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'What's my score?': the complexities of straight male Geo-Social Networking Application use

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ABSTRACT

Millions of people around the world use Geo-Social Networking Applications (GSNAs) to connect with new people and potential sexual partners. Using data from a broad study of GSNA users, this paper explores GSNA use by straight men and the implications on their positionality, masculinity, and for their leisure. Straight men showed that although they speak out against traditional masculine norms in their offline lives, on GSNAs they enact and embrace hegemonic norms of dating. This dualistic (re)presentation demonstrates some of the complexities of how contemporary leisure spaces (like dating) become digitally mediated, but maintain deep human-to-human involvement and traditionalist social expectations.

Worldwide, there were 194 billion mobile app downloads in 2018, and users in mature markets like Canada and the US spend, on-average, 3 hours a day using mobile apps (Petrequin, 2019). For some, that time is spent using Geo-Social Networking Applications (GSNAs[1]) to connect with new people and potential sexual partners. GSNAs, like other apps, cause us to change behaviours, act differently, or treat others differently (Shelton et al., 2015; Thaler, 2014). Users curate photos and profiles to appear in certain ways to potential partners, knowingly or not, enacting different social norms online than face to face (Hobbs et al., 2017). GSNAs have the power to change behaviour.

GSNAs are not dating sites but rather real-time, real-distance, GPS-based sorting mechanisms, where users engage 'for many purposes, such as making friends, having sexual encounters, or selling services (e.g. personal training), and not just for dating' (Bartone, 2018, p. 508). Given their massive popularity (e.g. Tinder boasts over two billion views per day (Tinder Inc, 2019), and Grindr has been downloaded more than 30 million times (Dating Sites Reviews, 2019)), and near-ubiquity in mature mobile markets, dating apps and GSNAs have received research attention across a number of fields. Research on GSNAs explores a variety of social impacts including: social changes to intimacy (Filice et al., 2020; Hobbs et al., 2017) the psycho-social impacts of profile development and maintenance (Blackwell et al., 2015; Siibak, 2010; Ward, 2017), and male body-work and self-pornography using profiles (Hakim, 2018; Tziallas, 2015). There is also a growing body of social and sexually-based inquiries on men who have sex with men (e.g. Bartone, 2018; Brubaker et al., 2016; Filice et al., 2019; Roth, 2014). The growing research and consumer attention to these apps mirrors increased usership, and follows in-step with the ubiquity of mobile computing, addressing significant influences on social norms, lives, and leisure practices related to digital technology. Lacking in the literature, however, are both leisure scholarship on these apps, as well as a particular focus on masculinity and the experiences of straight men. Using data from a larger project, here we explore straight men's representations of masculinity as they used GSNAs. GSNA use created disparity

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between what straight male participants said about how they lived, how they considered men's places in sex/gender/power relationships, and what they did as users.

Leisure in digital spaces

Mobile applications, especially GSNAs, are ideal places to situate a discussion about leisure in digital spaces since much of our leisure activity is now situated on, or complemented by, digital platforms (Silk et al., 2016). Major journals have published special issues on leisure and digitality, including special issues in *Leisure Sciences* on digital leisure studies (Spencer Schultz & McKeown, 2018), and *Leisure Studies* on digital leisure cultures (Lupton, 2016). Theorisation on the interplay between leisure and digitality is ongoing (Carnicelli et al., 2017; Spracklen, 2015), including work on virtual leisure worlds (Wearing, 2017), as well as sport and digitality (Wood et al., 2019). The use of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are discussed repeatedly as leisure (Janković et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2019; Rose & Spencer, 2016). Digital leisure practices are being explored across the lifespan, including the lives of young people (Valtchanov & Parry, 2017), mothers (Valtchanov et al., 2016), and older adults (Genoe et al., 2018; Lifshitz et al., 2018; Nimrod et al., 2015). Integration of mobile applications into leisure time physical activity is also under investigation (Layland et al., 2018).

