects of that experience are described in terms of flow, time to complete profile, and interface features such as icons, screen content, access to terms, in-app advertising, and any other features

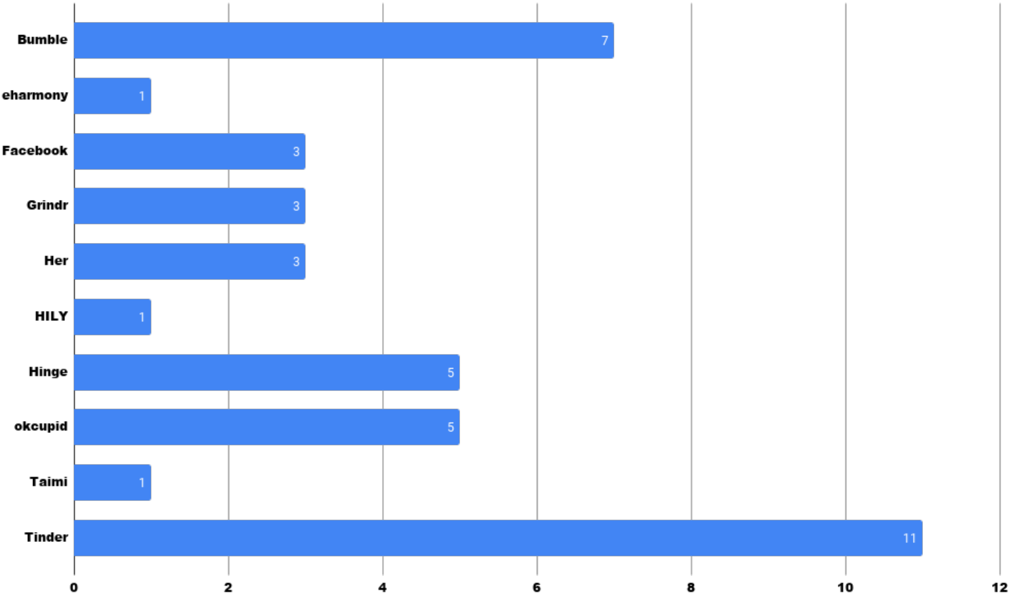


Figure 3.2: Apps Used by Participants

encountered during enrollment. Additionally, I started recording before downloading the app so I could record where the app was positioned in the app store in relation to other apps as well as read and capture some of the reviews. I did not read or analyze all of the reviews and my sampling was dependent on what position the Apple Store determined. I explored one-star reviews as well as five-star reviews and some in-between. This allowed me to include the reviews in my coding and analysis.

On my second iteration, I read the transcripts focusing on mentions of information practices and beliefs related to gender, sexual, and Christian identities, relationship goals, and dating app use. CTDA privileges the perspective of the user, so I focused on gaining insight into the participants' understanding of gender, sexual, and religious identity formation, desired relationships, and experiences with dating apps. I identified key themes grounded in participants' narratives of choosing to identify as a queer Christian and choosing to use dating apps to find a match made in heaven. I identified key emergent themes and then reviewed

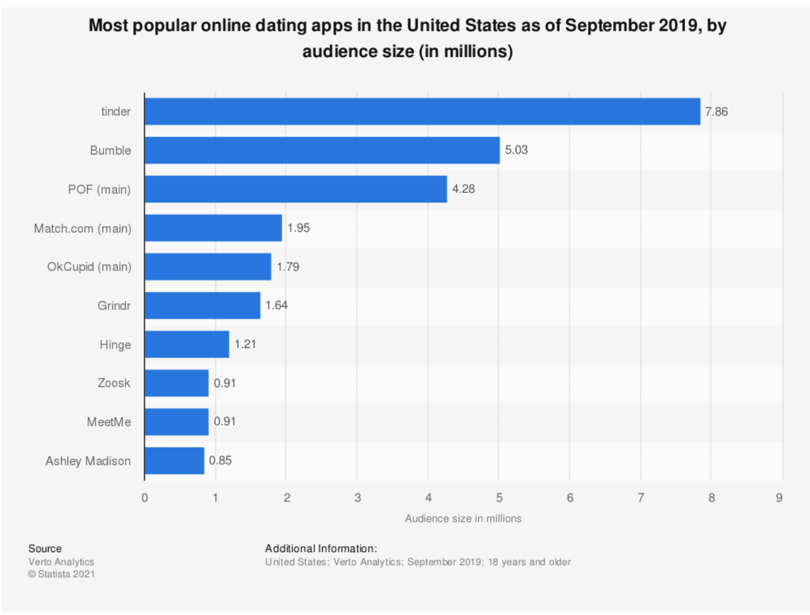


Figure 3.3: Popular Apps Used in US

the coded passages and analyzed them in relation to each other, and in relation to historical, ideological, and cultural contexts to understand power relations at work. Appendix C includes the complete codebook I used to inform my analysis.

3.4.4 Limitations

One limitation to this approach is that it is only a snapshot at the time the study is conducted. Dating apps are constantly undergoing revisions and updates to interfaces, terms of service, and operating models. For example, in my own experience with dating apps, I was excited that okcupid offered so many categories for designating sexuality and gender. One of the options was "sapiosexual," which means finding a person's intellect attractive or arousing. However, sapiosexual is seen by some as ableist and excluding ways of thinking and being that are not defined by dominant standards or intelligence models. One critic said of sapiosexuals, "You're not attracted to intelligence[,] you're repulsed by disability" (Blum, 2016). I found when looking at my profile four years after completing the first of my first online dating

profiles, I found that this description of my sexuality was missing - it was no longer an option and had been removed from my profile.

Another limitation is in abbreviating the walkthrough method to focus on the registration process. I focus on the registration process in order to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of registering for the first time and setting up a profile, as well as to limit the scope of this dissertation. A fuller analysis of marketing materials, ownership, governance, and business models of each app, along with an analysis of everyday use and mechanisms for leaving the apps would provide context for the ways users interact with GSRD on dating apps more broadly.

Limitations to doing interviews involve time and budget constraints, as well as ethical concerns regarding the labor of participants. I conducted interviews remotely using video conferencing. Participants were paid for their labor of participating in a study that required them to prepare materials ahead of time as well as spend time in the interview. Some people in marginalized communities are often called upon to do work explaining things like racism and sexism in everyday conversation and contribute this labor for free. Asking them to contribute their knowledge to this study was compensated using institutional dissertation research funding. Interview participants were recruited using a snowball method inviting participants from the researcher's social networks and LGBTQ+ Christian group affiliations.

Recruitment through snowball sampling depends on interpersonal relationships. One of the participants was a friend of one of my offspring. However, through the use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter, my call for participants was able to reach more people than I anticipated. I take into consideration how my positionality impacted my interactions with data collected from that participant. In using a recruiting strategy that drew participants from my extended network, I recognize that my sample was skewed towards users who are white, educated, open to speaking about GSRD, willing to be recorded, and able to do the work of a self-study. I am aware of those who may have been excluded from this study because of my recruitment techniques, including older people, black people, indigenous people, people of color, and trans people. Additional qualitative and quantitative research

is needed to further the impact of this exploratory study.

My interpretations are limited to the specific context of this research project. However, my aim with this dissertation is to provide empirical insight and grounding for the conceptual frameworks through which scholars attempt to understand queer religious subjects generally, as well as how dating apps categorize and classify them.

3.5 Summary

The methodological toolkit of CTDA I have chosen is complex and challenging, but complex tools are needed to understand complex problems. Gender, sexuality, and subjectivity have long and varied histories with Christian traditions. My own positionality and experiences studying Christian church history and theology inform my analysis, bringing a depth of understanding of the perspectives of participants. In the following chapters, I discuss my findings and the implications of this study more broadly.

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Ethnoracial	Gender	Sexuality	Seeking
Terry	she/her	Japanese/White	CW	Lesbian	Marriage
Sidney	she/her	White	CW	Bi	Undisclosed
Chance	he/him	White	CM	Gay	Marriage
Brook	she/her	White	CW	Bi	Marriage & family
Max	he/him	White	TM	Bi	Marriage
Casey	she/her	Black/White	Womxn	Bi	Marriage & family
Marley	he/him	White	CM	Gay	Marriage
Bailey	he/him	White	CM	Gay	Marriage & family
Kerry	she/her	Filipino/White	Queer	Bi	Co-parent
Ace	he/him	White	CM	Gay	Marriage & family
Angel	she/her	White	CW	Lesbian	Marriage & family
Semira	she/her	Black	CW	Bi	Co-parent
Harper	she/her	White	CW	Lesbian	Marriage & family
Zoe	she/her	Black	QF	Lesbian	Marriage
Kory	they/them	White	NB	Bi	Unknown

Yellow = Research Partner

Legend:

CW=cis woman, CM=cis man, NB=non-binary,

Queer=queer, QF=queer femme, TM=trans man,

Womxn="intersectional, progressive, and inclusive way to recognize that womxn are not an extension of men" (Participant description from Her dating app.)

Bi=bisexual

Seeking=relationship arrangements participants desire

Table 3.1: Participant Details

Chapter 4
DATING APPS: HALLOWED BE THY USERNAME

4.1 Introduction to Dating Apps

To understand impact of dating apps on users and their process of becoming gendered subjects, I conducted a comparative analysis of dating apps using an abbreviation of the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018). I recruited queer Christian participants who had complex relationships with Christianity and were using dating apps. I then had those who agreed to be research partners study themselves as they walked through enrollment and initial profile creation on a dating app. Ultimately, my analysis reveals how dating apps do not allow for queer Christian complexity to be easily visible or searchable. In this chapter, I discuss ways dating platforms categorize users, focusing specifically on gender, sexuality, and religion. I explore a specific case of categorization on Christian dating apps and the significance for queer Christians. This chapter aims to make visible ways dating apps structure knowledge about complex identities in order to understand ways lives and their categories are co-constructed (Bowker and Star, 1999).

Understanding how dating apps shape user experiences of gender requires an understanding of dating app interfaces and their role in shaping what users are able and encouraged to do. Creating categories is a human thing to do with wide ranging consequences. First, app designers develop classification systems and standards that disappear underneath ambient interfaces, making the work they do largely invisible to users. Next, users see the artifact of their user profile, a technical artifact "embodying moral and aesthetic choices that in turn craft people's identities, aspirations, and dignity" (Bowker and Star, 1999, p. 4). Social media platforms and dating apps deploy a variety of user-facing gender category design strategies (see Bivens and Haimson, 2016 for a review of these design strategies). Gender cat-

egorization systems on dating apps are utilized by both users and advertising clients, shaping user experiences of seeing and being seen, along with shaping hidden matching processes and data analyses utilizing gender data. In a sense, technology and gender are co-constructing to reproduce power relations involved in subject formation, especially when it comes to gender and sexual subjectivity (Wajcman, 2010).

How users name and gender themselves are processes of subjectivity. Further, how they do this online has changed since the days of bulletin board services, newsgroups, and AOL (America Online) chat rooms. When the internet primarily facilitated text-based interactions, some people imagined cyberspace as an empowering and freeing place for underrepresented groups. Some online communities for gay people flourished, and finding forbidden and often hidden partners in these online spaces continues to this day. The internet was framed as a place without imposing gender norms, a place where a person could playfully engage in imagining their many selves. However, such freedom has also led to deception and manipulation using fake names and misleading social identity cues (Donath, 1999). Fake dating profiles today include people catfishing schemes and bots seeking to market products or scam people out of money. Sometimes, a person will misrepresent their gender as part of their catfishing scheme, which makes transgression of gender norms appear inauthentic and dangerous (Duguay, 2017). What is true or false about a person's identity online is worth exploring further because these systems can then become more widely used in society. The opportunity to craft ironic identities with absurd usernames persists in some online communities today, but social media sites also regulate and connect "virtual" identities with "real" identities. Our online and offline selves are now more connected than ever. By using dating apps to meet offline, offline bodies have become part of online spaces in order to be recognized and desired. This "writing in" (O'Brien, 1999) of bodies through dating app interfaces has an impact on gender and sexual subjectivity.

4.2 Walkthrough Results: Gender

Early dating websites like Match.com and eharmony offered two genders during registration. Users were asked to select their gender as man/woman and they were not asked about the gender of people they wanted to date, since they'd be matched with the "opposite gender" automatically, thus reinforcing compulsory heterosexuality. Websites like Gaydar.net were exclusively designed as a network for gay men. Today, this website advertises itself with the slogan, "Meet, chat with and date like-minded guys now." Early versions of Grindr advertised, "It's a guy thing," saying the app is the "go-to place for gay, bi, and curious men to meet" and did not include a gender category, assuming all users were men seeking men. Dattch, which has re-branded itself as Her, was "built for women, by women," and likewise assumed all users were women seeking women.

But times have changed, and so have dating apps. Not only are there more gender categories to choose from, but dating apps offer categories for sexuality, race, class, religion, along with physical attributes like height, weight, or fitness. Some of these are optional, some are required. All of them help users build their profiles—a visible representation of their identity for others to see when seeking a person to date. Users see and interact with their profiles to one degree or another, depending on the design of the app and the time commitment of the user. Increasingly, some profile elements are also linked to other mainstream social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Spotify, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Underneath the visible attributes of a dating profile, categories also perform work that is largely invisible to users and encoded in proprietary, patented, even Nobel-prize winning matching algorithms (Hinge). Although many gender options may be offered on dating apps, for people who identify with binary terms of man or woman, they are not required to deviate from the shortest path to seeing potential matches. For those who deviate, they are required to search a longer list or type in the terms they use for gender. The number of gender options offered on the dating apps I studied ranged from two options (the gender binary of man/woman) to 75 options. Figure 4.1 shows the number of gender options on each app studied. Among the 75

options on Bumble, there were options that were similar to one another, many reflecting "an ever-evolving list of trans-ing identities" (Enke, 2012, KL 93) including "Trans Female and Trans*Female." Bumble's gender options are expansive, however, the way they function in the interface belies assumptions the designers and programmers have about gender.

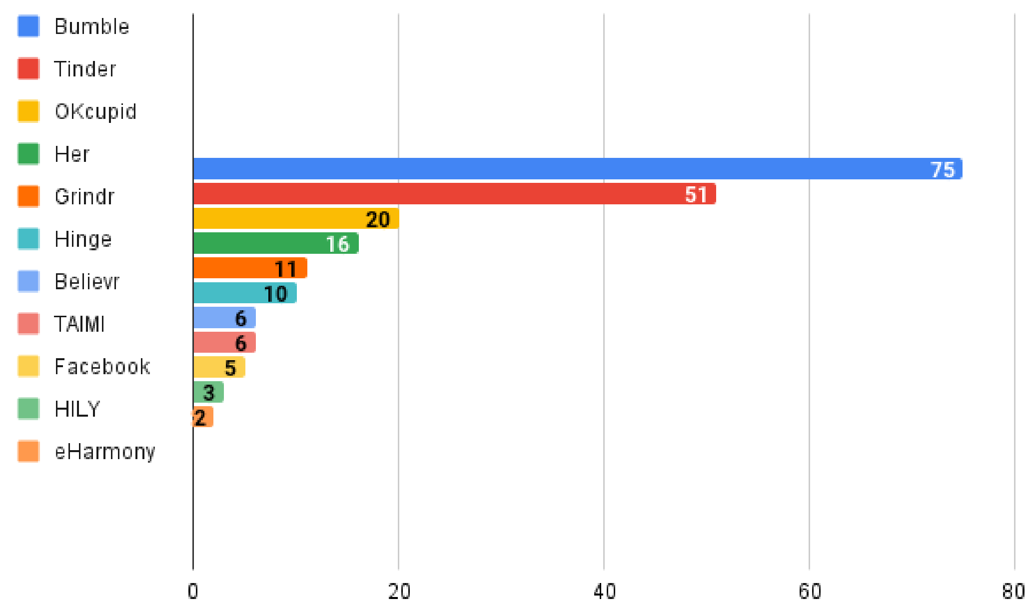


Figure 4.1: Gender Categories by App

On Bumble, after users specify their name, add their first profile photo, and specify their age, they are asked: "How do you identify?" This prompt is followed by the tagline "Everyone's welcome on Bumble!" Options available on Bumble's main gender screen are ordered radio buttons labeled *Woman*, *Man*, and *Non-binary*. Radio buttons function to allow users to select one and only one option among mutually exclusive choices. Below the labeled radio buttons, users can access a menu for "More gender options" which opens up a search entry field, keyboard for text entry, and the first six options on what appears to be an alphabetized list. Users can scroll through the list or search a specific label. Cis and Cisgender are on the list in alphabetical order, however, additional cisgender options appear

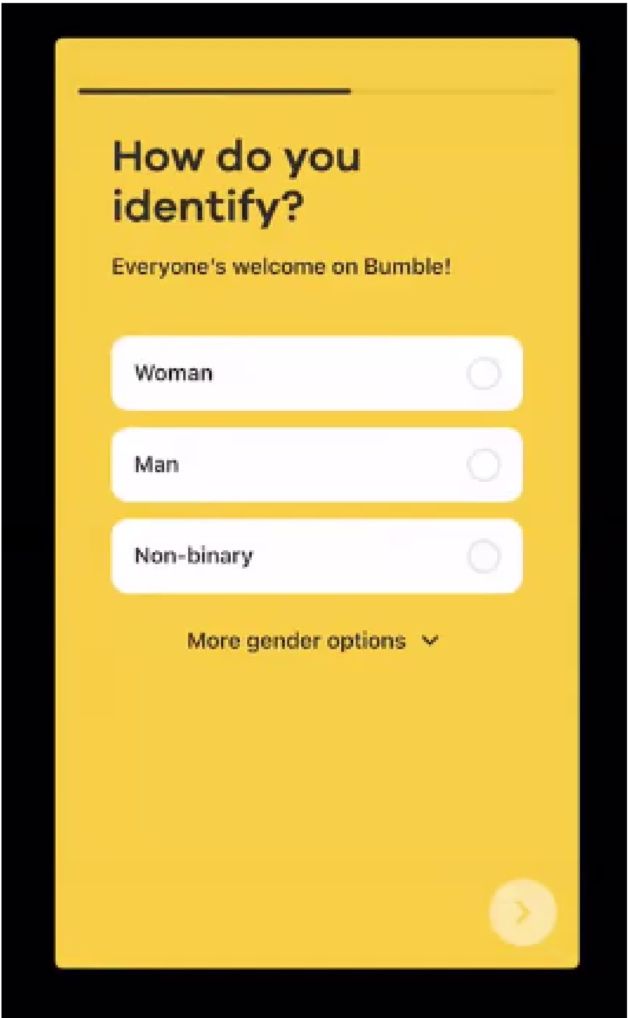


Figure 4.2: Bumble's Trinity

at the end of the list. Non-binary is included in the alphabetized list, and the other two options from the main gender screen, Woman and Man, are located near the end of the list. The very last option allows users to "Suggest another option" which opens up a dialog box for users to submit their preferred term for future consideration. See Figure 4.3 for an illustration of the input interface and Appendix A for a list of all the gender terms on Bumble.

