

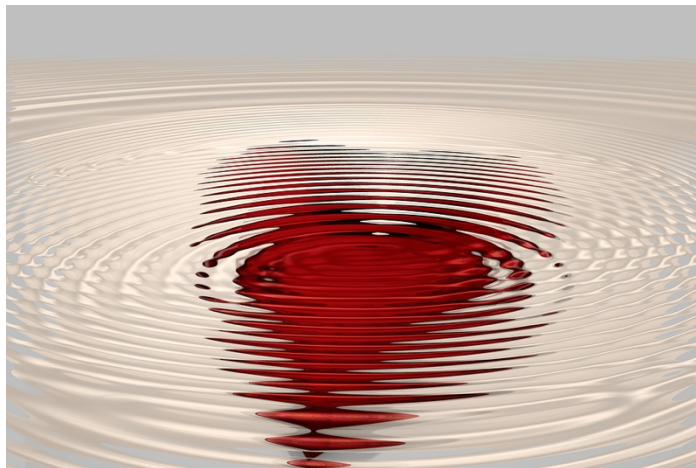
Tinder: The Marketplace for Love

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Online dating has become a global phenomenon within contemporary society with one in five relationships now starting online (Match.com, 2010) and Tinder ranking the third most popular online dating service in the UK (Statista, 2017). Clearly, wider societal changes are forcing the dynamics of social relationships to adapt. Thus, this contribution will explore and assess how contemporary consumerist values, technological innovations, and increased individualisation have come to influence our private sphere.

Late modern society has become saturated with technology and obsessed with the possession of knowledge. Webster (2006) illustrates the concept of what he refers to as the information society with five definitions, which are;

technological, economic, occupational, spatial and cultural. Arguably, the most visible aspects of the information era are the increasing influence of ICTs, specifically mobile phones and the internet which are easily accessible to the majority, making the downloading of dating apps such as Tinder effortless. Technological innovations, have also enabled a reconstruction of place, time and space within the information society.



Castells (1996) suggests that networks are fundamental components of contemporary society, creating new global flows of information. This is beneficial for the economy as it bases its productivity and efficiency on the continual loop of knowledge and information being fed back into the production process. Not only are time-space relations radically relieved within the industry, but also personally, as individuals connect with others and build relationships without physically coming together (Wellman, 2001).

However, it could be argued that information networks have been around since the invention of the telegram and postal

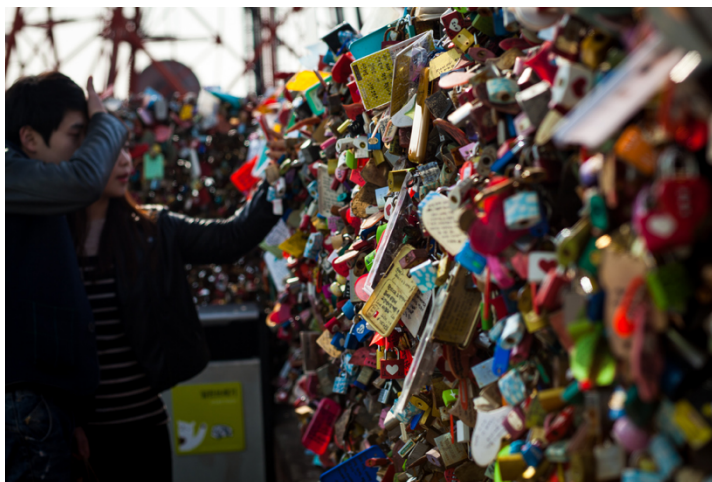
services and therefore are not a new phenomenon as Castells suggests (Webster, 2006). The increase of information in social circulation has also impacted our way of life as we are constantly bombarded with advertisements leading society to become obsessed with purchasing consumer goods with the intention to symbolise individual identities. However, Baudrillard (1983) argues that the postmodern era is so overwhelmed

with symbols and signs that meanings have simply dissolved as 'we are in a universe where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning' (Baudrillard, 1983: 95). This is therefore a downfall of late modernity as we can no longer distinguish between what is real and what is not (Baudrillard, 1994).

The arrival of the information society has not only facilitated wider structural changes in the social, economic and cultural sphere, but it has also led to changes in intimacy and personal life. According to Giddens (1992), the intention of relationships and marriage has moved away from economic gains of securing of wealth, power, and status, to modern romantic love that involves finding one person to live happily ever after with. However, in this

late modern era, love has become more confluent. Thus, relationships are more active, open, and self-reflective.

The contemporary intention of a relationship is no longer marriage, but happiness, and the sexual and emotional equality of men and women. This is illustrated by rising divorce rates and the disappearance of the nuclear family (ONS, 2017). This transformation of intimacy is also a product of the 'growth of individualism and the prioritising of the selfish self over the needs of others' (Smart, 2007: 14) within contemporary society. As society becomes more reflexive, individuals actively engage in the construction of their own lives, they are no longer passive or born with a route, and



thus will not stay in a relationship against all odds. However, Bauman (2003) is pessimistic of love within contemporary liquid modern times as individuals constantly fall in and out of love leading to frailty of human bonds and increasing feelings of insecurity. Particularly, increasing virtual connections make human relationships unstable as they are 'easy to enter and to exit' as 'you can always press 'delete'' (Bauman, 2003: xii). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2005) acknowledge that the nature of love is changing with accordance to the increasing reflexivity of social ties. However, though love in contemporary society has become more elusive, simultaneously, it has become more important than ever before. Individuals avoid loneliness from the weakening of social bonds

by seeking romantic fulfilment.