The breadth of theorisation on leisure and digitality provides a variety of perspectives about whether leisure in digital contexts is separate and distinct from analogue leisure. Given the messiness of leisure, work, and personal time in a digitised world (Rose & Spencer, 2016), we agree with Spracklen (2015) that, 'the Net [mobile or otherwise] is nothing special or unique; it is just another leisure space where people try to do things communicatively, under the constraints and increasing pressure of instrumentality' (p. 93). There is an ever-increasing ubiquity of digital entanglement in our lives (Silk et al., 2016), and Lupton (2014, 2018) argues we are permanent digital-cyborg assemblages, making digitality always embedded in leisure, and leisure in digitality. Leisure that takes place solely within a digital platform/space, or is mediated or moderated by digital technologies cannot be argued to be 'ontologically distinct from any other kind of leisure' (Spracklen, 2015, p. 49).

GSNAs in particular are interesting locales for the study of leisure in digital spaces, as meetings and interactions take place through the apps, often with the express intent of meeting face-to-face. Due to this multi-modal personal involvement, GSNAs have changed the landscape of connecting, dating, hooking up, and casual sexual encounters (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015; Cousineau et al., 2018; Roth, 2014), and the leisure landscape around dating and relationship building is being discussed (McKeown & Parry, 2019). Particularly within the gay male community, GSNAs have modified existing sexual leisure hook-up culture (Gudelunas, 2012); for example, bringing hook up culture online has modified the temporality and locality of the practice (Cousineau et al., 2018), rather than the practice itself. GSNAs, then, reposition a leisure practice rather than invent a new one, affirming the assertions of Rose and Spencer (2016), as well as Spracklen (2015), that 'digital' leisure lacks ontological distinctiveness from other forms of leisure.[2]

GSNAs

GSNAs are a type of mobile application that use 'mobile, internet-connected, global positioning system (GPS)-enabled devices' (Cousineau et al., 2018, p. 97), to access user location data, and places them within an algorithmically sorted proximity association to other users. There are two main ways that GSNAs connect users using this proximity data. The first is a matrix-based user landing page where users see a curated collection of others they can reach out to and connect with (Brubaker et al., 2016). This is the structure used by Grindr, a GSNA for men who have sex with men, and the most popular GSNA in the world (Filice et al., 2019). The second way that GSNAs are structured to present user profiles to other users is through individual profiles. In this case, users are presented with the profile

picture of other users one at a time, and can choose to pursue connection with that user. (Ward, 2017). This method of sorting is used by both Tinder and Bumble, the apps discussed in this paper. Both methods of presenting possible matches to users use physical proximity as a primary sorting mechanism before any personal filters are applied. Users always see others closest to them geographically.

There are a wide variety of GSNAs, each serving different populations across the sexuality and gender spectrums.[3] Previous study of GSNAs has focused on various issues, including the dynamics of meeting and developing sexual relationships through app use (Sumter et al., 2017), the changes to dating and intimacy brought by dating app use (Hobbs et al., 2017), and the pathologization of casual sex (Choi et al., 2016). In addition, some authors are exploring dating apps outside of sex and relationship contexts, including locations for trolling (March et al., 2017), play (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016), and social resistance (F. Shaw, 2016).

Our straight male participants discussed the use of two GSNAs, *Tinder* and *Bumble*. Both support matches for a variety of sexual identities, with matches made through reviewing photos and profiles. Users are presented with the main profile photo of a user meeting their sorting criteria (users can filter their matches based on a variety of factors including age, geographical distance, sexual identity, and other preferences), and they can choose to pursue a match with them or remove them from their curated list.

Tinder is the leader in heterosexual GSNAs, operating in over 190 countries with two billion views per day (Tinder Inc, 2019). Bumble is an offshoot of Tinder, where women must be the first to engage through messages after a match (Ratchford, 2015). The women message first rule is meant to empower its female users and limit the potential for harassment and abuse (Bumble, 2019), although questions and critiques about the efficacy of this approach remain. Who must initiate communication is a minor difference relative to the similarities in functionality and intent.

As for motivation, Carpenter and McEwan (2016) explored the motivations of those using dating apps with a sample of (mostly) straight participants and found that although the prevailing reason was for entertainment, sexual sensation seeking was also significant. Sumter et al. (2017) also uncovered use of dating apps in young people was for self-validation, excitement, and sex. The straight men in this study largely shared motivational categories for use with previous research. Their engagement was moderated by the infrastructural demands of the apps themselves, in particular profile creation and curation, and the social demands they felt placed on them as men.