Bumble's technological arrangements of gender categories places the gender binary as

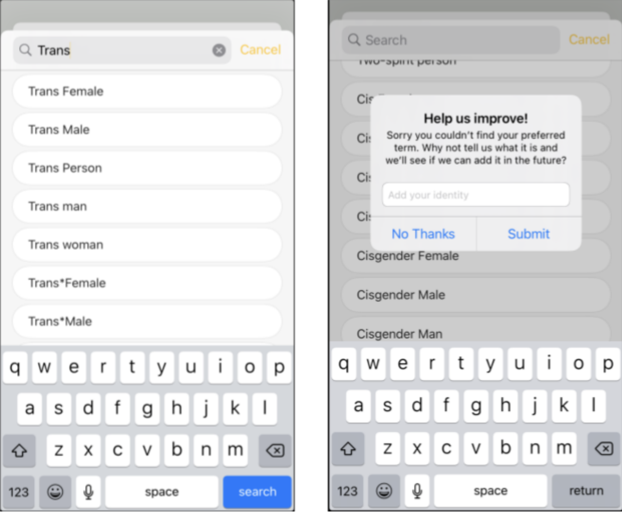


Figure 4.3: Bumble's Expansive Gender Terms

a primary social arrangement for gender. By offering Non-binary as a primary category, Bumble limits which non-normative genders are available, making Non-binary appear more normal than options not mentioned. This addition of just one non-normative option and arranging "other" options away from the main gender screen invisibilizes them (Keyes et al., 2021). Further, options that only appear away from the main gender screen require users to deviate from the straight path offered in the flow of creating a user profile. I argue that Bumble's developers consider gender as already known to its users, as stable, and attached to a specific label. By expanding gender options beyond the gender binary, they position themselves as welcoming of everyone, however, this arrangement does not welcome those who identify with multiple options on their list, or who might change their gender identifications frequently. When users attempt to change their gender on the app, they are presented with a warning (see Figure 4.4), stigmatizing those who are in the process of figuring out what terms they use. Bumble's regulation of gender options requires users to first know their gender identity before choosing to date and limits any trans-ing of gender to a one-time event, reinforcing a sense of gender being a stable category and gender transition as a move from one stable category to another. For Bumble users, the truth about gender categories is

that even though Bumble is inclusive of a diversity of gender identity categories, each one is mutually exclusive with another and users may only occupy one gender category at a time.

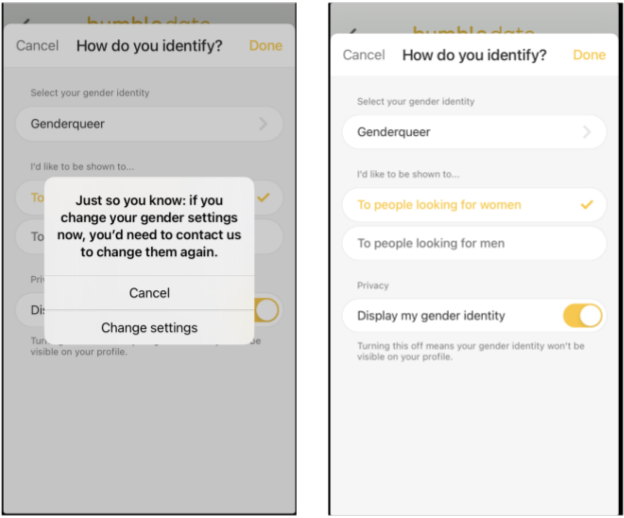


Figure 4.4: Warning: Gender Change is Regulated

Even for dating apps designed for LGBTQ+ populations like Grindr, Her, and Taimi, gender is a prominent identity feature. Her does not require users to designate gender or sexuality but does offer structured profile elements that users could choose to complete if they wanted. Her organizes gender, sexuality, and pronouns under the profile section titled "Identity," which is the first main profile section after profile photos. Grindr offers gender and pronouns in their "Identity" section below "Stats" and "Expectations," just above a section for sexual health. Taimi includes gender and preferred pronouns as part of a basic info section of user profiles. Interfaces that privilege gender as a main identity category incite users to *know* the truth about their gender **and** incorporate that knowledge into their identity. Not all of the dating apps studied present gender as a stable, fixed, and mutually exclusive identity category. Her and okcupid both allow users to select multiple options from their list of genders and they do not regulate changes. Her does not ask for matching preferences based on gender and instead offers gender, sexuality, and pronouns as premium

filters. On okcupid, even though the user may choose multiple options to show on their profile, gender and sexuality diversities are forced back into binaries through two prompts:

1. I'm interested in (blue text below prompt) pick one (options) Men, Women, Everyone

2. Include me in searches for (blue text below prompt) pick one (options) Men, Women

Facebook does a similar kind of transformations of gender on their social network (Bivens, 2017), but it is not done explicitly or with consent from the user. Rather, gender beyond the binary is transformed into binary categories beneath the surface of the interface, which is inaccessible to users. On apps that were initially designed for heterosexual matchmaking based on matching people of the "opposite gender," adding lesbian and gay matchmaking options is a somewhat simple fix. However, adding multiple genders beyond the gender binary requires deeper changes to entrenched infrastructure likely built into dating apps. The primacy of sorting humans into the sex binary of male and female remains an embedded infrastructural feature that challenges dating app developers as they add more gender options and then need to figure how to sort and match them. In other words, how do dating apps ascertain the sexuality of users? In the next section I discuss how sexuality is understood as intimately linked to gender.

4.3 Walkthrough Results: Sexuality

In this section, I discuss sexuality options on dating platforms, the ways they are configured, and how they promote certain ways being oriented in the world. As gender categories have changed with the times, so have assumptions apps make about sexuality and the ways those assumptions are encoded into the interfaces. When Grindr was first designed as a dating app for gay men, gender and sexuality fields were not included. It was implied that if you were on Grindr, you were a cis man seeking sex with other cis men (Birnholtz et al., 2014). Before the internet, gay men signaled in various ways that they were interested in having sex with other men, but this hidden truth had to be revealed to others (Mowlabocus, 2016).

Participants who had used Grindr noted this phenomenon and had used the dating app as a kind of "gaydar" to find potential dates in their current location (see Mowlabocus, 2016, for a detailed discussion of gaydar). Both Grindr and Tinder depend on geolocation technology, as they locate prospective partners in some proximity to users' physical locations. Grindr came first in 2009 with Tinder following in 2012, but their designs are quite different. Grindr presents a grid of active users, listed in order of how close they are to you in space. Bailey uses Grindr when he is in a social setting where he notices an attractive person and wants to know if they are gay before approaching them. He would login to Grindr, and if the person he was interested in was on Grindr, he would seek them out. In some cities, the nearest person on Grindr may be just feet away. Anywhere else, Grindr might present a grid of people who are miles and miles away.

Before Grindr offered gender identity and pronoun options, they offered "tribes." *The Advocate,* a premiere LGBTQ+ publication since 1967, published a humorous article describing gay culture at the time (Mazzei, 1979). In 1979, *The Advocate* published "A Glossary of Gay Animals" that described gay people according to type. (Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 showcase examples from Mazzei's 1979 article.) Classifying gay men according to animal names is not the most humanizing thing, however, in the late seventies it was welcomed satire. From this glossary, Bears are one of the group descriptors that persists. Even though not all of the "gay animals" in Mazzei's glossary have survived the test of time, the tendency of humans to classify and categorize other humans into recognizable groups has survived, and user profiles are taking it to a whole new level.

Grindr offers some of the groups described in Mazzei's glossary, in addition to a few more that may need a glossary of their own. The "tribes" on Grindr reflect gender and sexual diversity, and some options are related to the groups involved. [1] Grindr's groups, introduced in 2014, are optional in profiles, just like many of the other profile options. To use

[1] It is critical to note that any further use of this term in this dissertation reflects Grindr's branding as the label "tribes" is appropriative of Indigenous cultures and customs. Any further use will be balanced with the more general term "groups."

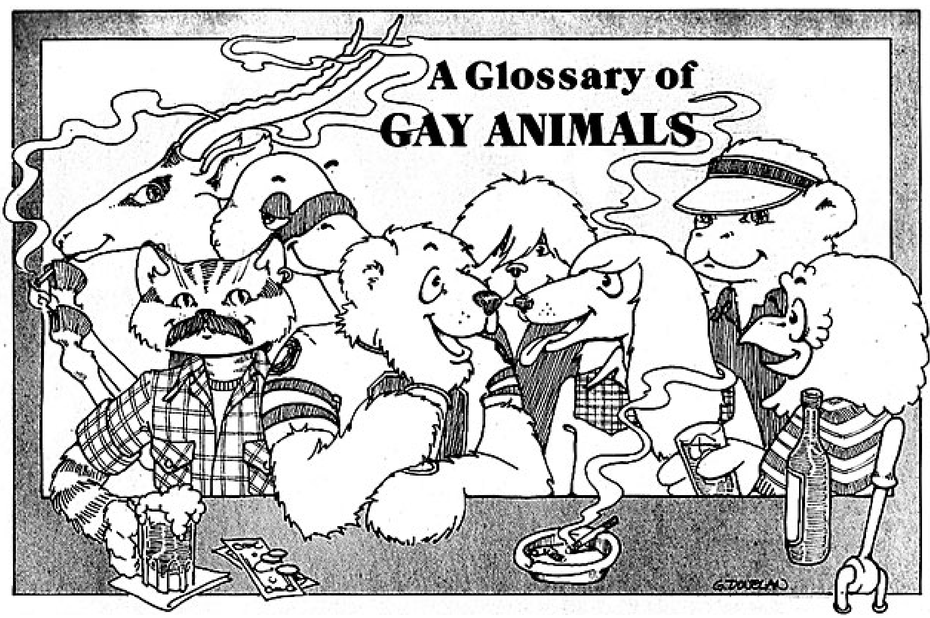


Figure 4.5: Glossary of Gay Animals, circa 1979

Grindr, at minimum, you need to have a mobile device. Users can sign up for Grindr without much more. Grindr still buys into the tech-utopia dream of usernames shielding participants from revealing their true selves. However, policing of gender as well as racist, xenophobic, and body-shaming behaviors have been widely documented on Grindr (Shield, 2018; 2019). Grindr responded to the growing complaints about racism, xenophobia, and body-shaming with a "Kindr Grindr" campaign. Grindr has since pivoted to be more inclusive of all kinds of queer people. When I signed up on Grindr to do my walkthrough, I chose Queer as my gender and Trans as one of my three groups. It is unclear whether tribes are filters for who you see or who sees you or both. However, for these groups to function, they are dependent on users actually using them. See Figure 4.8 for an illustration of Grindr's groups and gender options.

Grindr does have gender categories for women; however, as I searched extant materials online regarding Grindr's addition of gender options, including r/lolgrindr, a reddit poster argued that trans women have "always been a fixture of gay online dating." Grindr's list

BEARS

BEARS ARE USUALLY hunky, chunky types reminiscent of railroad engineers and former football greats. They have larger chests and bellies than average, and notably muscular legs. Some Italian-American Bears, however, are leaner and smaller; it's attitude that makes a Bear.

General Characteristics: Hair. Their tangled beards often present no discernible place to insert a comb. Laughter. Bears laugh a lot and are generally good natured. They make wonderful companions since they are prone to reach for the check, buy the next round and keep abreast of when the Trockadero is dancing this season. Their good humor can turn threatening if you attempt to cruise their trick and you will hear about it for weeks afterward.

What They Eat: Beer is their favorite food. When they stay out past their hibernation time on weeknights, their lower Bear nature takes over and they drink more Scotch and water than is good for them. Then they will often perform hilariously, trying to dance in time to the disco beat, providing amusement for all around.

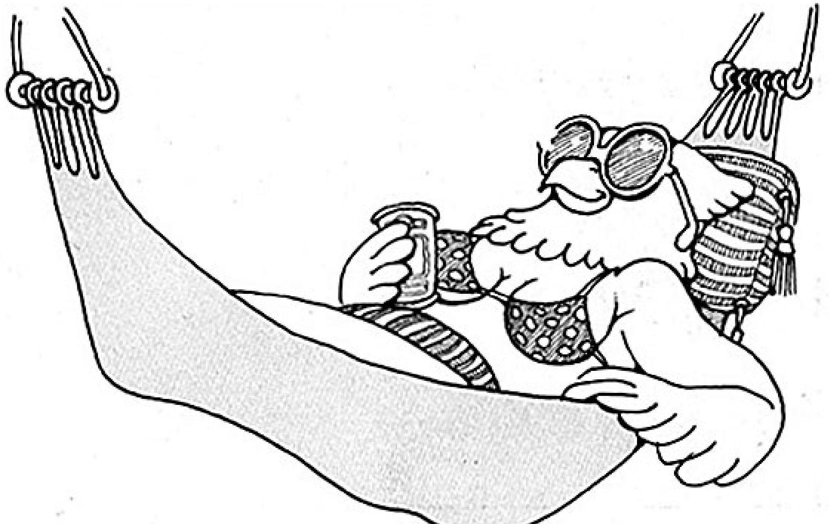
Mating Peculiarities: Before asking you home, Bears ascertain that you will stay and cuddle all night even if nothing else happens. They may wear full leather at all times, but Bears are usually not kinky. They are fascinated by nipples—others' as well as their own—and spend hours playing with them. Bears always have lovers to whom they are loyal, even though they don't sleep together much anymore.

Natural Habitat: Bears are fascinated by motorcycle runs—possibly because it provides an excuse to keep a can of beer in their paws at all times. Although titillated by the motorcycle mystique, they prefer to let other woodland creatures ride in competitions. And as for fixing a disabled bike, they wouldn't know a clutch cable from a zippered pocket.

Domestic Rating: Bears are wonderful around the house since they don't need much exercise to keep their distinctive shape and are extremely loving, loyal and dependable. The most affable of pets, they do require constant reassurance and, like some large dogs, tend to shed on the furniture.

Figure 4.6: Bear, circa 1979

begins with three options for men followed by a custom option. Two other main category headings appear below in all caps, "WOMAN," and "NON-BINARY." The options for each main category follow a pattern, including offering custom "write in" options. The positioning



OWLS

OWLS ARE OLDER gay animals. Though sarcastic at times, they love everyone and everyone loves them. They are the survivors of the Fabulous Fifties when gays were being hounded to death, yet they never stopped laughing or camping it up. They've earned their stripes; it's just unfortunate that thay insist on wearing them with plaids. Male Owls are mostly engaged in keeping Camp alive. They never use the pronouns "he," "him" or "his" unless referring to a close dyke friend. Female Owls retire from business at an early age to live at the beach, where they sell Early American antiques.

General Characteristics: They are usually—shall we say—round in shape. They wear outlandish clothes and jewelry. Their pants are too tight; their bikinis microscopic. Male Owls leave their shirts open to the navel and fill the exposed area with much tangled gold chain. The females often buy smart outfits at Bloomingdale's, but always show up in sweatshirts and blue nylon windbreakers.

What They Eat: Usually something that's been ruined because everyone got so drunk they forgot to watch dinner. And diet pills.

Mating Peculiarities: The male Owl has a lover of 25 years who is both business partner and sister. He also has some astounding Ethnic who comes by periodically for a tryst, while the lover watches, hidden in the closet. Female Owls tend to be less promiscuous, but are known to fight viciously over who burned the croutons.

Natural Habitat: Bar stools. Beach houses. Owls exhibit a preference for overstated decor. Males choose black-velvet-on-gold wallpaper for the stairway; females upholster everything in vibrant blue and red plastic—then photograph it.

Domestic Rating: Very high. They love the nest and keep the bar well-stocked.

Figure 4.7: Owl, circa 1979

of the categories of *Man*, *Cis Man*, and *Trans Man* at the top of the list without a capitalized main-category heading signals that men are the ideal and primary users of the app. These options raise questions about what it means to be gay. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines sexual orientation as "one's enduring sexual attraction to male partners, female partners, or both. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, same sex (gay

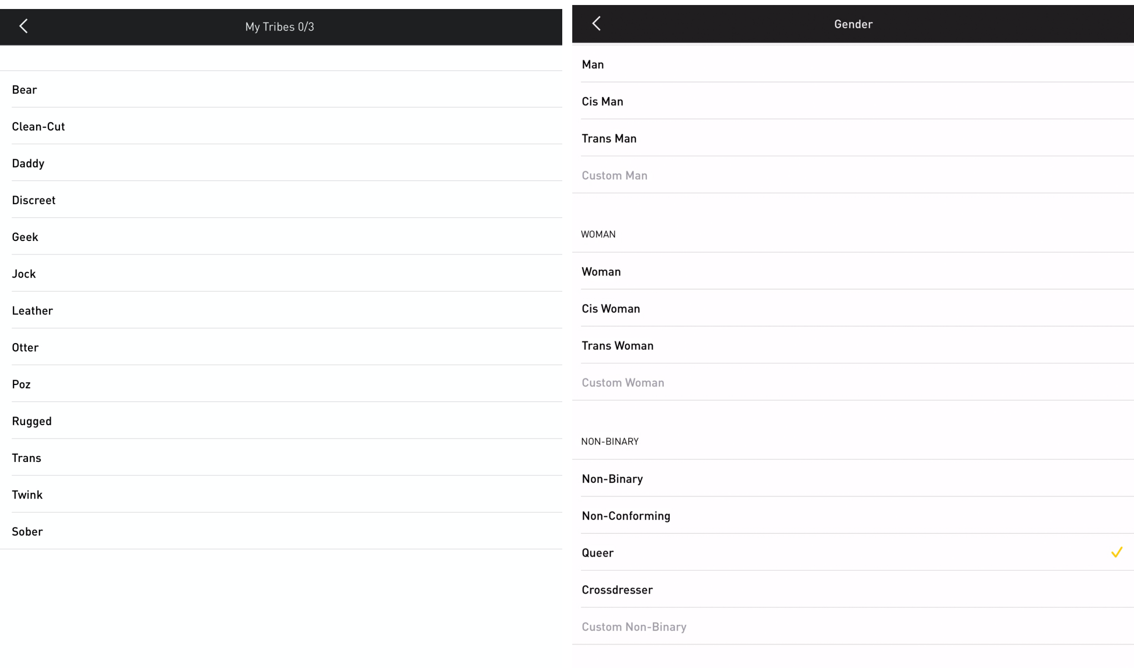


Figure 4.8: Grindr Tribes and Gender

or lesbian), or bisexual" (VandenBos and American Psychological Association, 2015). However, current psychological research theorizes that sexual orientation does not fit neatly into discrete categories and may be more fluid than the enduring attraction definition suggests (Diamond and Butterworth, 2008).