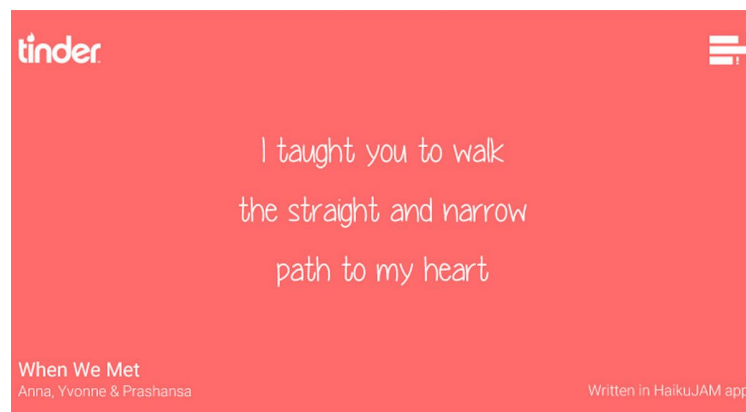
Thus, love within contemporary society has the potential to create opportunities of democracy, or chaos, within personal life. On the other hand, it can be argued that changing

expectations and practises of relationships along with the role of reflexivity and choice has created a more tolerant culture, more accepting of differences (Weeks, 2007). This is demonstrated by the emergence of online dating services specifically for individuals who identify as homosexual or bisexual such as Grindr. Therefore, increasing democracy is a positive feature of late modernity.

However, although much has changed for the better, inequalities still exist. Social media and other online services are constantly interrogating users about their relationship

status so that others can easily see if they are 'on the market'. Thus, changing intimacies reflect society's obsession with purchasing consumer goods. Unlimited choice within consumer society creates the attitude that if one is not satisfied with a product they can simply just replace it (Featherstone, 1991). Thus, this consumer value is reflected through contemporary dating habits as individuals are easily unfulfilled in relationships and assume they can easily find a more suitable partner (Giddens, 1991). Finding a partner online can be compared to online shopping. Consequently, Tinder becomes merely a catalogue filled with advertisements of products to consume. Therefore, 'the pattern of relationships between customers and commodities defines the patterns of relationships between individuals' (Bauman, 2015: n.p.).

Essentially, scrolling through Tinder is the same as window shopping. Not only do online dating services such as Tinder commodify relationships, they also establish an elite form of dating and create hierarchy and by offering subscription services. For instance, for as much as £7.49 per month you can access exclusive features with Tinder Gold. This purchase gives free Boosts, and the app brands this feature as enabling the user to 'skip the queue' in the same way as lining up to pay for a product in a shop. The commodification of relationships and the creation of hierarchy within dating is therefore a negative feature of late modernity.



As well as consumerism, another contemporary feature of the capitalist economic system is rationalisation. The McDonaldisation Thesis looks at how many interactive service jobs have become very highly rationalised. Ritzer (2015) suggests that efficiency, predictably, control and calculability are characteristics that all appeal to consumers and make a business successful. I believe that these qualities can be seen within online dating services such as Tinder making them appealing to consumers. Firstly, the app is quick and easy to download and available on a variety of devices. Once within the app, the controls could not be more efficient as you simply just swipe right to suggest that you are interested in an individual, and swipe left to dismiss them.

As for predictability, there are few surprises with Tinder as their simple slogan 'Swipe. Match. Chat. Meet' is straightforward and the

app is consistent in that it does not divert from the features advertised. Tinder also has elements of control by only displaying a few characteristics

about users such as a name, age, gender and profile picture. This also allows for calculability as social and physical characteristics are reduced merely to measurable tick boxes. This can be considered a negative aspect of late modernity as love becomes merely quantifiable, and in the process, the human person, gets forgotten (Bauman, 2015).

As well as living in a liquid, consumer and information-based society, Beck (1992)

suggests that we are also living in risk society. Wider social, economic, and cultural changes have created new threats and the contemporary world is a 'dangerous place in which we are constantly confronted with risk' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007: 3). Giddens' concept of reflexive modernisation refers to the increased self-awareness of society as individuals can construct their world based on risk assessment rather than previous methods of following traditions (Webster, 2006).

Thus, modernity becomes more reflexive as individuals are set free from structural constraints. However, this confronts society with a new set of global hazards and uncertainties. On the one hand, increased individualisation is a positive feature of late-modernity as new relationships can be chosen freely and maintained reflexively without influence from restraints such as class. However, individualised lifestyles mean people prioritise themselves and reflexively construct their social life. Thus, collectiveness fragments as 'more and more individuals are encouraged to perform as a 'Me and Co.', selling themselves on the marketplace' (Beck, 2000: 3).

A downfall of increased individualisation in late-modern times is that the increased focus on the self is accompanied by anxiety and has created a culture dependent on consumption and therapy due to lack of traditions and security (Furedi, 2003). Also, the freedom from tradition to reflexively chose your partner is only reflected in Western Cultures as arranged marriages are still prevalent within contemporary society.

This suggests that not only is risk distributed unequally (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007), but the development of risk consciousness is also inequitable. Technological innovations are also accompanied by risk. Online dating

services such as Tinder have seen many incidents of what is known as 'catfishing'; when individuals adopt online fictional identities to lure others into a relationship. Although, creating online personas is empowering for some, when technology is abused it can become a risk (Giddens, 2006). Therefore, contemporary risks are a negative feature of late-modernity.

In conclusion, it is important to note that intimacy is more complex than these voices suggest. Nevertheless, it is clear that cultural and economic changes within contemporary society such as increased individualisation, consumerist values and technological innovations have radiated into our private sphere and influenced the dynamics of social relationships. Online dating services such as Tinder create new methods of finding love, and its popularity highlights the importance of relationship. However, it could be argued that attitudes are focused on finding 'the one' romantic love, when in reality, society is saturated with 'the one night' liquid love leading to uncertainty and anxiety.

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