Self-presentation and profiles

As the front-facing aspect of applications for both users and observers, profiles and the presentation of self are important topics for inquiry. GSNAs are a space where users construct a sense of self they hope others will find attractive (Hakim, 2018). Using the profile as a kind of sales centre, individuals market the self as a product for consumption by the (sometimes faceless) other (Mowlabocus, 2010). As a result of this self-construction, users are sceptical of others as they enter the 'buyer's club' of GSNA use (Cousineau et al., 2018, p. 105).

There is a large body of research that discusses the effects of profiles and profile curation on women and women's bodies (Petrychyn et al., 2020; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Similar pressures identified in these works are also present for men, and the enactment of sexuality, masculinities, and hegemony in profile curation holds an important place in the GSNA and social media literature (Giaccardi et al., 2016; Hakim, 2018; Siibak, 2010). Each of these studies explored profile and social media representations by men finding social constructs of masculinity and masculine representations had significant effects on profile choices.

Masculinities and gender

Performance of gender is one way we differentiate between people, control power and relationships, and create a binary where in Western sex/gender systems, men hold power and influence over women (Butler, 1990; Rubin, 2009). These regimes of gendered performance create hierarchies between men, where one type of masculinity and masculine performance is valued above others; a concept described as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity, as a set of rules and social expectations, dictates important sex, power, and relationship roles for men (Duncanson, 2015; Johnson & Cousineau, 2018; Szabo, 2014). Changing social norms notwithstanding, traditional masculine roles of provider, leader, and 'king of the castle' remain influential in the dating lives of men (Kimmel, 2017), and young men continue to enact the troubling gendered promiscuity dualism of male 'studs' and female 'sluts' (Flood, 2013; Lai & Hynie, 2011). As a result, men are confronted with both calls to enact masculinities in new ways reflexive of changing social norms, and deep western traditionalism of misogynistic and patriarchal actions.

Gender and sexuality are inextricably linked in Western culture in what Gayle Rubin (2009) called 'sex/gender systems.' For Rubin these systems are 'set[s] of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity' (p. 159). Through sex/gender systems, and the constructed power relationships that come along with them, many men in Western traditions find entitlement to women, women's bodies, and sex (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2017). The dominant ideological messages around gender and sexuality are created, perpetuated, maintained, and enforced in social institutions and structures, making dominant hegemonic categories like masculinity seem natural and/or unproblematic. Hegemonic masculinity is also deeply steeped in heteronormative social expectations, where the enacting of 'real' manliness is couched in heterosexual conquests (Connell, 2005). Foucault's (1978) *History of Sexuality* encouraged researchers to reason that sexuality is historically based on, and produced by, the dominant's use of power, creating and organising social systems, social discourses, social process, and social products. The dominant culture uses these structures to influence individuals' production and consumption of ideologies about social identities (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; Harding, 1998).

Consequently, people are both explicitly and implicitly compelled *to be* a gender, and *to express* that gender through the appropriate dominant cultural expressions of sexuality at that historic moment. Although gay and straight men are influenced and affected by the elements of body morphology and public stature in similar ways, the power and control inherent in heterosexual relationships (sexual or otherwise) under patriarchy are powerful stimuli for straight men to reach for hegemonic norms. An important aspect of Connell's theorisation is that the masculine hegemon is not static, but rather a moving target which changes with time and cultural pressure (Messerschmidt, 2018). The malleability of the hegemonic ideal allows for changes in the enactment of masculinity, such as the 'softening' described by McCormack and Anderson (2010) or the 'inclusive masculinity' of Anderson and McGuire (2010), while maintaining its dominant positioning. While the use of 'softening' is meant as a counterpoint to the 'hardness' (both physical and emotional) of stereotypical western understandings of masculinity, the perpetuation of a hard-soft binary, even as it is used to demonstrate changing dynamics of masculine representation, is not likely to escape a good-bad simile in colloquial understanding. We need only look as far as men's rights communities online to see how a 'softer' masculinity is perceived by men with traditionalist sex/gender views (Cousineau, 2020). The problematic use of 'softening' notwithstanding, these changes are an essential part of maintaining masculinity as a cultural ideal in changing times, much like the rise of geek masculinity (Braithwaite, 2016) that coincides with the economic and cultural domination of digital technologies. Given the digital world is an extension of the 'real' one, we should not be surprised to find these complicated concepts and expectations materialise across the landscape of GSNAs.