On Tinder, most users are heterosexual; however, some are seeking other arrangements. Tinder works by displaying photos of nearby users, which can be clicked to reveal a more detailed profile. Tinder differs from Grindr in that instead of a grid of nearby users, it presents potential dates one by one requiring an evaluative judgment made before seeing the next potential date. Judging whether a user is "hot or not" is the metaphorical meaning invoked by the naming of Tinder, seen as well in the app's logo of a flame. Playing into the stereotype of men being more attracted to looks, paired with the gamification of hooking up, Tinder's creators set the precedent of "swiping" as a popular and less-involved way to find potential partners than web-based dating sites that require users to complete lengthy

questionnaires, create detailed profiles, and browse other detailed profiles to find dates.

Taimi only offers a few descriptions of sexuality in a group of descriptive "I am..." statements that are optional and range from "Cat person" to "Sarcastic" and from "Asexual" to "Queer." Lesbian and Gay are not on any of the lists in Taimi. As the "World's largest LGBTQ+ platform," users can signal that they have exclusively same-gender attraction by identifying with one of the six gender options, and then selecting that same option in the "Looking for" section. However, Taimi does not limit users to gay or straight as users can include/exclude any of the six categories offered. When a user selects among the gender options to describe who they are, they can only select one (radio-button style) and when they specify who they are looking for, they can select multiple (checkbox style) options. In this way, Taimi presents sexuality as multivalent in that a person may have desires across multiple genders. Yet gender identity is still assumed to be somewhat stable and containable by one of their six categories. See Figure 4.9.

4.4 Walkthrough Results: Religion and Christian Dating Apps

Religious classification systems emerged in white, western, colonial contexts and often carry discriminatory values and violent histories (Said, 1978/2003). Multiculturalism and religious pluralism pose challenges for traditions that are exclusionary in their beliefs, doctrines, and practices. Multiculturalism and religious pluralism also pose challenges for dating apps, unless they avoid setting up religion as a structured profile element altogether. Apps that offer detailed profiles and extensive questionnaires often invite users to include their religious beliefs or identities. Apps designed for quick and easy set-up and access to potential dates *right now* did not offer religion categories. Of the apps that offered users the option to identify their religious beliefs or religious affiliation, most included Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, along with atheist, agnostic, spiritual, other, and prefer not to say. See Figure 4.10 for a breakdown of how many religious categories each app offers.

The most inclusive list of not-so-major world religions is on eharmony, however, the first item on their list is Christianity, demonstrating that Christian users are their ideal users.

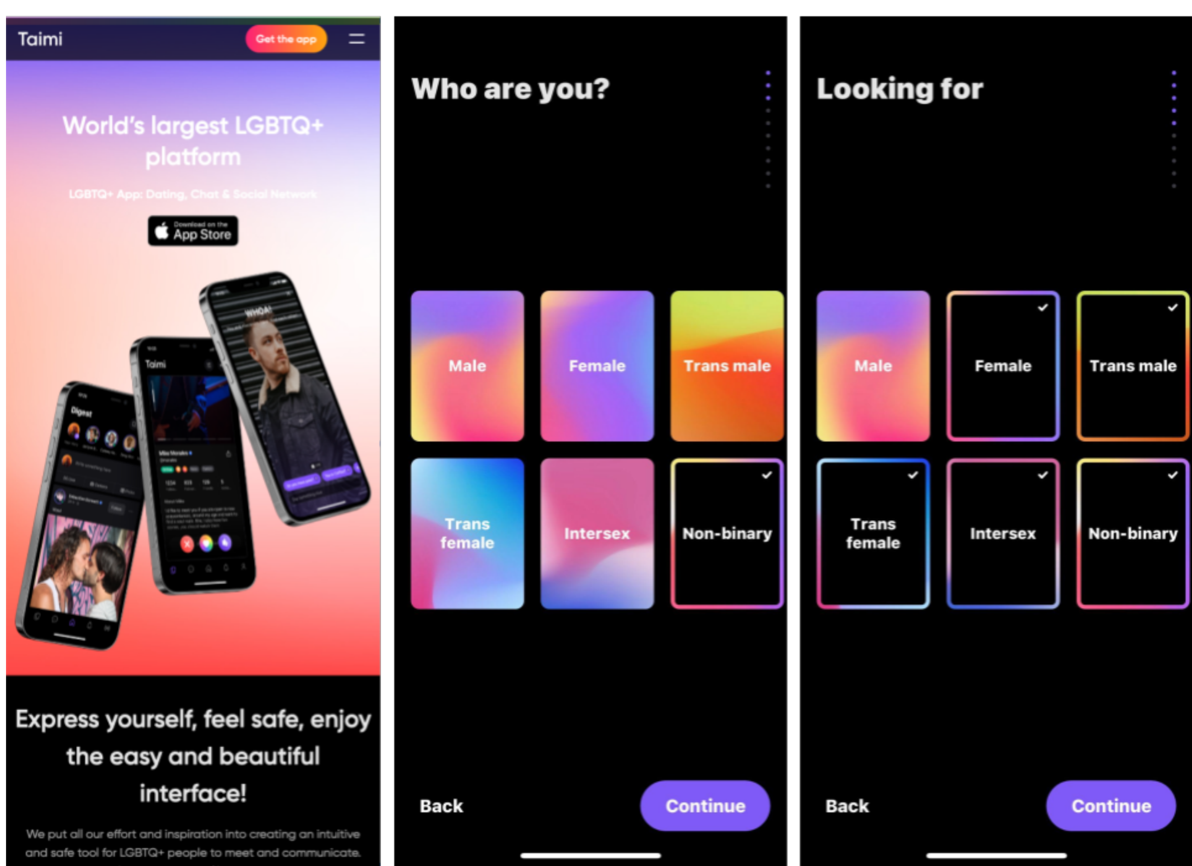


Figure 4.9: Taimi Sexuality

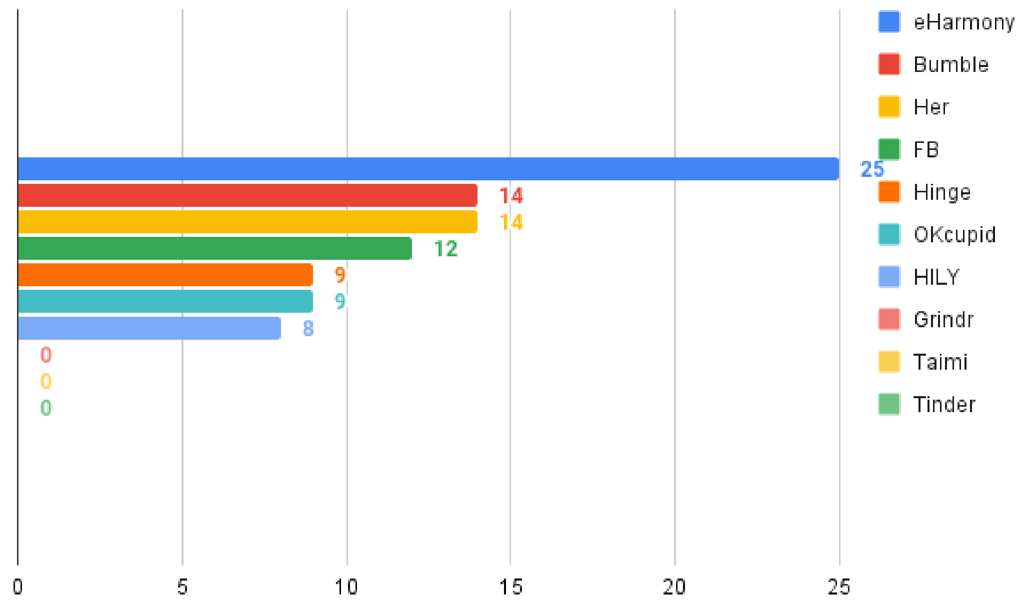


Figure 4.10: Religion Categories by App

Even though eharmony was built on Christian values and offers a fuller list of religious options, they do not offer distinctions within Christianity. Appendix B lists all the different categories across the platforms studied. Prompts for religious identity selections included,

- What's your religion?
- What are your religious beliefs?
- Your Religious Views

When I conducted my technical walkthrough of Bumble, they only offered twelve options for religion, five major religions (Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim), three medium-sized religious groups (Jain, Sikh, Zoroastrian), three unaffiliated categories (Agnostic, Atheist, Spiritual) and the obligatory "other." When I checked the app a few weeks later, I noticed two new additions: Catholic and Mormon. Conservative evangelicals, espe-

cially those who consider themselves "born again," do not consider Catholics and Mormons as Christians. "Born again" Christians believe that a person must convert to Christianity and that people are not born into Christianity. Christian denominations as well as unaffiliated congregations have varied doctrines and beliefs regarding the nature of salvation, grace, forgiveness, and inclusion into God's family. Many are exclusionary of any other Christian group that does not meet their minimum requirements for "being" a Christian.

Participants in this study discussed their Christian views, especially in relation to gender, sexuality, and relationship diversity, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5. Classification systems have been developed by theologians and academics, and as with many subjective experiences rendered as identity, religious identity is both a vernacular and analytic concept (Valentine, 2014). On the dating apps that offer preset religion options, two offer religion as a free basic filter. They also allow users to set it as a deal breaker, which is a match criteria that must be met in order to be matched. As for Bumble's recent additions of Catholic and Mormon menu options, we may never know the reasons behind the change; however, users noticed and posted about it on r/bumble. Figure 4.11 illustrates an exchange that gives insight into how dating apps create and control categories that impact the ways users are seen on the app. Users experience religion categories in vernacular terms and they expect religion to help match them with other users.

For my research partners, they cited being Christian as an important identity that they wanted to be able to both present to others and to find in others. At the intersection of GSRD and Christianity, research partners are in a very thin dating market. In order to see and be seen for the complexity of their queer Christian identities, research partners developed techniques to present this complexity to potential dates as well as strategies for filtering when filtering is available. I was not surprised to find that only a few of the participants had used a Christian dating app. Some of them had heard that eharmony was popular among Christians, however, none of them had heard of Compatible Partners, eharmony's same-sex matching app that was merged with eharmony.

In my technical walkthrough of the registration process for eharmony, I was offered icons

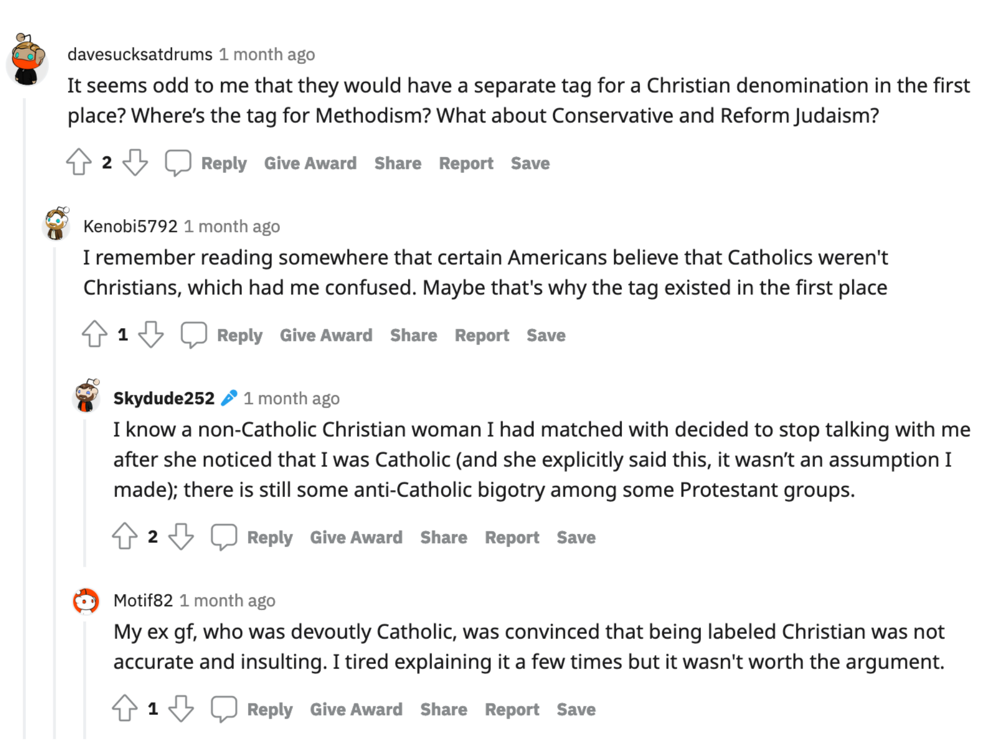


Figure 4.11: Are Catholics Christians?

of (normatively white) gendered people to indicate who I am and who I am seeking. See Figure 4.12. eharmony's positioning of normatively gendered icons as the first thing signals that gender identity is a fundamental and essential aspect of a person. It's the first thing the app needs to know about users in order to match them. The icons are mutually exclusive and the user must select exactly one choice. Since Compatible Partners was incorporated into eharmony, a user can select either gender option, but prior to the merging of the two apps, if a user tried to select same-sex matching on eharmony, they were directed to Compatible Partners and vice versa. Figure 4.13 illustrates Compatible Partners' redirect screen.

I set up my walkthrough on eharmony as a man seeking a man. On other apps, I can open my profile and look at the gender information I entered when I signed up. I have also been able to change my gender options on some of the apps to see how I might experience it

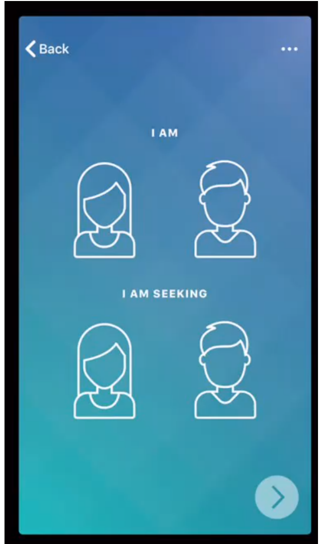


Figure 4.12: eHarmony registration start screen

differently as a genderqueer person seen as a man vs. seen as a woman. This ability to view and change was not an option on eharmony, so in order to check how I signed up, I reviewed the recording of the walkthrough. The only way for me to change my gender identity or gender of the person I am seeking would be to delete the app and start over. This technical arrangement assumes a stable gender identity and a stable sexual desire.

A Christian view that God's intent for a person is based on how God created them informs many doctrines arguing for LGBTQ+ inclusion in churches. In order to overcome anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments based on the unnaturalness of homosexuality (Hopkins, 2012), some queer Christians employ scientific arguments for the innateness, indeed "naturalness," of homosexual orientation. However, this idea of bodies having a natural and unchangeable orientation is questionable and "exposed as fantasy in the necessity of the enforcement of that orientation, or its maintenance as a social requirement for intelligible subjectivity" (Ahmed, 2006). With the incorporation of Compatible Partners into what Ahmed might call the "straightening device" of eharmony, homosexuality appears intelligible and the queerness of changing genders or changing desires is erased. Through hiding user orientations from the

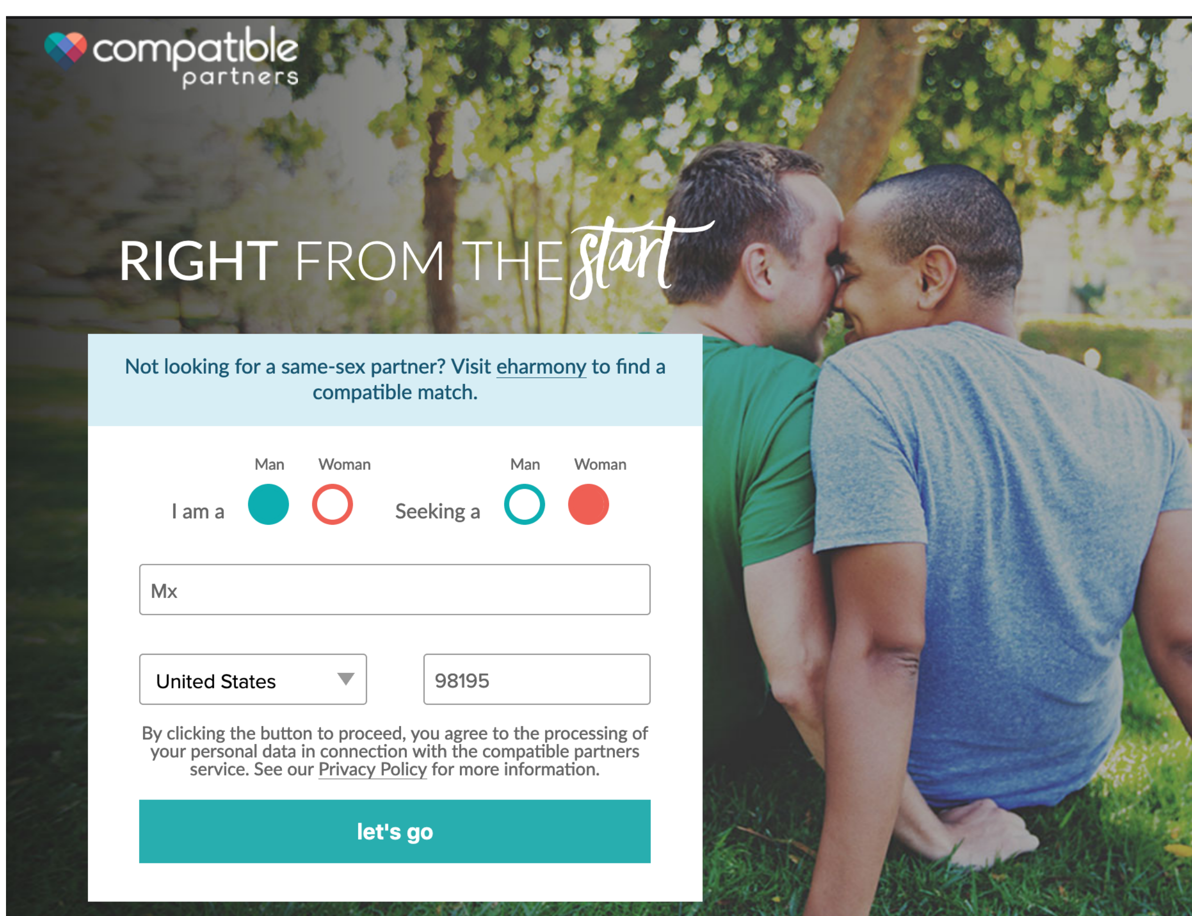


Figure 4.13: Compatible Partner's Redirect Screen

possibility of change, eharmony requires users to tend towards one gender or another but never both and those tendencies are unchangeable.