Methodology

This analysis is part of a larger project focused on the role of GSNAs and experiences across multiple gender and sexual expressions. 45 users from various sexual (gay, straight, bi, asexual) and gender (woman, man, trans) identities were interviewed about GSNAs and the role that these applications had in their lives. We employed narrative inquiry to explore and interrogate experiences of users. Narrative inquiry empowers research participants through the use of personal thoughts and layers of recollection, guided by experience and the push/pull of discussing what is most salient during interviews (Costa & Matzner, 2013; Duffy, 2007).

A team of eight researchers gathered the data. Individuals were asked to interview participants by matching sexual and gender identities, a unique methodological decision with implications discussed in forthcoming work by the authors.

Prior to interviewing, research team members were given group training on the epistemological approach and methods of conducting narrative-focused interviews, organised around the research questions: (1) Are GSNAs influencing gender identities?; and (2) What impact (positive or negative) are GSNAs having on sexual relationships and subsequent quality of life? For this analysis, we asked: How do straight men engage with GSNAs, and does this reflect larger social norms of dating, relationships, and masculinity?

This paper focuses on the data from ten interviews of men who self-identified as straight, who were interviewed by two team members who also identified as straight. These men range in age from mid-20s to early 40s, but we found no significant differentiation based on their age. The men in our sample were mostly white (except for a participant who identified as Sri-Lankan and Cuban-American), and seeking women-identified partners using *Tinder* and *Bumble*. Data were reviewed exploring interesting themes through repeated readings and thematic code development, then cross-compared to determine if there were shared experiences between participants as they engaged with app use.

Findings

Men in this study showed an important and consistent juxtaposition between the way they discussed their personal masculinities and what they said and did when engaged with GSNAs. Each man discussed his own relationship to masculinity and male conduct in sexual and gendered relationships, being careful to highlight awareness of, and sensitivity to the complexities of hetero-relationship expectations and power. They also discussed hegemonic-type engagement with relationships and connections through their use of GSNAs. In this section we will discuss how these straight men positioned themselves as practicing conscious, modern masculinities – e.g. masculinities which were conscious and respectful of sex/gender power dynamics and a desire to actively counter them. We will then explore how they simultaneously engaged in target-hegemonic masculine behaviour on GSNAs. Lastly, we discuss how the digitally mediated nature of GSNAs as networking and leisure tools, created a technological otherness during GSNA use, permitting these men to live dualistic expressions of masculinity.

What it means to be a man

Understanding the dualistic expressions of masculinity of these straight men begins with their own views. The men in this study situated their family life, upbringing, or social settings as reasons they tried not to live 'traditional' masculinity, and saw this as an antiquated worldview. Each made a point to express awareness and acknowledge that pervasive sex/gender systems had significance in their lives and their (potential) partners. Phil, a self-described former jock who realised he was 'never going to go pro or get a scholarship,' discussed traditional masculinity as well as its treatment of women and sexual experience as 'the game:'

I'd like to say I identified with [jock masculinity] but as I matured, I grew out of it because there's a lot of very negative connotations … I don't know the word for it, but I'm going to use the word 'rape-culture' as a sense where women are very much objects that you conquer on a conquest and that you're supposed to use your sporting athletic ability to get that. Everything is in the phrase of a game. And if you're winning the game that means you have whether it's like the biggest muscles or the hottest or cutest girlfriend or the most sexual experiences.

Steve also used his peers as a way to measure and mediate his personal representation of masculinity, to explain the 'real man' has changed,

When I hear the term 'real man.' I think much more, I think back to more of like a baby boomer error concept. Just like, put on your suit and tie, stiff up your lip, and go get a job … But yeah, I feel like we have a different definition of that in my friends.

Rob, an immigrant used that experience to construct a view of masculinity, and also to critique the idea of a single 'correct' male identity.

It was my friends who grew up in Jamaica or from Ghana or from El Salvador or Brazil or French and Europe or Asia and South Asia, there are different ideas in how they project their masculinity and how they demonstrate it, but there's a lot in common. A lot of rules, right? … There are some guys who stereotype and all that kind of stuff but then they're also participating in a so-called 'feminine chores' like cooking. … That's the kind of stuff that someone like me who's observant would look around and see all this and be like "this is all bullshit!" The way they ask us to act a certain way and they all do this. … So I think, those scripts or whatever you want to say it.