Building on the gender binary, eharmony includes a gender roles aspect to their personality profiles, which incorporates the idea that each person can have both feminine and masculine elements to their personality. This feature is likely derived from complementarian notions of partnerships. Christian complementarianism promotes biblical manhood as inherently and essentially different from biblical womanhood, where men are created to be leaders and protectors, and women are created to submit to, affirm, and strengthen men. Gender roles, even when presented as "feminine sides" and "masculine sides," reinforce the gender binary as being necessary for compatibility with another human, regardless of the gender they put at sign-on. When applied to same gender matches, eharmony's match scoring along the lines of feminine and masculine traits configures same-sex desires along "straight" lines. Strong complementarianism also shows up in queer relationship discourses about which partner is the "man" and which one is the "woman"—or who is top and who is bottom, who is active and who is passive—in same-sex relationships. eharmony's initial intake questionnaire asks about this specifically, and it is likely used as a proxy to calculate scores for gender role compatibility. I did not test whether this question is posed for matching between men and women, but I did encounter this question on both eharmony and compatible partners.

At the time of the first interview, none of the participants were using eharmony and only two had tried either eharmony or Christian Mingle. I did not include Christian Mingle in my initial walkthroughs and background research; however, one of the last research partners decided to try it for their self-study, so I conducted an abbreviated technical walkthrough to understand what she was describing. Christian Mingle is rooted in the idea of finding a soul mate to marry. They offer more options for religious identification, allowing users to filter by Christian denominations. Couples of color and same-sex couples are noticeably absent from Christian Mingle's marketing materials. The absence of couples of color and same-sex couples collapses whiteness with straightness. Following Ahmed's conceptualization of whiteness as a straight line "against which others appear only as deviants or as lines of deviation"

(2006, p. 97), Christian Mingle also marries whiteness with Christianity, thus erasing Black, Indigenous, and other users of color. If a queer Christian of color encounters the app in an app store or through the website, they may think that people like them will not be reachable on the app. A queer Black Christian would be seen as doubly deviant, reinforcing notions of technology being designed not only *by* but *for* white, Christian, heterosexual men (Brock, 2018). The actors featured on the web sign-up page are predominantly young, white, and heterosexual, demonstrating their target audiences are not older, gender-variant, homosexual, or people of color. Class status is also on display as the actors are well-dressed and generally engaged in leisure activities. Fat bodies and disabled bodies are also absent from both Tinder and Christian Mingle advertising, as is true of the promotional materials for all of the apps in this study. This kind of marketing of dating apps has been consistent among widely popular apps, including Tinder (Duguay, 2017).

4.5 Walkthrough Results: Privacy and Discrimination

Early cyberspace scholars talked about disembodied possibilities of the internet, which may still be possible in some domains. However, in dating apps, bodies are not only "written in" (O'Brien, 1999), what is written about them is projected out to a specific space and time. Geolocation data and "online now" indicators give users access to information about where a desired body is/was and when they were last online. The first few choices dating app users are faced with are all about orienting embodied desires towards (or away from) other bodies. As Wilchins ponders, "what does gender identification mean if it doesn't tell us about a person's body, gender expression, and sexual orientation?" (2014, p. 142).

One desire that a few participants expressed was to not see or be seen by straight people, especially straight conservative Christians. In my technical walkthrough of okcupid, I found an *LGBT+ Privacy* feature that users can enable in three prominent places. See Figure 4.14.

okcupid's *LGBT+ Privacy* allows users to both hide their profiles from straight users and prevent straight users from appearing in their feed. If we reverse a common catchphrase, "it's not a bug, it's a feature," we get, "it's not a feature, it's a bug." What seems a feature to

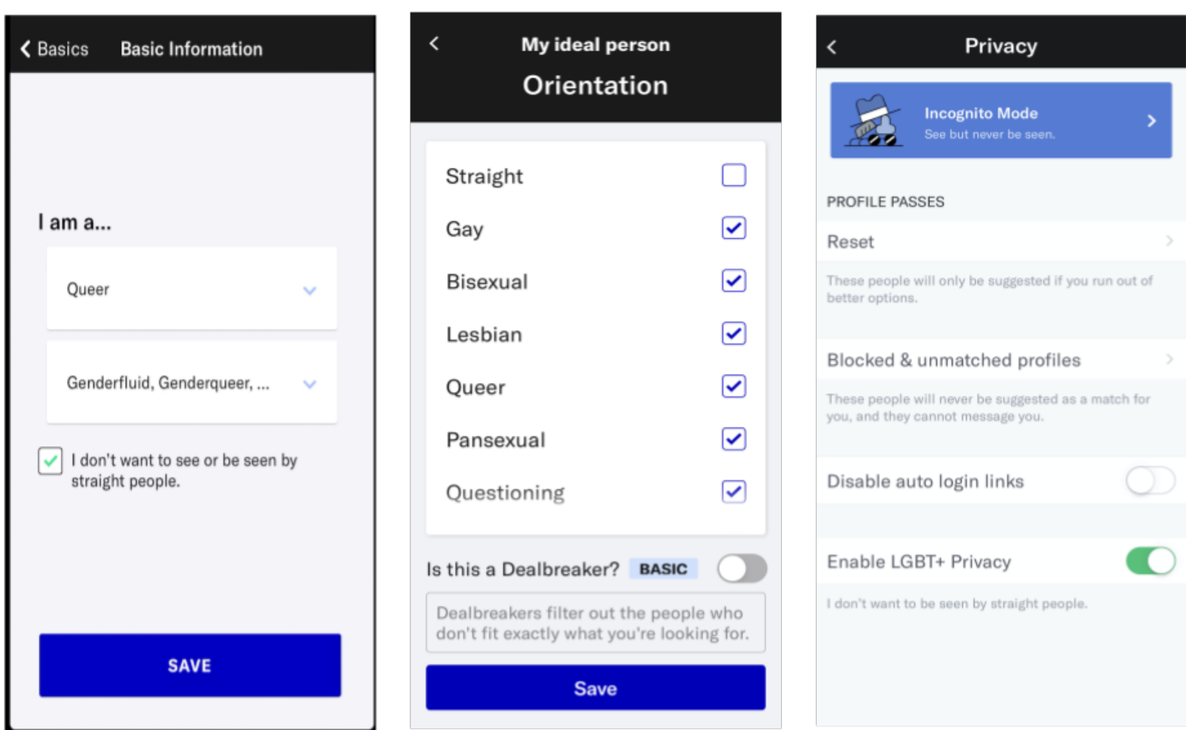


Figure 4.14: okcupid Straight Feature

those of us who do not want to be seen by straight people could be reconfigured to be a tool for straight people who want to be trans-exclusionary. okcupid does not offer a "straight privacy feature," but Taimi's gender options could be used in this way as can Facebook dating. The one-to-one correspondence of gender options gives LGBTQ+ users on Taimi the freedom to skip explicit sexuality/orientation questions and instead implies more specific orientations along queer lines. However, in what ways might queer sexuality options be used on mainstream apps like Facebook to reproduce discriminatory practices and essentialist beliefs about gender and sexuality?

Discrimination of all sorts is still a problem on Grindr. One example came up on r/lolgrindr, one of the reddit groups I joined in my search for background information on gender-related changes on dating apps. A woman posted looking for a hookup and the reddit poster said they knew it was a bot, but "wrong app bbygurl" was the title of their post. Redditors discussed policing gender and sexuality in gay spaces both on Grindr and in gay bars. (See Figures 4.15 and 4.16.) When dating apps offer solutions, they often reinforce the power of binary structures and merely serve as respectability features that promote a sense of inclusion and diversity without actually enacting change to systems of oppression and exclusion.

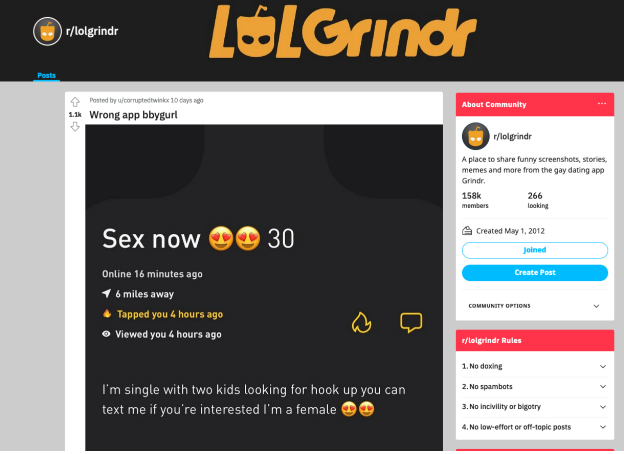


Figure 4.15: Wrong app bbygurl

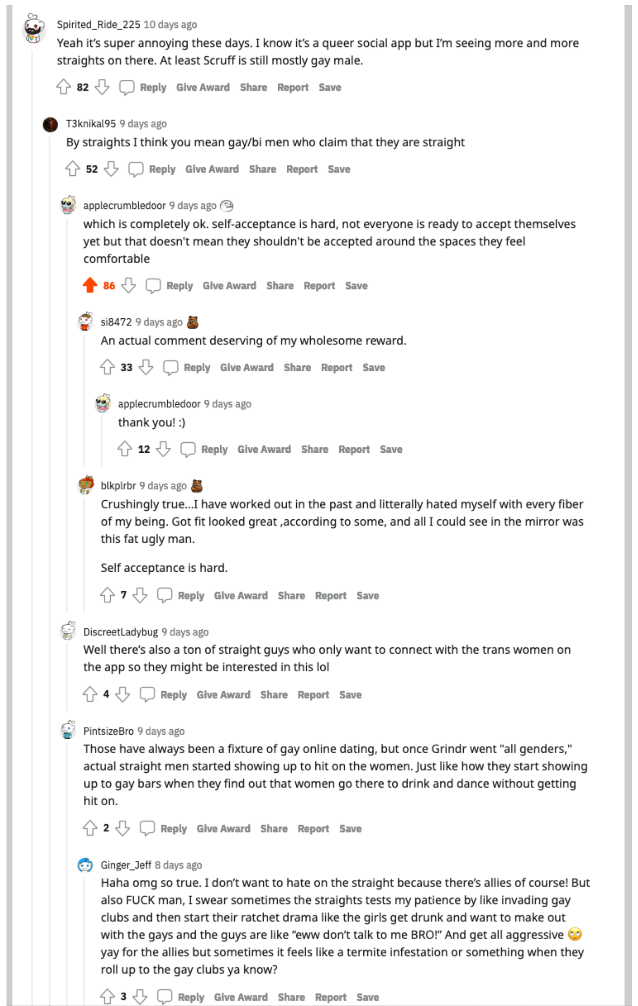


Figure 4.16: Straights on Grindr

Tinder hasn't always worked so well for queer or trans women. Trans Tinder users reported being banned before Tinder implemented their expanded gender categorization options, and many wondered if the app itself had a transphobia problem. Reports of trans women being harassed, targeted for exclusion, and ultimately banned (Barr, 2017; Vincent, 2016) circulated on the internet, along with news of lesbians having to swipe through stacks of straight men for no apparent reason (O'Hara, 2019). In response, Tinder first expanded their input fields for gender identification to be more inclusive of transgender and

non-binary users, then they added a sexual orientation input field, which includes an option to be matched with people of the same orientation first. Yet, Tinder's algorithm resolves "other" genders back into the binary and then allows users to only search for 3 categories: men, women, or everyone. Through these technical features, Tinder regulates sexual orientation through gender, reproducing heteronormative and homonormative assumptions that desires are oriented based on gender and limited to binary systems. As mentioned in Chapter 2, like with heteronormativity, homonormativity aligns with existing social structures that normalize ideas that marriage and family ought to be the central goals of the dating relationship (Duggan, 2002).

Tinder added other gender categories in response to cis men saying trans women deviate from expected norms on a primarily heterosexual hookup app that privileges the so-called 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 2009). The male gaze presents and represents women as sexual objects for heterosexual men. Tinder was created by men and in the US, Tinder users are mostly men. Offering gender options beyond the binary was done after accusations of gender deviance by these men and serve to maintain social hierarchies and the appearance of binary gender (Enke, 2012). For Tinder, they may have created 75 new gender categories, but by resolving them all back into the binary, they are upholding sex, gender, and sexuality binaries while also creating banks of data for market analysts.

Ironically, Tinder positions itself as offering a "more inclusive community" with a marketing campaign using the hashtag #AllTypesAllSwypes (Tinder, 2016). The impact of Tinder's #AllTypesAllSwypes campaign is significant, as Hoffmann suggests, "These campaigns arguably constitute the new data ethics' affective guard, marked by emotional appeals to tech's role in mediating people's relationships and helping them achieve their goals" (2020, p. 9). Specifically, the campaign includes a short film featuring high-profile trans activists and corporate leaders collaborating in creating the new gender options. The short film tries to assure users that Tinder consulted the proper users and experts and is working to extend the breadth of resources necessary not only for facilitating more diverse relationships, but for educating users about gender diversities. At one point in the video, Tinder's Product Man-

ager, Drew Glicker, describes what they are doing to inform and educate users around the new gender features, including how they will be used. In a sense, they are setting themselves up as experts in helping users understand the complexities of gender and sexuality in the context of using dating apps. In reality, Tinder is as problematic as any other component of the patriarchy. For example, Bumble was born out of problems caused by toxic masculinity culture at Tinder, including sexual harassment and discrimination. Whitney Wolfe, the founder of Bumble, was an early Tinder executive who felt forced out by a number of factors. Wolfe filed a harassment and discrimination lawsuit against Tinder that was settled out of court for over one million dollars without Tinder admitting any blame. By then also advertising inclusion and diversity by offering new input fields for gender and sexuality options with questionable functionality for LGBTQ+ users, they are not actually progressive on gender or sexuality fronts. It seems that deprogramming the heterosexual/homosexual binary may be as difficult as deprogramming sex and gender binaries (Bivens, 2017).

When Tinder asks users if they want to see people with their same sexual orientation first, what is shown second? Lesbians who wonder why men keep showing up in their stack may never have a direct answer from Tinder (O'Hara, 2019). As dating apps continue to refine their matching technologies to be more inclusive, all the while still depending on exclusive gender options, the gender binary becomes more entrenched. Once the primacy of a social category gets embedded in a technological infrastructure, it persists in new ways (Bowker and Star, 1999). Building dating apps that assume users are either straight or gay reinforces the heteronormative and homonormative structures in society that privilege straight and cisgender experiences over queer and trans experiences.

User profiles on dating apps vary widely, depending on the primary market for the app as well as the app's primary purpose. Even though there are no governing bodies setting standards for what information should or should not be included in social media profiles generally, or in dating apps specifically, all the apps in this study asked users to identify their gender and sexuality in one way or another. As such, they position gender and sexuality as primary and foundational in order to see and be seen on dating apps. Profiles are generally

considered sketches or outlines of a person—a surface, summary, and partial view of a whole person—yet, profiles are also tools used to analyze and predict behavior or extrapolate information about a person from known traits or characteristics.

Dating app users construct profiles with as little information as a username connected to a geo-tagged "current location" (and whether they are online or offline), or alternatively, with as much information as completing an extensive personality profile along with ten or more demographic questions about physical characteristics, economic status, education, etc. The construction of a user profile is part of identity work, and completing a dating profile is often an important aspect of queer identity work. Further, "algorithmic profiling that thrives on continuous reconfiguration of identification should not be understood as a supplementary process which maps a pre-established identity that exists independently from the profiling practice" (de Vries, 2010). Through apps designing profiles, users completing profiles, and data analytic firms making marketing decisions based on profile elements, the varied layers of "profiling practice" contribute to identity work in complex and often invisible ways.

4.6 Summary

Disciplining of bodies and people through various means is not a new concept (Foucault, 1975/1995), but the involvement of popular apps and the ways they build bodies into their interfaces is an emerging aspect of interest within subjectivity. At the intersection of queer and Christian identities, we see ongoing tensions for queer Christian people. Dating apps are designed to build bodies in particular ways that present users as desiring and desirable according to normative categories and standards that exclude or erase other kinds of bodies. Even when dating apps strive to be inclusive, they often fail. For example, when non-binary is offered as a third option alongside binary options of man/woman, does it become a normalized gender? If homosexual is considered an orientation of desire for someone with the same gender, are non-binary people who want to be matched with other non-binary people considered homosexual? How do sexual orientations get classified once there are more options beyond the binaries of man/woman and gay/straight? These are the questions raised when

dating apps expand their gender options beyond the binary.

In the spirit of inclusion, dating app developers are expanding gender options on the surface while maintaining binary gender matching systems and marketization of users underneath the surface. Some dating apps offer many gender options for users to choose, but I wonder, how many options are too many to facilitate meaningful matches? How many are too few to be inclusive of diverse gender options? Is there an optimal number of options to both meaningfully match people as well as be inclusive **and** allow for fluidity of GSRD? For users who do not fit categories offered by an app, or do not find the kinds of people they desire to date, they experience exclusion and fear that they will never find their way into the kind of dating relationship they are seeking. Dating profiles display users as objects to be desired and discovered while at the same time construct users as desiring consumers. When users articulate what they looking for, they are constrained by the options available, building their ideal user from a fixed set of characteristics determined by the app designers. This consumer/consumed dichotomy is integral to the structure of dating profiles, making bodily desires and desired bodies more visible, more real, and more valuable as a commodity - or not. For queer Christians, a dating profile is one of the tactics they employ with hopes of rendering their invisible minority identities visible and legible. A "legible" body is one that is articulated, regulated, and potentially subverted through "textual productions" that "each society uses to produce physical bodies that it recognizes" and thus deems culturally intelligible (Stone, 2000). The formation and maintenance of queer Christian subjectivity is happening in the context of using dating apps with emerging frames of reference at work. Are dating app profiles becoming primary frames of reference within which queer Christians form and maintain their subjectivities?