With deeply religious parents, Cam also drew markers from those men around him. 'I even catch myself sometimes feeling more compelled to be wanting to be the bread winner, just things that I know, from reflection, it comes from the dominant narrative, but I can a lean towards that sometimes not because I intellectually think that, it's just how the culture brought me up'. Cam's awareness of cultural influences, and how they do not align with contemporary expectations, is borne out in the way he expresses his connection to expectations of men: 'I also done a lot of work to become more aware of my privilege as a white male and as a cis male, to not be attune in their emotions to just went to a place to drink beer. Those type of things that they are almost afraid of their emotions.'

Pete had similar issues but ascribes them to an artefact of his generation. 'Males tend to think I'm more on the sensitive side, so I've always just kind of been ragged about being gay … "Come on, fag." Whatever, but … that's just a standard, whatever.' Phil, Steve, and Rob developed their own conceptualisations of appropriate masculinity by observing ideals, across cultures, on the behaviours and outcomes of other men, limiting pejorative effects of what is permissible in social interactions and relationships. Pete articulates a generational shift, implying that homophobia inherent in his childhood engagement with masculinity are no longer issues. Cam's, deeply rooted in his home life, also expresses an understanding of the potentially detrimental effects of these conceptualisations of masculinity. In doing so, he tries 'to fight against that by being emotional vulnerable, which allows me not to treat other people as dominating way.' Cam's comments are complemented, or perhaps juxtaposed, by Darrin's repeated acknowledgement that an important part of meeting up through the use of GSNAs is his partners' belief that he will not harm them. 'I've gotten their cell phone number and we've connected via social media and verified that I'm not going to murder them, which I wouldn't ever do for the record. In case this gets subpoenaed.' Although said in jest, Darrin references his potential partners' fears of being murdered by him six different times in his interview, indicating that he is engaged in negotiating with a broader understanding that date-linked violence (sexual or otherwise) is a possible outcome when meeting new partners, especially online. An issue that he must navigate as he situates his position as an eligible partner. The gendered nature of the fear and mitigation strategies is laid bare as Darrin never references fear for his own safety in the same situation.

Buying into hegemonic culture on GSNAs

The way that the men used GSNAs was utilitarian, each of them understanding that while also meeting people, the underlying nature of the apps was to hook up for sex, or as entertainment. Phil explained 'unfortunately, the intention of these apps especially Tinder is a hookup piece. So, if you think you're going to meet prince charming on there, I hate to tell you sweetheart, you're kind of fishing with no bait.' Steve's reflected similarly,

> If someone says they're not into hookups, I just think bullshit and continue as usual because I am not buying it. Unless their profile pictures are taken in like, their church group.

As did Darrin: 'If I were a woman on Tinder and I was looking for a hookup, or to sleep with somebody, if I got on Tinder on a Saturday night, I had downloaded it for the first time, and I was looking to get laid that night it would be super easy because that's just the nature of men.'

These recognitions of the sex-based hook-up nature of GSNAs are indicative of the men buying into these social expectations, but also a lead-in to other more traditionally-oriented practices on the apps.

One of these is the expectation that men are the first to make contact while using GSNAs, especially Tinder: Steve said, 'The standard practice and expectation in Tinder is that the man messages first.' This expectation is so prevalent, in fact, that the other app (Bumble) creates an infrastructural barrier to men contacting women users first, and putting women in control of the interaction landscape. Interestingly, Phil's experience with this flipped communication paradigm did not result in instigation from matches beyond that first message, 'from what I can remember, in terms of asking someone out to meet [on Bumble], it has always come from me.' Where the infrastructural change can modify the communication paradigm at the beginning, common dating tropes around gender seem to play out regularly for the men. In fact, for some men, the output required in always making the first move requires a lot of energy,

> I don't always have the creative energy to put myself out there and have a creative, enticing first line on Tinder. It makes it easier when a woman has demonstrated interest at first and makes the first move. I can play off of that versus Tinder, where I have to do research and look at their bio and figure out whether I'm compatible with this person and then think about their interests. And then come up with something that is going to stand out and also not make me look like a total douche bag. (Darrin)

These men also play along in the construction of profiles and photos to display themselves. From some, like Rob, the underlying influence of the profile was deeply rooted in social pressure and idealised male body. 'You look in the mirror and go 'Oh okay. Why would anyone want to spend time with me? What are my selling features here?' … When I'm putting a profile together, I remember for Bumble … being like 'Oh shit, I don't know what I'm going to put in here, you know?.'" The pressure of putting the 'correct' things into his profile obviously weighed heavily on him, 'it's also putting yourself out, it really fucks with you, right? "Am I getting matches? Why am I getting matches?".' He was also acutely aware, the profile with photos is the only chance you get for the 'drive-by impression.'

> You can be just obsessed with people's perception of you and that would drive you nuts or you can just refuse to give into it and that can drive you nuts too because as a human being, you need to be mindful of "how am I making these mistakes? What's my impact here?"

Steve's view was slightly less self-aware, and certainly more cynical about profile construction. 'Honestly, I do not put that much effort into them. I should do more because it really makes a big difference but I guess I am just kind a little bit lazy … So it is like, a picture of me with a dog [hitchhiking] Argentina.' While he claims that his profile doesn't matter much to him, he also explained profiles 'seem to by and large relate to what they are trying to find. It is pretty logical,' which perhaps says something about Steve's unconscious GSNA use. Cam, as well as Paul, Joe, and Gerritt, on the other hand, seemed to care quite a lot about how they were represented in their

profiles. For each of them, profile pictures needed to represent their 'real' selves, 'so people can see that I am outgoing and really I am always on the move' (Paul), 'I try to represent myself and show that I'm kind of an interesting guy" (Joe), and 'I'm a person that does things' (Gerritt). Profile pictures for these men also needed to show who they were not, like Cam's living situation with other men. 'I would watch about talking that I lived with four other guys because I think that wasn't always a positive thing.' His reasoning was about being '[fit] into this frat house stereotype if I said I lived with a bunch of guys. Not like, "Oh, I'm actually kind of a professional who lives with a lot of other guys who do a lot of neat things in the community".' The concerns of the men in this study, although distinct from one-another, in many ways revolve around the complex dynamics of representing self through profiles and the dating/communication culture of GSNAs.

Technologically mediated space

The disparity between the counter-hegemonic self-representation of the participants during their interviews, and the way they discussed the apps and user perceptions is tied to the technologically mediated nature of GSNAs. The meaning and significance that GSNAs play in the lives of these men is co-constituted with the ways they use and choose to engage with that technology. 'I think it's interesting' explained Rob, 'how a lot of us in that society, we're really becoming more introverted. Rather than going to a sporting event, you watch a livestream of it. Or when you see a film in a theatre, I'll just watch it in bed at home.' Cam also discussed how technology is disconnecting people from face to face social interactions: 'We talk through texts, and those are different exchanges versus being like how you get to know someone through texts.' Darrin didn't mind this type of interaction saying that it was important that he and his matches 'had great textual chemistry. I trademarked that. But, texting, we had a good rapport via online communication,' since 'Tinder and Bumble, it's social media, again the same way that Instagram or Facebook is social media and it's engaging and it's something to do.'

Participants also shared that the technology of GSNAs is changing interactions in burgeoning intimate and sexual relationships, as well as how they end; 'I think that with social dating apps, it is moving the goal line as far as the quality of our exchanges too. One thing I've heard a lot from women is that it's more about making the connection and making the match. And once this match is made, the guy disappears' (Rob). Phil's treatment of GSNAs as games was another example of how technological mediation of social connection was taking place, 'we used it as a game. We would sit in our apartment go: "Okay, swipe-swipe-swipe," and then if we both got a match and we say "Okay, how fast can we get blocked or deleted by somebody?" We just say the worst things possible.'