Bodies on dating apps are regulated in a variety of ways, including through notions of authenticity. Dating apps require users to construct authenticity in ways that are both protective and productive. Dating apps promise safety and security to users, constructing their authentication methods as protecting them from catfishing, scammers, and other unsafe entities. However, by placing authenticity as an important organizing principle at the

beginning of signing up for a dating app, the truth about a person's "real" self described in their profile becomes paramount. Further, authentic identities becomes a truth-game that must be played in order to reach others to date, as well as to be legible in the system and thus reachable. In the next chapter, I focus on the lived experiences of queer Christians using dating apps and discuss the importance of queer Christian visibility and legibility in their search for a match made in heaven.

Chapter 5

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD: QUEER CHRISTIAN DATING

5.1 Introduction to Queer Christian Dating

To understand the impact of church and queer cultures on dating app users and their becoming gendered subjects, I analyzed fifteen semi-structured initial interviews, through which I learned how participants constructed knowledge about their identities in relation to their families, their church experiences, and queer culture. Nine of the fifteen agreed to be research partners and participated in a self-study and an elicitation interview. The majority of my participants grew up in conservative evangelical churches. They described family and church expectations they wrestled with as they came into their LGBTQ identities. Participants described ideal dates, which revealed social scripts for dating, and how they knew who they wanted to date. As they described their expectations, I gained insight into their beliefs about technology and the role of dating apps in matchmaking.

Christians learn gender, sexuality, and dating norms from their church communities. Church culture is a significant frame of reference for queer Christians, especially as they are growing up. When they enter the dating market, they often look to their church communities for potential partners and find none. So, they turn to dating apps. Like the church, dating app profiles are also a site where identity work happens. Church culture and technoculture then inform queer Christian subject formation. When Christian and LGBTQ+ experiences come into contradiction, a type of wrestling occurs (O'Brien, 2004). Wrestling with contradiction involves how we are seen and recognized by others as well as how we see and recognize ourselves. Seeing and being seen is also a primary mechanism of matchmaking on dating apps as users construct desiring and desirable selves (Blackwell et al., 2015, Hardy

and Lindtner, 2017).

As discussed in Chapter 4, dating apps are including more gender and sexuality options for users, but their strategies for inclusion often reinforce existing power relations that harm queer people, and that require users to regulate their own visibility (Hoffmann, 2020). How do queer Christians experience such strategies for inclusion? How does inclusive terminology on dating apps buffer exclusionary experiences in churches? My analysis reveals that queer Christians experience dating apps in such a way that confirms how and why they feel different from both Christian and queer cultures. This chapter explores the ways queer Christians also wrestle with contradictions while using dating apps, focusing specifically around intersections of gender, sexuality, and religion.

5.2 Interview Results: Gender

When reflecting on his experiences signing up for a new dating app, Marley said, "That's interesting to think about, like the human manipulation aspect or the algorithm manipulation" (Elicitation Interview). He was curious to know how okcupid would use his specified gender identity in calculating his match percentage. On other apps, he hadn't thought much about choosing to be classified as a man; however, because he was enrolled in this study, he decided to check out the "other options." He was surprised to discover *Hijra* on the list, a gender category he had never heard of before. He also found the option of *cis man* appropriate since he never questioned his assigned gender.

Marley's narrative around his gender identity involves disturbing family expectations and norms that men will want to date women because that's what men do. Implicitly, his gender identity was in question since the direction of his desires did not line up with his mom's expected gender norms for a man. However, he articulated his understanding of being a man to include same-sex desire, allowing him to deviate from family norms. He described his mom's beliefs about gender as based on her understanding of Christian relationships. She refused to accept his deviation from those Christian norms and said she would not refer to dates he might bring home as "boyfriends" (Initial Interview). When Marley first came out

as gay to his mom, she countered, "but you've always been manly, I don't understand;" to which he replied, "that's why I'm gay - I'm a man who likes men" (Initial Interview). During his self-study, he noticed he could select more than one gender option and couldn't imagine how that feature would be used in calculating match percentages. We speculated together what might be going on underneath it all and agreed that we may never find out.

When using dating apps, Marley had accepted the default options and never questioned his own gender identity as a man. Even during the self-study, his exploration of "other" gender options was a result of participating in this research. However, exploring other options required a deviation from the dominant sign-up path. If he chose man on the first screen, he would not have seen the "other" options and would not have learned of gender identities beyond the binary.

As discussed in Chapter 4, there are many options beyond the binary, including non-binary. Kory identifies as non-binary and pansexual. They described how they mostly identify as a woman on apps that limit them to binary options because they were assigned female at birth and are still mostly presenting femme.

> I don't want to feel like I'm deceiving anyone to any degree. I don't know how I could completely switch presentations for photos because like there's some things that you just can't change in a moment's notice. Like I want top surgery and I have a binder, but it's still like biologically, I'm largely just still female and so it's just like I feel like it'd be a lot of juggling and really hard to present how I want to be in one aspect of my life and not in all. (Elicitation Interview)

They described how difficult it is to navigate dating apps as a non-binary, pansexual person open to dating all genders. They described the dilemma of not wanting to date straight cis guys who wouldn't accept them if they decide to transition from female to male in the future. However, they didn't want to exclude getting matched with men on the apps because then they might miss a nice trans man who could be a good match. The new app they chose for the self-study was HILY (a text initialism for *Hey I Like You*).

> I was very pleasantly surprised. Oh, there's a third category, even if it's like they're using a unicorn emoji for it when the other two are just like normal person emojis. I thought, that's interesting. But like I'm a human too, not a magical creature. Still, it was nice to see the third category and not have to feel like okay, I guess I'm gonna say I'm a woman. I picked the unicorn this time and then I just said I'm looking for all three.

Figure 5.1 illustrates their experience. In this example, Kory was constructing knowledge about their gender identity in relation to norms enforced on the dating app requiring them to choose a different category than they used outside of dating apps. Tinder, on the other hand, did not recognize their gender identity when they first signed up. They expressed concern that they would not be recognized as a non-binary person who is exploring transmasculinity. This liminal space wasn't as much of a problem for them when they identified as a woman seeking women on the app. They explained that they were hesitant to identify as a man seeking a man for fear of being seen as deceptive, yet, the risk of deception also felt present when they identified as a woman seeking men.

In spite of rejection from church, Kory held on to their religious identity.

> I started to feel alienated from a lot of the church, especially because the background I grew up in was very conservative. It still is a huge part of who I am and where I'm from, and the stories in the Bible and like having God there helped me through a lot in life that even if I felt like I couldn't connect with some Christians anymore, I still want to be a part of Christianity in a way and while some of the people may not be the best towards me anymore, it's still really important to me and I don't think that'll ever completely go away.

Kory tried to come out to their mom, and it didn't go well. Kory was dependent on financial support from their parents, so they waited until they felt financially secure "just in case the absolute worst happened" and their parents withdrew all support. They are considering

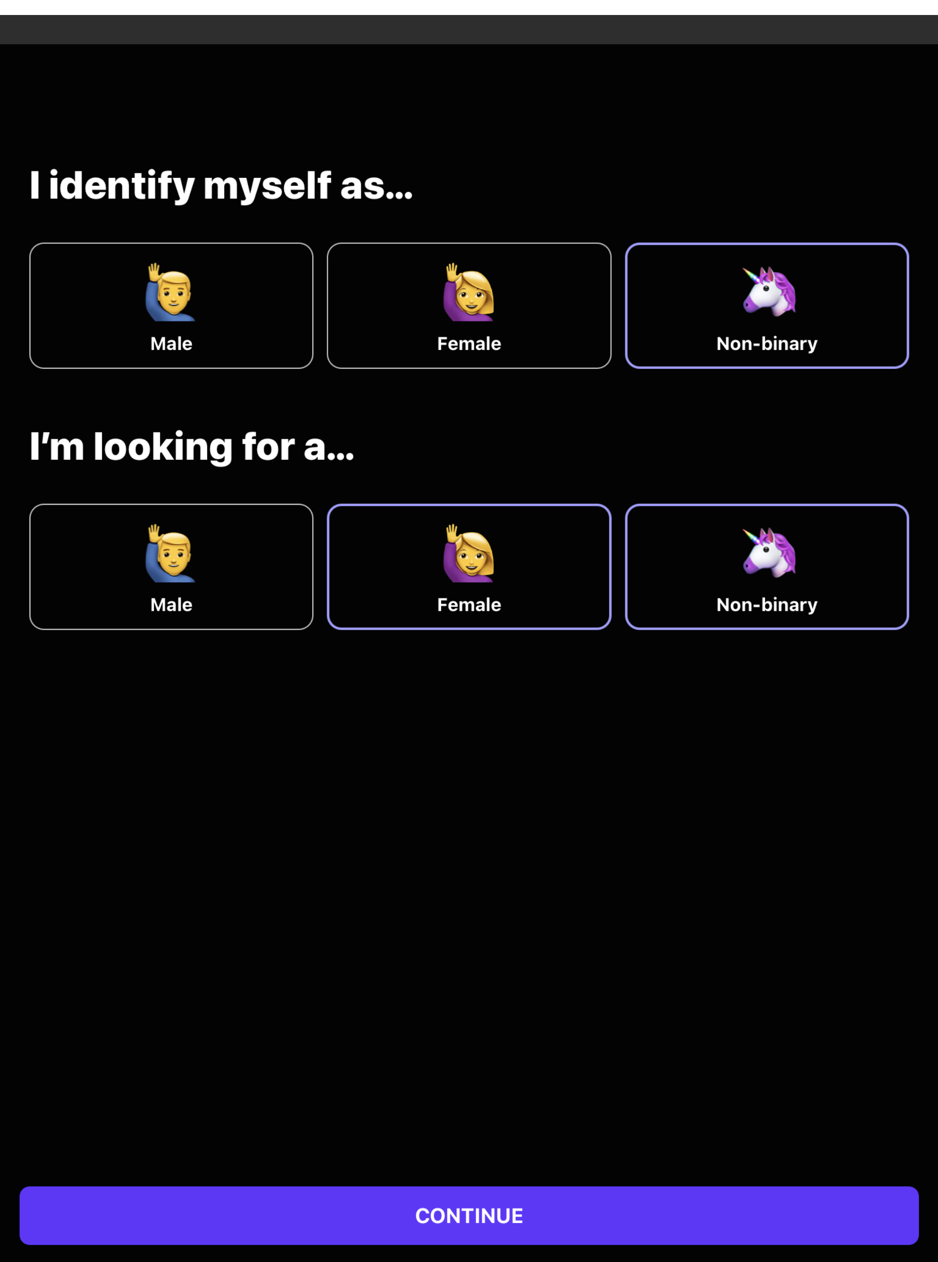


Figure 5.1: But I'm Not a Unicorn

transitioning to be more masculine, but they stopped hormone therapy for now because of their mom's reaction when they tried coming out as non-binary. "I tried to come out to my mom and it just ended up in her like crying, and saying I was going to hell and stuff. So it went over very wrong." Kory is holding off on coming out to family as non-binary or trans masculine for now because their attempt at coming out to their mom was so hard.

Kory wanted to be out on dating apps, but found it difficult. As they navigated gender identity in the apps, they wrestled with their own feelings of rejection. Kory didn't like swiping left on too many people, even though they were anxious about being non-binary and not knowing what their future gendered expressions and desires might be. They made a rule: if they had swiped left on seven people in a row, they would swipe right on the next person. "I always feel bad, just because I don't like judging people. And when I swipe nope on them, it's like, oh, I feel bad. It's not that I don't think they're good enough or it's not like I'm mean. It's just like, I feel bad, like I'm rejecting them in a way." Kory had experienced enough rejection from family and church that they didn't want to do that to others. They kept using dating apps and hoping they would find someone to accept them in their journey to figure out if they want to transition. They know it's a slim chance, however, they feel that dating apps are their only hope for finding a queer Christian to date.

Kory explicitly connected their sense of their gender to their body as "biologically" female, expressing concern that any other choice of category on Tinder would be perceived as deception. They are exploring trans masculinity, while emphasizing that the truth about their gender was what could be seen—they are presenting as more femme, and they have not had top surgery. Though, they knew they would be perceived *differently* than other women. Biblical masculinity and femininity are constructed in conservative evangelical rhetoric as polar opposites, which has the effect of homogenization. (For example, all women *should* be quiet and submissive and all men *should* be strong leaders.) Kory recognized that they were different from "other" Christian women in their church and family. Yet, for Kory, the "truth" about their gender was located in/on their body. They described wanting top surgery someday and wearing a binder sometimes, however, the perceived difference in how they would

be “seen” as a woman, instead of non-binary or trans masculine, caused anxiety around choosing a gender category on apps like Tinder that didn’t have a non-binary category when they first started using it. They described trying to switch back and forth between categories on the app, but they always defaulted back to woman because they worried that any other choice of category on Tinder would be perceived as deception. Kory’s experience of identifying as non-binary was constrained in terms available on the apps, their understanding of what constitutes being a woman, as well as their understanding of dominant narratives in trans medical settings. Kory’s experience with being non-binary and pansexual shows one kind of challenge. However, other participants barely commented on gender in relation to their sexuality.

5.3 Interview Results: Sexuality

Sidney was sent to a “Jesus Camp” (Ewing and Grady, 2006) type summer program after her parents suspected she might have same sex attractions when she was a young teen. Other participants also described the anti-gay beliefs of church and family, which reflect popular discourses about the ways many churches exclude LGBTQ+ people. Brook recently came out publicly to her family and friends just a few months prior to participating in this study. She moved away from her conservative family and church to attend seminary. Brook lives in an urban area that has a significant queer population, but she has not found queer Christian community, and because of the pandemic, has not gotten involved with any queer community locally. She uses Bumble and is discovering more about what she likes and doesn’t like. She finds herself leisurely swiping while watching TV or doing something boring.

At times it seemed it was easier for participants to describe what they didn’t like more than what they like in potential dates, however, there were some things they specifically looked for while browsing profiles and swiping left or right. Brook knew some of her desires and was still figuring out her bisexuality, while beginning to notice who she was swiping right on.

> If they post anything about BLM or dismantling police or against white supremacy, I'm like automatically interested. And then if they also choose to say that they're Christian or they have like Christian things on their profile, I'm especially interested because I feel like that's hard to find. As I was swiping, I was just noticing my tastes, I usually like more femme presenting women. Or like androgynous looking people who've got bits of both. And then I noticed, I don't know why, I like a woman who has short hair and lots of tattoos, I really like that. But I don't like that in men. And I don't know why it is a thing (Elicitation Interview).

For Brook, dating apps brought desirable others into view in a most unexpected way. When she identified as a straight woman, she had already knew what kind of men were desirable. After discovering her attraction for women, Brook began to *see* women differently, particularly on dating apps. Women were now desirable too, and she had to figure out what women she was attracted to. In addition, rigid gender norms opened up more questions for her. If she was interested in women and men, what were the qualities that would attract her? She described liking "femme presenting" and "androgynous looking people with bits of both," and did not question the binary.

Brook was hoping to find some queer Christians to connect with and was disappointed. She had abandoned Tinder because she couldn't filter for Christians and Bumble offered religion as a filter, though not everyone filled out their religion. She realized that not all who showed up in her feed were desirable. There were a few things she found it easy to swipe left on.

> If they have like a bunch of American flags, guns on their shirts, or holding a fish or have camo usually that's a swipe left because I'm assuming that they are more conservative than I am and I am also assuming that they're way more patriotic than I am at the moment. And they would probably support Blue Lives Matter not Black Lives Matter and that, it's just not gonna work. And I usually

> noticed that's more men, especially the fish thing that's like almost always men. (Elicitation Interview).

Brook discovered ways social straightness (Ahmed, 2006) operated on her feed, making her new queer desires more salient. Exploring her queer desires allowed her to resist heterosexual norms that shaped her desires prior to coming out. By using dating apps to explore her sexual attractions, she was subjecting herself to Bumbles terms of deciding who should appear as an object of desire.

Angel described how she is still really spiritual as a Christian, and she has decided it is important to put that she is a Christian in her dating profile. She said, "It's not that I'm looking for someone with the same belief system, I just want someone who is okay with it. Like, if the fact that I believe in Jesus is going to scare you away, then swipe along" (Initial Interview). For Angel, putting this on her profile has made dates feel more successful and even if she doesn't think the person is a good match, she often ends up with new friends, which she said never happened when she identified as straight. Angel was not raised in a Christian church context, however, she became a Christian while attending a youth group at a local evangelical church. Her parents accepted her when she came out as lesbian, however, she was not so welcome at the evangelical church she had been attending. Angel described the valorization of heteronormativity in churches she attended and how it disturbed her.

> There's this weird thing in church culture. Someone takes the stage and they're like, and give it up for my beautiful wife down there. And I'm like, why? Like your wife did nothing but sit there like, I don't understand why we're clapping for someone random. And then they're like, oh, she's so much better than me and completely my other half. That's a little problematic. And you should complete yourself, which I've always found a little problematic too (Elicitation Interview).

Angel has rejected the "weird thing in church culture" and does not identify with the conservative Christianity of her youth. Since she came out as a lesbian, her understanding

of relationships is no longer organized around finding “the one.” She said, “Until I was a senior in college I was pretty convinced I was straight, I just hadn’t found the right person” (Initial Interview). Complementarian ideas of “the one” that she heard in church included finding a partner that is like you in regards to beliefs and interests, but unlike you in regards to roles and responsibilities. Complementarianism is the idea that women were created *for* men and that both women and men are not complete without each other, espousing the view that women and men are discrete and different with innate qualities that naturally complement each other when combined in marriage. Angel rejected complementarianism and the belief that men and women were made to complete each other. Still, she believes finding a compatible partner includes a natural attraction. She organized her sense of being a lesbian around the idea of homosexuality being “natural,” even though this was in contradiction to what she had been taught in church. She wrestled with this contradiction and found a way to hold onto her faith through believing God made her this way. Processes of managing tensions and contradictions are features of an articulated social self (O’Brien, 2004) and contribute to forming a queer Christian identity. For Angel, being a lesbian was something that was God-given and existed within her, a truth that needed to be discovered (Foucault, 1976/1985). She remarked on being a lesbian in relation to her use of TikTok. She described TikTok as the new lesbian dating space in a provocative way:

> Dating apps should just use videos instead of photos. I’ve met so many people on TikTok. I’m really into progressive Christian TikTok where you can see all the gay Christian things. TikTok will know what you should pay attention to. I just started scrolling through TikTok and I was like, it took me twenty-some years to realize I was gay and it took TikTok about 45 seconds to figure it out (Initial Interview).

In this example, TikTok’s algorithm inferred Angel’s lesbian and Christian identities. As noted in Chapter 2, Deleuze (1992) posited that we are transitioning from societies of discipline (Foucault, 1988; 1975/1995) to societies of control, which Cheney-Lippold (2011) argues

can be seen through algorithmic inferences. In what ways might algorithmic inferences, such as those Angel experienced, constitute new forms of knowledge about the self?