Gerritt and Joe both lamented the emotional disconnection which came with the technological mediation of dating; 'I think it is really drawing away from an emotional connection. If people are looking for that on Tinder I think, in my opinion, making a poor choice just because Tinder kind of takes that away, that initial meeting of people' (Joe), and 'I just don't go out to meet people anymore. It's just not something you do' (Gerrit).The technology which served as a mediator between the and the women they connected with served as a buffer for the type of behaviour Phil discusses and he was conscious of the fact that he acted differently when using GSNAs. He said to be successful in making connections you have to 'be a bro in the moment and then break it down for your own needs later.' Rob also experienced GSNAs as a game space, thinking about imaginary points than people on the app, 'it leads to a more video-game aspect of it where it's just like "What's my score?" How many clicks do I have? Why don't I have enough? Oh, I got a bunch, but I don't like any of these people.' For Pete, this buffered communication was problematic; 'the app communication tends to be much shallower, you're just testing the waters with some bullshit conversation to see if there's any like feedback and whether or not it's even worth pursuing from that point.'

Together, these elements of technological mediation contribute to the dual representation of our participants, as the disconnected nature of the interface allows for it to be both game and dehumanised. Although these men acknowledged the issues, they did not seem to affect their

willingness to continue using the apps in searching for partners, and continued to use it in social and relationship-focused leisure time.

Discussion

This analysis highlights the relationship some straight men have between living as men aware of sex/gender systems, but simultaneously redeploying sex/gender paradigms when using GSNAs. Men still enacted hegemonic notions of power within relationship communication, and fell victim to the calls for specific representation of self by men seeking sexual partners (Bartone, 2018). The disparity between what they say and what they do is a symptom of living in changing sex/gender systems (Rubin, 2009), where norms are not consistent and still susceptible to traditional conceptualisations of masculinity. While trying to navigate the complexities of changing ideal masculine representations (Messerschmidt, 2018) in a technologically mediated landscape, the men represented here use a variety of tactics to navigate app use. Simultaneously mediating and moderating the sex/gender positioning of the men in this study, the technologies inherent in GSNAs, as well as representations of masculinities, are significant factors at play in straight male use.

Technologies

Platform and app development decisions are the most significant factors in user experience (Cousineau et al., 2018). Sometimes design elements have deep and practical roots, such as Bumble's women-contact-first interface. Some researchers believe that this feminist concept has failed (Bivens & Hoque, 2018), and our participants highlighted they were not the first to start conversations, but often carried them forward into face-to-face meetings with potential partners. For these men, the need to carry on the conversation was a combination of a glut of men on GSNAs relative to women, and a more traditionalist expression of sex/gender dynamics where the (hetero)-man should pursue his potential mate. Their frustration with this set of challenges is an expression of feelings about how the interfaces of new technologies remained out of step with rapidly changing gender expectations for men and women (Beasley, 2015; Dunlap & Johnson, 2013); speaking to the challenges, participants expressed with feeling the need to be the 'man' in a relationship, or the 'breadwinner.' Sex/gender expectations have a strong influence, with men reaching for a kind of traditionalism and control to give them meaning in their lives (Kimmel, 2017; Rubin, 2009). While some GSNAs set out to reshape leisure relations, both digitally and face to face, it was clear that many straight men feel constrained to think and act in ways they see as traditionally masculine.

Even while trying to be forthright about Tinder's purpose for users, Phil's use of the word 'sweetheart', his condescending tone about Tinder being void of relationship potential, and the prevalence of other participant-users to delete then return to the app when looking for hook-ups to 'just to see who is on there' and if they are 'still into you' (Joe) are strong evidence. Discussing the perils of traditionalist masculine behaviour, they cannot escape the deep social gender roles, and this manifests in their app use (Harris, 2009).

The impact of traditionalism extends into all parts of the app use with profiles and personal (re) presentations as no exception. Profiles and profile construction are as significant for most men as they are for women when curating online presence (Bartone, 2018; Mowlabocus, 2010; Thaler, 2014; Ward, 2017), perhaps working to equalise perceptions that only women face curatorial sex and gender representational pressures. Men, too, face deep social pressure for proper masculine representation through what Hickey-Moody (2019) calls 'cultural pedagogies of gender' where the performativity of masculinity is inextricable from assemblage (technological and social in this case) and affect (in how these straight men represent themselves in their GSNA profiles). Each man was concerned how they were represented in their profiles, and what their profiles really said about their prospect as a mate relative to social conventions (Blackwell et al., 2015).