Two participants remember attending a megachurch when they were teens and how their pastor was removed from leadership because of "homosexual behavior." Another participant who attended a Christian school kept their own desires hidden after one of their teachers just didn't show up anymore one day, later learning they were fired for being homosexual. In spite of such fears, and many others that LGBTQ+ people face in society, these participants eventually came out and embraced their LGBTQ+ identities and found queer Christian resources that shaped their understanding of self as loved by God and lovable by others. Marley described his church experience in relation to understanding his early notions of being gay:

> In middle school and high school, I knew I was gay. And it was really hard because I'm from a church that used to be a Baptist church but then left during like the charismatic awakening of the '90s. So it was this weird mix of like Baptist but like some charismatic stuff. So it's kind of like I guess an evangelical church somewhere. It was just like a hodgepodge, you know, it was very, very strange. But I was always very interested in religion and biblical studies, I thought I wanted to be a pastor, you know, I want to learn to be a teacher in a church. And I was so very attentive to the messages and it was really hard when I, you know, realized like, I'm gay. Because our pastor would often say things like, well, the gay people are destroying the country or, you know, they're wicked and they have this plan to undo everything in society and yada yada, the gay agenda. And I'm like, well, sign me up. But yeah, so it's like really hard because he kept saying this stuff of like these people are like awful. And I'm like, well, I'm not awful. I'm not trying to destroy anyone and my friends that I know are gay aren't either, you know, like what is it that you know, what does all this mean? So I kept it quiet for a long time in high school. (Initial Interview)

Marley went on to describe how he used Grindr during those quiet years to try to talk with someone and that chatting with people on Grindr became a lifeline for him. However, he believed what he was taught growing up, that it's impossible to be gay and Christian. His Christian identity was important to him, so he tried to change being gay during college. He dated his best woman friend and attended a small group focused on "relational wholeness" that he described as having elements of conversion therapy. He later came to accept his gay Christian identity and is looking for a gay Christian to date and marry. Becoming a gay Christian required Marley, and some other participants, to claim that "God made" them that way. Understanding their queer identities in Christian terms forced them into wrestling with whether their attractions and desires were given to them by God.

5.4 Interview Results: Religion

In this section, I discuss how participants described their religious identities and their expectations for dating apps to help them make their Christianity visible. Christian dating apps are oriented toward reinforcing social straightness and carrying middle-class whiteness along the way. My discussion of specifically Christian dating apps is limited to the two apps mentioned by participants: eharmony and Christian Mingle. I include eharmony as a Christian dating app because of its broad appeal among Christians.

Bailey was raised in evangelical purity culture and was struggling to define what he was looking for in a partner because it was drilled into him to date someone with the same "calling" and vision, yet someone who complements you. "Because of purity culture. I was like, oh man, if they're not Christian, I don't see it going somewhere so I shouldn't even go on a date, you know." He gives himself permission to go on dates just for fun, but he really wants to find a partner to marry and raise a family together. That person doesn't have to believe exactly what he does, but, he says, "I want someone that I can share my faith with and we can process that together because I make decisions on praying and thinking about this and I feel like maybe God's saying that, and I don't want to have a partner that disregards that." Bailey's very excited about a new app for LGBTQ+ Christians, Believr.

He's been following the app's Twitter and Instagram and heard they match people based on values. He hasn't had much luck finding queer Christians on Grindr, and Tinder hasn't been much better. He prefers Hinge right now, though is struggling to overcome religious sexual shame from his upbringing in purity culture. On Hinge, he was able to seek same-sex partners and filter for religion, though he did find the market was thin.

For Bailey, his beliefs about dating were shaped and formed by his conservative upbringing, limiting what kind of dating app he would even consider using. Grindr and Tinder both have reputations as "hookup" apps. Hooking up was in conflict with his belief that dating should lead to marriage and sex should happen within the confines of heterosexual marriage. Purity culture rhetoric teaches that the best sex happens only between straight married couples (Gardner, 2011). Further, Bailey described hearing anti-gay rhetoric about the evils of gay hookup culture and experienced deep shame when he used apps like Grindr and hooked up. Grindr's ideal user was once just cis gay men looking to meet cis gay men "right now" (see Chapter 4).

Today, Grindr's promotional materials position them as "The World's Largest Social Networking App for Gay, Bi, Trans, and Queer People," yet for Bailey, it was still just a hookup app. He wrestled with reconciling his gay identity with his Christian identity after a time of rejecting Christianity in order to explore his sexuality. He decided to identify as a "Side A" gay Christian (see Chapter 2), which informed his choice of dating apps. He described Hinge's ideal user as people seeking marriage, and since they offered same-sex matching he hoped he would meet someone using the app. His beliefs about whether dating apps would help him find a gay Christian man to marry were shaped by the intersection of church culture and queer culture. His exposure to anti-gay rhetoric predisposed him to experience shame when engaging in hookups with gay men. He wrestled with these contradictions for a long time and eventually decided he did not want to give up on his Christian identity. Eventually, he found support in another gay Christian and together they imagined how to find other gay Christians to marry. Bailey and his friend both expressed desires for marriage and family, however, Bailey's use of Grindr made him wonder if there

would ever be a dating app that would help gay people who want to marry find each other. Hinge's marketing to people looking for long-term, committed relationships informed his choice of dating apps as well as his self-understanding as a gay Christian.

Two participants were not raised in such conservative church environments. Angel was invited to a youth group at an evangelical church in the Pacific Northwest when she was in high school. Her Christian identity is still important to her, even though she had already become unwelcome at an evangelical church because she allied herself with LGBTQ+ Christians before she came out. A gay coworker "pushed" her out of the closet and she was glad. Angel then came out to her parents and said, "my parents are not that religious at all, like, a lot of that was me and the Evangelical Christianity thing. My parents were nothing but accepting." She considers herself privileged, knowing many other LGBTQ+ Christians were not so easily accepted by friends and family.

Conversely, Casey explained how being LGBTQ+ wasn't a big deal in her church.

> I remember bringing a girlfriend that I had once to church and the pastor was thrilled and I have been so blessed with a wonderful family like my parents have not said much. And so I didn't necessarily come out directly to the church that I was going to, at that time, but that did not seem to be necessary. I believe that as LGBTQ individuals, we are so radiant and that is just one of the things that God has bestowed upon us. It's, you know, we are also trumpet players and activists and, you know, neurodiverse and we love what we love. We love our hobbies and people and so I was grateful that I never felt any pressure from the church to be like, identify yourself as something so that we can love you. (Initial Interview)

Casey's experience of being loved and accepted by her family and church inspired much of her activism and in her description of her ideal partner, she said,

> What I'm looking for first is kindness - and I mean genuine kindness - and it would probably be the kindness of Jesus Christ and other extraordinary people

> like Martin Luther King or Angela Davis, but if I was to think of that central figure that everyone would know that would not be Santa Claus. It would be Jesus Christ and so kindness first. And I would prefer someone to have a sense of spirituality so I would want someone to be connected to their faith in some way just recognizing that it is not just us here floating. Now that I'm getting older, I'm like, okay, kindness, and you have to vote, you know, you have to commit to a political process or kindness and you have to show some sense of responsibility. (Initial Interview)

For Angel and Casey, finding a queer Christian was not as important as finding a partner who would accept them as queer Christians. Angel knew that being queer and Christian might be unappealing to other lesbians. Her sense of queer culture as not being inclusive of Christians shaped how she interacted on dating apps to make sure her Christian identity was visible to others. For Casey, her Christianity informed her activism and shaped her ideas around what kind of partner she was looking for. They did not feel a need to seek other queer Christians in their search for a partner, however, both were looking for long-term partners to marry and have a family with. Angel and Casey deviated from the straight norm in seeking same-sex partners, but they did not deviate very far. They organized their desires around heteronormative notions of marriage and family as primary outcomes of dating relationships and used dating apps to help them reach that desired objective.

Chance expressed a similar desire for long-term partnership, however, he still enjoyed hooking up and used different dating apps for different goals. When seeking a long-term partner, he used mainstream dating apps like Tinder and Hinge, and when seeking hookups, he used Grindr. He included his religion on mainstream apps as it was important to him. If the app did not offer a structured profile element for religion, he included it in his free-text description. On Grindr, he was careful not to mention religion, even after meeting up for a date. He described how when he told hookups that he was Christian the date sometimes turned into what felt like a counseling session. As soon as Chance told a hookup that he

was Christian, his date described how they were hurt by Christianity and didn't understand how Chance could still be a Christian. For Chance, the incompatibility of hooking up as a Christian remained a truth within the queer culture he was exploring and he wanted to avoid wrestling with that truth again. He no longer questioned being queer and Christian and didn't want to be questioned about it when seeking a hookup.

Bailey and Marley used dating apps while they were trying to figure out their same-sex attractions that they believed were forbidden and incompatible with their Christian faith. The evils of homosexuality loomed as a truth that required them to situate themselves in relation to the power of that truth. For a while, Bailey hid his Christian identity from hookups he met on Grindr. He believed the messages that homosexuals were promiscious and their lifestyle was evil. In order to embrace his same-sex attractions, he thought he had to abandon his Christian faith. He lived a forbidden lifestyle until he decided to reconcile the contradiction of being queer and Christian (O'Brien, 2004). After finding other queer Christians who accepted and affirmed homosexuality as a valid and even God-given identity, he returned to his faith and decided not to use Grindr for hookups anymore. He internalized messages that promiscuous gays were evil and resisted conforming to gay hookup culture. Through his wrestling and with the support of other queer Christians, Bailey committed himself to using dating apps to find a man to marry. Bailey and others in this study are resisting dominant heterosexual narratives with the help of others who are also seeking a match made in heaven. Through reconciling his homosexuality with his faith, he has subjected himself to Christian norms regulating dating as a step on the way to marriage and family. This type of resistance, framed in terms of homonormativity, normalizes homosexuality within the terms of an existing social order that privileges marriage and family (Duggan, 2002).

Marley used Grindr to explore his same-sex attractions for a while until he tried to change. The power of social straightness urged him to get his desires in line with dominant gender expectations. His faith was important to him and if God said being gay would lead to hell and damnation, he wanted to escape that fate. After trying and failing to direct his desires toward women, he turned back to dating apps designed for long-term relationships and is

seeking a same-sex partner for marriage. Messages of homosexuals being abandoned by God constrained Marley's early explorations of his same-sex attractions. He is still wrestling with his fears, yet he has hope that through using dating apps he will find a partner who will love and accept him. Like Bailey, Marley uses dating apps to resist heteronormative expectations from church and family, while at the same time contributing to normalizing homosexuality.

For Marley, being able to filter by religion without paying extra was important. On Bumble he would look for a religion tag. He would make note of the one's with the Christian tag and often decide, "Oh, you're a Christian. Oh, maybe I'm a little more into you." He found Hinge a little easier than Bumble because he could filter for Christians and set it as a priority and Christians would appear at the top of his potential matches. "It kind of like filters out and you get some other people who aren't labeled as Christian explicitly but it's a drastic difference from when you don't have it on. But I think you end up repeating people. So like I would go through a bunch of people and then I would have to like either turn [religion preference] off or swipe through old people that I've already decided I wasn't interested in" (Elicitation Interview). On Bumble he wouldn't get repeats because once you swipe left on a profile, it never appears again. All of the participants wrestled with the difficulty of finding queer Christians to date. When they swiped left over and over again on app after app, they expressed discouragement.

Semira tried eharmony for a while, however, it was not sustainable for her. Semira is a single mother of four and said:

> I didn't know how expensive it was gonna be. And like, yeah, I don't think I have that kind of money right now. And so that's that. But I feel like when I'm in a better position financially, if I'm still on the market, I may invest in that because I do think that eharmony probably has better success rates than on the other apps based on the depth which they ask questions about people and things (Initial Interview).

Prior to Marley's initial interview, he had tried Christian Mingle after he heard same-

sex matchmaking was an option. He didn't last long on the app partly because, as Marley explained, "there was no discoverability feature. So you can go to a profile and try to match with a man or say I'm interested. But there's no identification to say like this person's gay. Yeah, I think because technically that's a workaround. You're not discriminating anyone, like if you're gay, you can match with a man, but there's not an identification layer" (Initial Interview).

For users that already experience scarcity in their dating market, apps that have limited number of profiles users can see or the number of likes they can send, increase a sense of scarcity prompting users to pay to play. This was a problem both for Semira and for Kory, who recently moved out on their own and is struggling to pay rent. But for Harper, it was no big deal and she insisted on paying for premium services so she could have access to more people. Monetization of matching requires a certain level of wealth in order to participate. Dating apps offer premium services, which are often marketed as access to more people or access to better matches. Either way, how queer Christians experience scarcity reminds them of the ways they deviate from social straightness.

However, Brook was curious during her self-study. "So I wanted to try Christian Mingle and I set it up and everything, but then I only ended up with **five matches**. Like, no matter how I played it out, it was only five matches and it was the same five. So I had to give up on that one, because what can you do with five people?" Christian Mingle allowed Brook to change their settings for the gender they were looking to date as well as religious identification.

> When I first signed up I went for like everyone which was interesting, like the whole setting up process. I'm like, they were actually a little bit more queer friendly than I thought they would be. Even though they didn't ask for orientation or gender identity and they only have two options. Anyways, it was only man or woman, you had to choose one of those. But you could select that you were looking for a man or woman or both of them. I could do both instead of

> just one and I would not have expected that from them. (Elicitation Interview)

Participants expressed how their commitment to their Christian identity caused conflict with their becoming queer. Max struggled on dating apps and was afraid to use Grindr, in part because his Christian identity was a key part of who he is. He said, “I’ve been a Christian my entire life and the church has always been a huge part of my identity.” Prior to coming out as trans, he lived in a city where it “wasn’t a big deal to be LGBT even in the church” (Initial Interview). However, when he moved to a different city and started at a new church, he was out as bisexual to his friends and was just starting to come out as trans. At one point, he was outed at his church and was confronted soon after by the pastor, the pastor’s wife, and the pastor’s son. He had a few conversations with them hoping to change their thinking, but in the end they told him that he was under the influence of demons and suggested Christian conversion therapy. He was heartbroken because he thought the people in the church cared about him. After leaving his church, he and his family church-hopped for a bit until they found a place that was more accepting. At his new church, he met with the pastor before committing to become a member and asked if he would be allowed to be a member as a bisexual trans man. The pastor told him, “Yes, as long as you want to be here, we won’t turn you away.” Max excitedly told of his new pastor, “she uses my proper pronouns, she uses my name. She’s never asked me my birth name” (Initial Interview).

For Max, his trans identity was in conflict with his Christian identity in one church but not another. He described some of the research he did to

For all the participants in this study, their queer Christian identities are important. For Max, it was important that he be seen and accepted as a bisexual trans man in his church community, and for Angel it was important for her to be seen as Christian among lesbians who might be potential partners. Most participants explained the importance of including their Christian identity on their profiles, either through an option on a menu of religious identities in a structured profile element, or in the free text portion of their profile description. However, not all participants needed the person they matched with to identify

as Christian or hold the same beliefs.

5.5 Summary

Before I explained to participants the process for doing a self-study and subsequent elicitation interview to explore their dating app usage in more detail, I asked them why they were using dating apps and what they hoped dating apps would do for them. Every participant mentioned a sense of scarcity, highlighting how thin they think their dating market really is. They try to fit themselves into popular dating apps that have more users in hopes of greater access to finding "the one." Although they express a certain dependency on dating apps, they also voiced frustration with how difficult it is for them to reach other queer Christians on the apps they are using. Some were more optimistic than others, however, all of them believed it was possible to find a partner through using dating apps.

Queer Christians want to be able to match with other queer Christians in meaningful ways on dating apps. They also expect the apps to give them intelligible, recognizable identity categories to facilitate finding matches in a thin dating market. Many have been told they will never be loved or able to marry because of their queerness, so when they encounter difficulty finding other queer Christians on dating apps it reinforces this notion. However, the participants in this study have not given up hopes that dating apps will make queer Christians reachable. They are still looking for that match made in heaven and still believe dating apps will help them seek and find what they are looking for. In this chapter, I have discussed who LGBTQ+ Christians are hoping to find on dating apps and how they've experienced their gender, sexual, and religious identities in their search for a match. For each queer participant, their religious identities intersected with their queer ones in unique ways, and each participant described the importance of holding onto these seemingly contradictory identities, then making them visible on dating apps. Although they all put some amount of faith in the apps to help find partners, others put their faith in God first. As Casey put it, "Partner wise, I just have faith that God will work it out ... She/he/they are perfectly brilliant and so I completely trust in God" (Elicitation Interview).

A dominant narrative in evangelical Christianity is that "God will make a way where there seems to be no way". This narrative is drawn from interpretations of Isaiah 43:19 (*The Holy Bible*, 1989) which says, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Christian biblical scholars and theologians often interpret this verse from the Hebrew Bible as a foreshadowing of Jesus, who, in the New Testament of the Christian Bible says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (*The Holy Bible*, 1989, John 14:6). Many evangelical Christians put their faith in Jesus and the Bible to instruct them in knowing what is true and how to live. Social straightness limits their perceptions of queer possibilities in the world in many ways, including through family, church, and authorizing texts from the Bible. Earlier in the prophetic book of Isaiah another verse orients them to straightness: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (*The Holy Bible*, 1989, Isaiah 40:3). This verse is also interpreted as foreshadowing Jesus. Evangelical Christians combine verses from the prophet Isaiah with narratives of the life of Jesus, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (*The Holy Bible*, 1989, Matthew 7:13-14). Queer Christians in this study described how they are subjected to anti-gay and anti-trans rhetoric in their Christian families and in churches that instill fear and shame and warn of destruction. They also described how they are discovering new narratives and new ways of being Christian while searching for a match made in heaven. In the next chapter, I discuss the results of walkthroughs and interviews, and explore regimes and games of truth that shape and form queer Christian subjects.

Chapter 6

SEARCH ME, O [ALGORITHM] AND KNOW MY HEART

Queer Christians expect dating apps to help them seek and find partners while dating apps design algorithms that not only offer potential matches, but sort people and their data into increasingly fine-grained categories for sale to advertisers and data analytic firms. This study shows how queer Christians are disoriented in straight Christian worlds, and how they seek other ways of being by searching for other queer Christians to help them find their way. When they use dating apps, they become commodities in a data culture that is primarily organized for targeted behavioral advertising and for sale to various data analytic purposes. Dating apps are oriented toward collecting, selling, and marketing data over serving sexual cultures they purport to be designed for. The tensions of becoming a commodity—through marketing the self to other users as a desirable other and through marketing of user data collected—hover beneath the surface of user engagement with dating apps. For many, the hope of finding other queer Christians in cyberspace, including through dating apps, motivates their becoming gendered subjects.

Christian culture, queer culture, and technoculture constantly interact with one another and are intertwined with systems of domination in queer Christian subject formation. Such relations of power involved in queer Christian subjectivity require participating in a variety of "games of truth" that provoke contradictions, inciting queer Christians to wrestle in particular ways. Today, radically heterogeneous truthful knowledges—religion, science, law, social justice, politics, culture, and technoculture—comprise regimes of truth that often compete for dominance. Queer Christian subjectivity involves participation in games of truth. *Truth games*—playing by the rules of knowing and being known—of Christian culture come in conflict with those of queer culture and technoculture simultaneously when queer

Christians use dating apps.

This dissertation was guided by the following question: **What can queer Christians' use of dating apps tell us about Gender, Sexuality, and Relationship Diversities?** Queer identity work and subjectivity involve complex processes that require LGBTQ+ people to wrestle with ways they deviate from cultural norms for relationships and what Ahmed (2006) calls, "social straightness." Queer Christians in this study discussed their experiences of inclusion and validation through individual internal psychological processes as well as relational processes, but they were often unaware of the "truth games" that governed their becoming queerly Christian. "How" they did queer identity work is as important as "what" they did. In the initial interviews, many participants narrated how they came to accept their queer identities in relation to their Christian faith, families, and communities. These processes involved how they experienced desires that were out of line with straight expectations. For some, they had never seen a queer Christian while growing up and were taught it was impossible to exist as both queer and Christian. Moments of disorientation often shattered any confidence that their faith could support them in ways that make life feel livable and make them feel unlovable. In this chapter, I discuss queer Christian subjectivity and how analyzing "truth games" offers insight into my broader research question.

6.1 Truth Games: The Cis/Straight Agendas

Participants describe dominant narratives circulating in primarily evangelical and conservative Christian cultures, including the idea that God intended a specific order, a straight line to follow, from gender to sexuality to reproductive relationships. They explained the ways they were taught that God intended gender to flow from genitals, sexuality to be reproductive, and relationships to be lifelong and monogamous between men and women. As queer Christians, they critique and disturb boundaries erected around gender, sexuality, and relationship diversities by their families and religious communities. They participate in a *game of truth* by seeking to be recognized as Christian even though they do not fit normative ideas of gender, sexuality, and relationship arrangements authorized by the *regime of truth*

for biblical manhood/womanhood. Gender, according to biblical manhood/womanhood narratives, is God-given as much as bodies are. Trans participants experience shame for wanting to "mutilate" their God-given bodies and are accused of being demon-possessed.

They wrestle with the contradiction of knowing queer people who are not evil in the ways they were told and wrestle with imagining themselves as evil. They do not want to believe the truth of queerness being inherently evil, and they do not want to reject God. For most participants, their Christian communities and families interpret the Bible in particular ways and use those interpretations as authorizing, setting a "straight agenda" that orients Christianity in line with social straightness. Experiences of *not fitting* or deviating from the dominant narratives for gender, sexuality and relationships caused them to question, to wrestle with contradiction, and resist social forces to become straight. Many participants described fear and shame—fear of rejection by God, church, and family; shame for being evil, wrong, and an abomination. Their fears were validated time and again as they saw teachers, pastors, and friends rejected. Some describe the power of shame persisting even after experiencing affirming counseling and loving queer relationships. The straight agenda of Christianity limits their ability to imagine Christian dating apps helping them find queer relationships. As they wrestle with the various agendas—or plans others have for their lives—they often encounter new regimes of truth that required them to play new truth games.

6.2 Truth Games: The Queer Agendas

In a nutshell, the gay agenda positions same-sex desire as leading to rejection *by* God and the trans agenda positions transgender desires as a rejection *of* God. Both agendas position desires of participants as evil and their identities as invalid within the terms of Christianity. Many participants discuss their first exposure to and understanding of what it means to be queer from narratives within their Christian communities. They are told that the "gay agenda" is in opposition to Christian morals, especially Christian standards of monogamy and purity. Purity culture, as described by participants, results in shame for having sexual

thoughts, feelings, or actions outside of a committed, heterosexual, monogamous relationship. For some, this *truth* is validated when they explore same-sex relationships on dating apps, especially for those who used Grindr. Grindr does not offer structured profile elements for religion. A few participants describe “coming out” as Christian when hooking up only to have the validity of their queer Christian identity questioned. They all describe how important it is that they be recognized, validated, and accepted as both queer and Christian by potential partners, even if those partners do not identify as Christian.

Two participants describe a “trans agenda” from the perspective of their church and family that focuses on rejection of God’s intentions for their bodies and identities. They did not describe any experiences of rejection from trans communities for being Christian, however, since they were both interested in partners who were not straight, they still feared rejection from potential partners on dating apps. The narrative of incompatibility between being queer and religious, especially in regards to Christianity, is more significant in relation to queering sexuality than gender. One possibility for this difference in the histories and genaologies of homophobia and transphobia in relation to Christianity. However, an us vs. them mentality was salient for all participants. In academic queer studies, narratives of those who are religious (they) hating those who are queer (us) abound and build the foundation of the inverse (Puar, 2014). Regimes of truth governing queer conceptions of an us (queer) vs. them (religious) are built around lived experiences of material harm done to queer people in the name of religion. In the context of this study, the religious (them) are primarily involved with conservative, fundamentalist, evangelical Christianity, the background of the majority of the participants in this study, and the dominant expression (and stereotype) of Christianity in the U.S. today.

6.3 Truth Games: The Technocultural Agenda

Technoculture positions religion as one of the elements in what Dinerstein (2006) calls “a matrix that assumes superiority” of Euro-American identity over others. Christianity has shaped Western technoculture in relation to beliefs about progress and quests for transcen-

dence, inviting users to put their faith in a better future through technological advances (Noble, 1999). In short, technoculture has influenced how we think about what it means to be human, to be a subject in relation to others, to be a self, and to have identities. A technocultural agenda is built on heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions inherited from histories of Christianity and configured through gender categorizations that are now ubiquitous online.

We've already seen the neologism "cisgender" cross institutional boundaries from social movements to everyday classrooms (Enke, 2012). With cis man and cis woman as gender options on social media sites and dating apps, the radical politics of cis- as naming normativity and privilege along not just gender lines, but lines of race, class, and ability, has been reduced to the practice of naming individual identities. The usage of cis in relation to individual identities that can be selected on a menu of options allows users to situate themselves comfortably inside discourses of inclusion and allyship, playing a game of truth encoded in technocultural spaces. However, as Enke (2012) argues, setting up trans- in opposition to cis- stabilizes not only trans as a fixed identity a person arrives at in space and time, but also stabilizes the categories of male and female, and the boundary between the two that must be crossed to arrive at a trans identity. In the realm of dating apps, the boundary to cross in most instances is the selection of "more gender options," which in turn requires users to select their location among binary gender options. In order for trans users to be recognized as trans- on dating apps, they must play a game of truth about whether they want to be recognized as man/woman or trans or something else. The inclusion of more fine-grained gender categories on dating apps is a result of trans women being banned from dating apps for not being women, according to some other user's truth about what it means to be a woman. In the example of trans women being banned, the user reporting is given more authorizing power over the truth about the person they are reporting than the person being reported.

6.4 *Discussion: Reconciling GSRD and Religion*

Queer Christians make visible their forbidden and often hidden identities on dating apps. For most of the participants, being queer and Christian was forbidden in their family and/or church contexts. They hid their forbidden identities from family and church authorities in a variety of ways, yet it was important to make them visible on dating apps. Participants who were not out to family or church communities still chose to identify as queer and Christian on dating apps. They used dating apps to try to reach others who were not visible or reachable in their worlds shaped by social straightness (Ahmed, 2006). Through dating apps they resisted social straightness imposed upon them. For the majority of participants, they were using dating apps to find long-term, monogamous partners for marriage. Diversities of gender, sexuality and relationships outside of heterosexual norms challenged queer Christians to wrestle with contradictions in how they understood who they are becoming and who they want to date. In this section, I connect results of dating app walkthroughs with findings from interview analysis to answer the overarching research question that guided this dissertation.

Gender, as a social identity category, involves how we come to know ourselves and each other (Shapiro, 2015). Shapiro argues, "by identifying with a gender and embodying the behaviors and characteristics associated with that gender" we recognize ourselves and become recognizable in society (p. 17). Social scripts are technologies of power about bodies and identities. Consider the case of Marley, in Chapter 5, who came out to his mom as gay. Her social script for sexual relationships followed lines of social straightness. For her, the only natural and acceptable desires for sexual partners were between men and women. Her understanding of gender and attraction were constrained by ontological assumptions about how gendered desire functions; namely, that men have God-given desires for women as sexual objects. These terms invoked the idea of an unchangeable, God-given gender that God ordained to determine sexual orientation toward the other gender. In response to Marley's coming out as gay, his mom could not accept his orientation, as it did not fit her gender scripts. Christian social scripts for gender involve deterministic notions of gender as flowing

from bodies that "have" a gender, and toward gendered objects of desire. In contrast, gender theorists have worked to decouple sex and gender from essentialist, heterosexist, heteronormative notions of the body and identity without denying the material relations of sexed bodies and embodied gender identities (Alcoff, 2006; Butler, 1993).

Marley's response to his mom—that he is gay *because* of his gender and the gender of the kind of person he desires to date—resisted the social script that men were created by God to desire *only* women. He described how he tried to fit himself into Christian heterosexual gender norms of his church and family. He dated a woman who was his best friend, but it didn't work, thus he didn't fit. For Marley, the contradiction he wrestled with was the "truth" that as a man he *should* desire women, but he did not wrestle with the truth of *being* a man. In this way, Marley saw his gender as involved in sexuality and in some ways determining it, just not in the preordained way he was taught in church. Classifications of heterosexuality and homosexuality that have been constructed through religion and medicine require a person to "know" their own gender as well as their gendered attractions. Even though homosexuality is no longer classified as a pathology in medical terms, anti-gay Christian rhetoric produces and reifies truths about gender and sexuality that have been encoded in their doctrines, practices, and expected social interactions. Marley did not explain where he learned to think of his gender as cisgender, yet he described himself as a cisgender male. (Cisgender was not a top-level gender option on any of the dating apps used in this study.)

Dating apps make gender visible or hidden in a variety of ways, including gender differences. At the same time, gender differences are still ulitmately organized into a binary system, which underpins matching algorithms on dating apps in such a way that makes gender difficult to untangle from vectors of desire. Most apps explored in this study set up gender as a primary organizing category, a basic fact, a foundational identity upon which other aspects of a user profile must be built. By locating gender as both an aspect of identity in structured profile elements as well as necessary for matchmaking, dating apps position gender as fundamental to constructing the self as both desirable and desiring. In this way, dating apps redistribute the truth that Marley discovered when wrestling with contradiction

produced by heterosexist norms. He articulated the notion that even though he deviates from the gender script that says men should not desire men, he did not question the truth that his gender is fundamental to the dis/orientation of his sexual desires.

Enke argues that a transfeminist use of trans as prefix (or with a dash or asterisk) forces recognition of trans as "modification and motion across time and space" (2012). For trans participants, they wrestled with timing of transitioning as well as deciding whether they wanted to "fully" transition. "Fully" transitioning involves narratives about medicalized body modifications, even though medical transition is not the only option for trans people. Time and space were significant factors in Kory's experience of gender. *Now* they see themselves as neither man nor woman, but sometime in the future, they imagine seeing themselves as a man and wanting to be seen as a man. Yet, they had to move across binary gender spaces on the app in order to see who they wanted to see and be seen by people who might be interested in them. This goal eluded them on Tinder because they were not ready to come out to their mom as non-binary or trans. Dating apps developed on the basis of binary gender, even after adding more gender options, force people like Kory back into the binary, limiting spaces where they exist within the liminality of transition. In this case, Kory was subjected to binary gender norms through both family interactions and interactions with dating app interfaces. However, they were firmly invested in the process of resisting those dominant narratives. In Bettcher's terms, Kory may not yet have a sense of a core gender-inflected erotic self, but they were imagining one.

Trans experiences pose multiple challenges for dating apps, and dating apps expose trans people to increased stigma and violence, both through messages they receive on apps and how they are reported, blocked, and removed from apps without question. Trans Tinder users wondered if Tinder had a transphobia problem, not just a problem with users reporting trans profiles and getting trans users banned (Vincent, 2016). Bumble regulates trans identities across time and space in that they limit the number of times a person can change their gender, as well as how frequently they can do it. For Kory, identifying as non-binary also presented challenges to understanding their sexuality as they struggled to make their

sexuality (pansexual) visible on dating apps. Max, a trans man, also experienced challenges using dating apps. Max, who identified as bisexual, was afraid to use Grindr for fear of not being seen as a "real" man because he knew he wanted to medically transition, but did not have the money to do anything beyond starting hormones.

Participants also expressed their reliance on gender in understanding their own desires. They expressed the ways gender and orientation of desires toward or away from particular genders felt innate and unavoidable and an important part of what it means to be human. Many of them discussed feeling that God made them this way for a reason and one of those reasons was to display the beauty of diversity in God's creation. Although some participants expressed a sense of being brilliant, other participants described the anxiety they experienced as they deviated from norms of their family and church. These differences, as Mulvey (2009) argues, "[produce] great anxiety," while "polarisation, which is the theatrical representation of difference, tames and binds that anxiety" (p. 167).

Other participants mostly described sexuality in terms of lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Some participants described how they *knew* they were "gay" from a young age. They described wrestling with the "truth" of whether God made them that way or not. The determinism vs. constructivism of sexual orientation is a significant factor in many discussions of sexual orientation. While the problem of "free will" is often conceived of as a theological concern, the idea of the autonomy of the self to determine identity has made its way into various sciences (Alcoff, 2006). Because science is influenced by religious notions of the self, and religion is influenced by scientific notions of the self, we witness these notions of "free will" vs. "biological," "nature" vs. "culture," "constructed" vs. "determined," "religion" vs. "science," surface in a variety of ways in popular, religious, and scientific discourses on homosexual identity.

When discussing what kind of relationships they were seeking, participants primarily described long-term, monogamous marriage as their goal. Even though they deviated from the heterosexual norms of "opposite-sex" relationships imposed by their families and churches, in reality they did not deviate far. Participants connected hookups and casual sex with

the "evils" of homosexuality. The terms of the "gay agenda" constrained they ways they imagined their relationships, as all felt that in some way, they needed to prove "we" are not "evil" like those "others" they were told about. While Marley questioned the validity of the association of evil with sex outside of heterosexual marriage, he did not question the association of evil with sex outside of marriage. Diversion from heterosexual norms was limited to gender and sexual deviation, rather than deviating from marriage as the ideal relationship form, and family as the goal of marriage. Christian notions of gender and sexuality being ordered only for reproductive purposes are based on paradigms of the past colliding with possibilities of the future (Coupe, 2009). Technoculture is infused with religious ideologies that shape people and shape worlds.

6.5 Discussion: Technoculture

As networked cyberscapes have produced increasingly networked selves with gender imported and "baked in" (Bivens and Haimson, 2016) from patriarchal, heteronormative, cisnormative, and binary cultural forms, what do we make of the proliferation of a growing list of terms for gender identity? How do we make sense of concommitent gender expansions and dichotomous gender reductions? In earlier days of online interactions, Jodi O'Brien (1999) noted that "we use existing cultural representations to give meaningful order to uncharted netscapes" in regards to gender and I wonder, are we finally seeing "the emergence of signposts indicating allowable multiplicity" (p.95)? Perhaps the now-networked cultural representations of increasingly fine-grained descriptions of more than seventy genders will be used to give meaningful order to uncharted genderscapes. Or perhaps not.

Ahmed (2006) argues, we can speak of the white world and the straight world because white and straight bodies are more involved in giving shape to Western worlds. "It is not just that bodies are directed in specific ways, but that the world is shaped by the directions taken by some bodies more than others." (p. 159). Following this, technocultural worlds are theorized as white, Christian, heterosexual, male worlds (Brock, 2018). The technocultural worlds of dating apps appear to be inclusive and progressive, yet participants described ways

they were disoriented at times and felt excluded to the point of leaving an app in hopes of finding a better one. Tinder was the app most often left by users but then taken up again at one point or another. Tinder's swiping method of interaction has become a primary way of interacting with potential dates on many apps. Bumble, created as a feminist alternative to Tinder, uses swiping as a primary interface mechanism as well. Most participants had at least tried Tinder at one point or another, and over half of the participants were still using it even though they were dissatisfied with it. Tinder is working towards inclusion, though their strategies tend to be largely instrumentalist, as "the glossy presentation of diversity is often a matter of good public relations or a tool leveraged by the powerful to accomplish various ideological and institutional goals" (Ward, 2008, p. 7).

Technoculture is also characterized by progress, modernity, and an orientation toward the future (Dinerstein, 2006). Likewise, dating apps market themselves as helping users on their way to a better future, sometimes for a night and sometimes for a lifetime. Dating apps are monetized through selling data and subscriptions that promise better dates. Visions of possible futures for matchmaking are dramatized in popular culture. A Netflix Original TV series, Osmosis, envisions a technology that has access to vast stores of data about every person on the planet. This technology is then implanted into a person and reveals an image of a person somewhat like an animated Seurat painting, where a multitude of dots swirl together and form a picture of "the one." The fictional technology of Osmosis predicts soulmates precisely and facilitates connections in both physical and virtual spaces that are significantly more satisfying than meeting "the one" unaided by the technology. This imagined future depends on progress in terms of global infrastructures, as well as progressively finer-grained data about each person on the planet. The ways dating apps include more gender options in order to market themselves as inclusive, only to then transform diverse gender data back into the binary for sale to data analyst firms, reveals an inconvenient challenge: that dating apps are likely designed more for the sake of the data market than for the sake of the dating market.

Dating apps sell data based on binary gender categories to data analysts and use gender

categories to compute matches. Gender fluidity and multiplicity beyond the binary present challenges to matchmaking algorithms that claim to be able to match people across dichotomous gender variables. Further, dichotomous variables offered in identity-based input fields or inferred using predictive analytics, contribute to continued "data violence" against vulnerable populations (Hoffmann, 2018, Hoffmann, 2020). The current practice of resolving diverse genders to fit in the binary, both on many of the dating apps studied and on mainstream social media sites, is more likely to produce yet another binary to be contended with and dismantled. For specifically Christian dating apps, they seem content with upholding the binaries of man/woman and gay/straight. However, in a broader sense, the potential for the binary of cis- and trans- to become the new dichotomous identity variable that sorts people and shapes constructions of self on social media platforms is real. Arrangements of genders and orientations on dating apps may serve to further discussion of erotic structuralism (Bettcher, 2014 in general, gender and sexuality arrangements on dating apps do not adequately allow for trans experiences across time and space.

Out of the ten apps featured in this study, Bumble offers the most options to choose from, however, many are semantically very similar. For example, the difference between "trans male" and "trans man" depends on how a person differentiates between male and man when describing gender. The messiness and unruliness of gender terms in American English poses challenges that quickly multiply when thinking about these categories in global circulation. Tinder showcases the most inclusive list of terms from cultures other than America. Tinder includes *Tangata ira tane* "A Mäori term describing someone born with a female body who has a male gender identity," though it does not include, for instance, "Whakawahine, Hinehi, Hinehua: some Mäori terms describing someone born with a male body who has a female gender identity" (H. RESOURCES:Terminology, n.d.). Who decides which new terms get added to dating apps lists of gender options? Decisions about when and how gender terms get updated remains very vague, if not opaque. Dating apps that are used in multiple markets around the world employ localization experts. To what degree are localization experts influenced by Western technoclture? How do localization and globalization interact

with hegemonic ideals of matchmaking across a binary gender scheme?

6.6 A Match Made in Cyberspace

Dating apps reduce the complexity of sexual attraction in ways that reproduce Christian heteronormativity and contribute to a growing Christian homonormativity for those who deviate from straight/gay and man/woman binaries. This tension feeds a growing interdisciplinary subfield of research on dating apps, and researchers are calling for studies that enrich ongoing conversations about how dating apps expose users to increased stigma and violence (Albury et al., 2017, p. 9). Following Anna Lauren Hoffmann (2020), this study shows how the"terms of inclusion" dating apps offer are, in the end, deceptive and false. By including expanded lists of gender identities, but then returning users to binary gender categories without their consent as a condition of seeing and being seen, inclusion on dating apps is an illusion that uses the affective appeal of advertising campaigns to attract more users and advertisers over serving the needs of GSRD users. The dating app industry is a growing industry with extensive reach across cultures. This myth of inclusivity conceals dominant power structures at work underneath the surface of dating app interfaces.

Cyberspace extends beyond borders of nations and divisions between East and West, with dating app revenue exceeding 3 billion USD in 2020. Discourses of sexuality circulate globally, even though "the study of sexuality has often been bound by disciplinary constraints" that are, more often than not, confined by Western norms(Grewal and Kaplan, 2001). Grewal & Kaplan argue that the emergence of global sexual identities is best explored from "an interdisciplinary and transnational approach that addresses inequalities as well as new formations" (p. 664). Information and digital studies offer an interdisciplinary position from which to study global gender and sexual subjectivities. The dating apps explored in this study are designed and used in the context of white, Western, male-dominated, heterosexual, Christian contexts, contributing to further understanding of how technologies steward what Dinerstein (2006) calls "Euro-American myths." Dinerstein posits that new technologies maintain myths of progress and white Western superiority. This study demonstrates

that dating apps help maintain myths of cisnormativity and heteronormativity as well, both contributing to and complicating further understanding of technocultural features at work in emerging technologies.

Dating apps have changed romantic relationships in a variety of ways. How we understand identity, the self, and processes of subjectivity now involves new and emerging technologies (Castells, 1997/2010). Theories of the self that explore ways information and digital technologies have contributed to new understandings of identity, subjectivity, and agency, particularly around gender and sexuality, are informed by queer and transfeminist scholarship. This study contributes to ongoing conversations about how societal norms are increasingly embedded in menu-driven identities that often function to uphold dominant ideologies. Gender is baked into information and digital technologies in ways that are not easily de-programmed (Bivens and Haimson, 2016; Bivens, 2017; Bivens and Hoque, 2018). This empirical study contributes to gender theory conversations by attending to new forms of knowledge constructed in relation to new and emerging technologies.

The double stigma participants described—feeling excluded from Christian communities for being queer while also feeling excluded from queer communities for being Christian—extends beyond experiences of individuals and communities. In queer studies, being queer and religious is framed in us vs. them terms—those who are religious (they) hate those who are queer (us) (Puar, 2014). Puar notes that the inverse—those who are queer (they) hate those who are religious (us)—is important to consider as well. In what ways might deconstruction of this oppositional binary, especially in American Christian contexts, contribute to a growing sense of homonationalist exceptionalism? As noted in Chapter 2, homonationalism is a sense of pride in being a nation that accepts homosexuality as normal, so long as marriage and family remain primary goals. This study contributes to conversations in religious studies exploring queer religious subjectivities and the deconstruction of queer/religious binaries. Queer Christians are an understudied group, and as queer Christian communities continue grow in America, it is important to cultivate understanding of how their acceptance in American society might contribute to American homonationalism.

Religion is a unique form of culture that many of the world's religious adherents argue is more than merely cultural (Wellman and Lombardi, 2012; Prentiss, 2003). As discussed previously, many aspects of religious worldviews become unconscious presuppositions within culture. Religious worldviews can be mythic in their authorizing capacities of gender, sexuality, and relationship norms. Participants in this study resisted the norming influences of "truth games" leaders of their church communities and, for some, family members were playing. Religion, as a technology of power, does not determine normal behavior, but rather demarcates norms that adherents are forced to face and either accept or reject. Individuals, on their own or with the help of others, can and do resist norming influences of their Christian traditions and transform themselves into a different kind of Christian subject. Queer Christians are doing just that: resisting and reorienting their understanding of who they are in relation to God's kingdom to be more inclusive of gender, sexual, and relationship diversities (GSRD). Their experiences of disorientation and re-orientation allow them to depart from straight and narrow paths built by their often conservative and evangelical religious gatekeepers and pave new inroads to God's Kingdom.

This study joins ongoing conversations in queer Christian theology that explore how human relationships inform Christian knowledge about God. Religious ideologies embedded in digital artifacts have the potential for powerful impact, just as religions, when rooted in a matrix of multiple power relations, produce truths that persist as taken-for-granted, God-given, and reflective of the natural order of the created world. It is important to understand how Christian heteronormativity and cisnormativity underpin technological advances.

6.6.1 Future Work

Commodification of queer Christian dating app users remains an underanalyzed aspect of dating app data cultures that this study begins to explore. This study sets the stage for more work to explore dating app data cultures from user perspectives, as well as from the perspective of dating app designers. A research agenda to extend this work includes further user studies of queer Christians examining their understanding of how user data is used in

matching and marketing the self to others. In addition, more work is needed to explore the perspectives of dating app designers and developers. Believr, an LGBTQ+ Christian dating app was released just after I finished my dating app walkthroughs. An ethnography of the development and use of Believr would extend understanding of users who are exposed to increased stigma and violence through dating apps. Through immersion in a particular, targeted dating app culture, an ethnographic approach offers insight into the ways dating app data are designed and used by a dating app company, led by queer Christians, who have an invested interest in serving their community.

6.7 Summary

The mystery of finding a perfect match made in heaven for Christians has often been narrated through clichés like, *God knows me better than I know myself*, *God has wonderful plans for my life*, and *God will provide the right person at the right time.* Dating apps are on their way to moving the mysteries of matchmaking away from heaven and into a new space—cyberspace. Instead of looking to heaven, dating apps invite users to look to cyberspace to find their perfect match. The not-so-heavenly cloud is full of data and algorithms that analyze fine-grained user behaviors across multiple platforms with claims of knowing more than any human could ever know. On the other hand, dating apps expect users to know themselves well in order to match them successfully. They require users to know their gender identity and sexual orientation at the time they sign-up. They expect them to know the kinds of people they tend to desire and how to describe them. However, after collecting user data, apps propose to take what users know and infer what's best for them by way of expert matchmaking systems and scientific research. eharmony and okcupid ask users to answer more questions to get better matches. Compatibility is calculated based on some unknown formula and then presented to the users as truth. Compatability and match percentages basically say to users, "we are 96% sure you two will like each other." Hinge goes a step further and bases their matching system on a Nobel Prize winning algorithm offering a "Most Compatible Match" (Hinge, 2019). This rhetoric signals that Hinge is an expert

system at knowing what users want and how to connect users with desiring and desirable others. Nevertheless, queer Christians are still searching.

Queer christian participants expressed their dependence on dating apps as a technological solution to helping them find partners that appeared otherwise unreachable. Yet, they were skeptical. They described their dependence on gender in understanding their own desires and the ways gender and orientation of desires toward or away from particular genders felt innate and unavoidable and an important part of what it means to be human. Many of them discussed feeling that God made them this way for a reason and one of those reasons was to display the beauty of diversity and complexity in God's creation. Ultimately, my analysis reveals how queer Christians know and express gender and religious identities on dating apps, but dating apps do not allow for this complexity to be easily visible or searchable. Queer Christians wrestle with dominant narratives, deviate from social scripts, and resist condemnation to a life without hope for loving partnerships. Dating apps offer fine-grained means of seeking and finding a match made in heaven while simultaneously constructing a hell-hole of exclusionary, discriminatory, and oppressive binary categories. Still, queer Christians depend on dating apps, both to do queer identity work **and** to help them seek and find their match made in heaven.

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Appendix A
TABLE OF GENDER CATEGORIES

Figure A.1 is a chart of the most frequently used gender terms by number of apps that used each one.

For each dating app, I scrolled through lists of gender options and checked them off on a spreadsheet. The tables on the following pages include each unique term that was included on an app, even if it was semantically similar to another term. I alphabetized the list to see semantically similar terms more clearly.

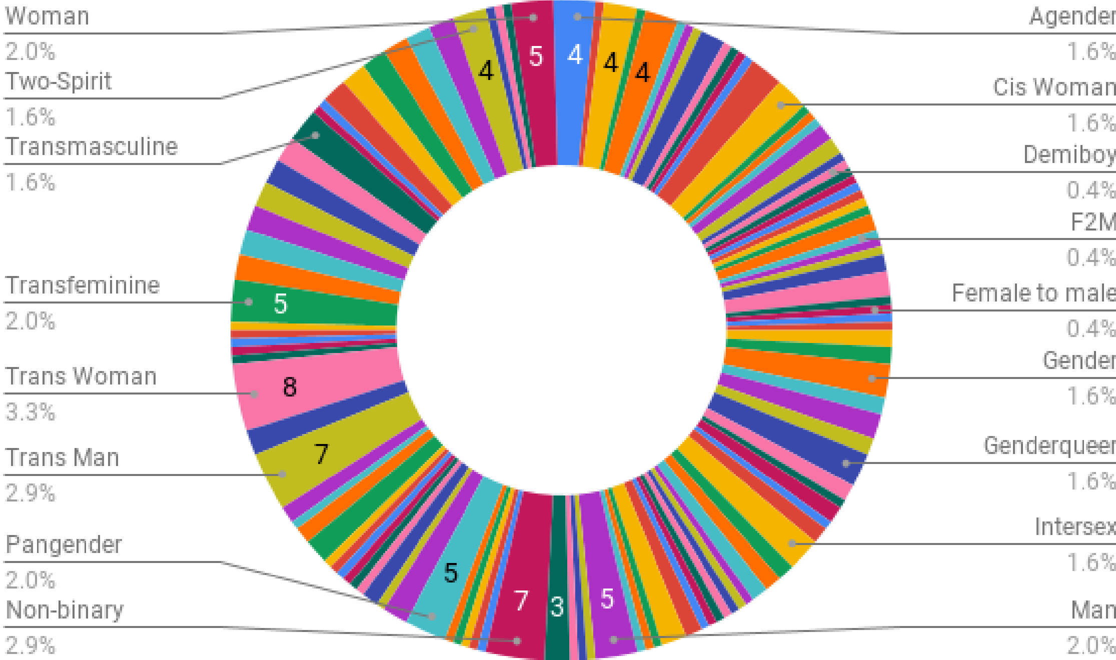

Figure A.1: Most Frequently Used Gender Terms

Gender (User)	Bumble	eHarmony	Facebook	Grindr	Her	HILY	Hinge	OKcupid	TAIMI	Tinder
(total)	*75*	*2*	*5*	*11*	*16*	*3*	*10*	*20*	*6*	*51*
Agender	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
akava'ine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Androgyne	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Androgynes	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Androgynous	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
aravani	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Asexual	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
bandhu	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Bigender	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Brothaboy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Cis	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cis Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cis Male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cis Man	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Cis Woman	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Cisgender	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cisgender Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cisgender Male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cisgender Man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Cisgender Woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Crossdresser	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Demiboy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Demifemale	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Demigirl	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Demiguy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Demimale	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Demiman	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Demiwoman	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Enby	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
F2M	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
fa'afafine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
fakaleiti	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Female	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐
Female to male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Female to male trans man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Female to male transgender man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Female to male transsexual man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
FTM	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gender Fluid	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Gender neutral	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Gender Nonconforming	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Gender questioning	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Gender Variant	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Genderfluid	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐

Gender (User)	Bumble	eHarmony	Facebook	Grindr	Her	HILY	Hinge	OKcupid	TAIMI	Tinder
Genderqueer	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Hijra	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
I use another term	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Icon of Man	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
Icon of Unicorn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
Icon of Woman	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
Intersex	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☑	☐
Intersex man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Intersex person	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Intersex woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
katoey	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
khwaja sira	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
kua xing nan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
kwaa-sing-bit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
M2F	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
mahu	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
mak nyah	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Male	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐
Male to Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Male to female trans woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Male to female transgender woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Male to female transsexual woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Man	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
mangalamukhi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
MTF	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Neither	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Neutrois	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Non-binary	☑	☐	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑
Non-Binary Person	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Non-conforming	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Non-Gendered	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Palopa	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Pangender	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
Polygender	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Queer	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Questioning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Sistagirl	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
T* man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
T* woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
tangata ira tane	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Third Gender	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐

Gender (User)	Bumble	eHarmony	Facebook	Grindr	Her	HILY	Hinge	OKcupid	TAIMI	Tinder
thirunambi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Trans	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Trans Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐
trans laki-laki	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Trans Male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐
Trans Man	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
Trans Person	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Trans Woman	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑
Trans Womxn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trans*Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trans*Male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trans*Person	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trans*Woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transfeminine	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
Transgender	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transgender Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transgender Male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transgender Man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transgender Person	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transgender Woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transmasculine	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
transpinay	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
transpinoy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Transsexual	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transsexual Female	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transsexual Male	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transsexual Man	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transsexual Person	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Transsexual Woman	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑
Two-Spirit	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Two* person	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
vakasalewalewa	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
waria	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Woman	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑
Womxn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix B

TABLE OF RELIGION CATEGORIES

Category	Sub-category	Bumble	eHarmony	FB	Grindr	Her	HILY	Hinge	OKcupid	Taimi	Tinder
Religion (user profile)		14	25	12	0	14	8	9	9	0	0
	Agnostic	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Atheist	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Baha'i	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Buddhism	Buddhist	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐
	Cao Dai	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Catholic (Bumble added after	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Christianity	Christian	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Christian Science	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Church of Hayley Kiyoko	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Confucianism	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hinduism	Hindu	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Jain	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Judaism	Jewish	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Metaphysical	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Mormon (Bumble added afte	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Muslim/Islam	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Neither religious nor spiritual	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	New Age	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Non-religious	Not Religious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Other	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Pagan	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Prefer not to say	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Rastafarian	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Scientology	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Shinto	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Sikh	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Spiritual	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
	Spiritual but not religious	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Taoism	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Tenrikyo	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Unitarian Universalism	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Wiccan	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Zoroastrian	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	radio buttons	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐
	checkboxes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
	Checkboxes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C
QUALITATIVE CODING GUIDE

Subjectivity and queer identity work are main concerns of this work. I analyze queer identity work along three main themes, outlined on the following pages. In the final revision of my codebook, I grouped key conceptual themes under three main themes. I identified key sub-themes and emergent themes and then reviewed the coded passages and analyzed them in relation to each other, and in relation to historical, ideological, and cultural contexts. The codebook inludes source materials that informed the main themes.

MAIN THEMES	Key Themes and Sub-themes	Working Definition	Sources
Sources and Contingencies of Knowledge	Power-Dominance: ● Religious ● Platform ● Family ● Bible ● Pastor/Church ● Dating Rituals ● Social Scripts	Power structures, social and cultural practices that normalize certain behaviors over other behaviors including institutional influences, constraints between people, power structures embedded in particular platform interfaces or associated with particular communities	Foucault (various)
	Articulation of the Self	Self-identification and material ties to historical events and social structures	O'Brien, 2004; Alcoff, 2006: Foucault, 1988
	Contradiction	Description of beliefs about identities that are in conflict, primarily focused on gender and Christianity, but also includes race	O'Brien, 2004
	Identities: ● Gender ● Sexuality ● Christianity ● Race ● Class	Identification with terms that designate how they see themselves, how they want others to see them, or how they see or want to see others. Identity categories in apps and how they are presented to users.	Various
	Relationships	Descriptions of partnerships as monogamous, longterm, short term, hookups, etc. Arrangements of determining matching criteria in apps.	Barker, 2017
	Authenticity	Manufacturing and performing of identities or experiences of others identities that depends greatly on context (static or absolute conception of authenticity should be resisted)	Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016; Duguay, 2017

Definitional excesses	Inclusion/Exclusion	Access or lack of access to categories that describe identities, or allow filtering for meaningful categories. Description of experiences of inclusion/exclusion in communities/on apps. The ways qualities are selected or avoided in profiles. The range of broader/narrower identity categories than expected.	Hoffmann, 2020; Enke, 2012; Ahmed, 2006, 2012
	Overflow	Way users adapt when categories aren't enough or don't quite fit.	Duguay, 2017
	Resilience	Bounce-back from difficult experiences, sticking with something that is hard	Emerged from interviews
Activism and Allyship	Respectability	a set of beliefs holding that conformity to prescribed mainstream standards of appearance and behavior will protect a person who is part of a marginalized group	Ward, 2008; Enke, 2012
	Professionalism	Framing diversity efforts as skilled work.	Ward, 2008, Wilchins, 2014
	Instrumentalization	Features of diversity and inclusion in apps positioned as doing the work of diversity and inclusion.	Weber, 2010
	Commodification	Marketing of app as diverse and inclusive as well as ways users can market themselves as diverse and inclusive	Hoffmann, 2020