Profiles

The profile representations discussed here, matched far better with the idea of men reaching for a hegemonic ideal than what these men said about masculinity and their places in society. This is explained, in part, by the changing landscape of idealised masculinity, and the lingering notion that there are separate 'real life' and digital selves (Carnicelli et al., 2017; Markham, 1998) causing us to assume that consequences are different, when we engage with others (or the machines of others) (Donath, 1999). As a social species, when we do not have to engage with or feel empathy by looking someone in the face, we are prone to behaviours and discourses that damage (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). Such is the case with the use of GSNAs and the experience of these straight men, who made decisions to ignore or delete the app (sometimes multiple times) as they were not feeling emotionally fulfilled nor engaged. They did not find the kinds of meaningful and non-exploitative relationships some of them said they desired – the types of relationships which signified important notions of their own representative masculinities. However, each of them went back to GSNAs (sometimes over and over again), citing different reasons, their collective discourse remained couched in pre-digital systems of male dating and relationship success where sex, hooking up, and relationships are not necessarily connected. They also loved the game.

Leisure

From a leisure perspective, these men reinforce the complexity and the interconnectivity of leisure and digitality. The disparity in what they say and how they act when using GSNAs demonstrates how gendered subjectivity is inherent and fused into leisure, a fusion which is integral to the systems of primacy and power within gendered leisure practice and understanding (S. M. Shaw, 1985; S. Shaw & Slack, 2002). These ideas are especially evident as we consider personal (re)presentation and public facing personas related to dating (Berbary, 2012). Fusion of gendered performance into leisure spaces serves for the men as a type of constraint to enacting the same representations of masculinity in their GSNA use as they try to do offline. There is an extensive body of literature linking gender to leisure constraints, but here the influence is more nuanced. Like the split representations explored in Berbary's (2012) work on sorority women, and more specifically Valtchanov and Parry (2017) and Ron and Nimrod (2018) work on the complexities of negotiating gendered expectations in online leisure platforms, these men did not reconcile the difference between their offline thoughts and GSNA actions, or largely ignored them altogether. This failure to recognise the problematic dualistic representations of masculinity enacted by these men is tied up in both the pervasive nature of hegemonic masculine expectations (Messerschmidt, 2018), but also the desire to succeed in the (arguably visceral) task of finding a partner for sex.

Our discussion of the leisure context of sex-seeking behaviour is more informed because of the work of researchers and theorists like Williams (2009, 2016), Berdychevsky et al. (2013), and Attwood (2011) who argue that sex as leisure is not deviant, but normal. Instead, much of our theoretical discussion on the place of leisure around GSNAs has focused on the integrated nature of digital tools into leisure practice, and that the modern modality of dating (not to mention leisure, as well as masculinities (Hickey-Moody, 2019)) are assemblages – technological or otherwise (Lupton, 2016). The notion of digital leisure as separate from other forms of leisure is not substantiated when we consider GSNA use as necessarily online and offline, as games, and integrated into social activities where men are engaged in digital and analogue leisure simultaneously. Leisure practices which involve or are exclusive to digital platforms must become baseline leisure theory and not apart from other leisure theorisation (Spencer Schultz & McKeown, 2018).

Conclusion

Who the men in this study appeared to be when they engaged with GSNAs was changed by the design and expectations of the apps. When straight men use these apps, they are necessarily bound by the expectations of potential partners to perform in certain ways and engage in certain types of behaviour (e.g. being the one to engage conversation or propose in-person meet ups). These expectations do not align with desires around a more appropriate masculinity, but are outweighed by their romantic and sexual needs. These men had clear expectations of self/personal representation online, but everything changed in the apps. It was clear these apps did it *to* them, enabling them to embrace hegemonic masculine norms, if it meant they might hook-up.

GSNAs provide a fruitful theoretical and research landscape, as the users are simultaneously gaming, interacting, dating, having sex, changing social norms and expectations, and using leisure to engage in digitality. It is an excellent example of Spracklen's (2015) assertion that digital leisure cannot be distinct from other leisure, and that this type of multi-faceted and complex landscape is the new normal of leisure behaviour and interaction. An important point of departure for further exploration of technologically mediated forms of existing leisure activities, both as an entryway into understanding contemporary leisure practice, but also to extend our thinking and theorisation about gender, performance, and action where the digital and analogue are both deeply interwoven in our most intimate moments.

Notes

1. We choose to use the term Geo-Social Networking Applications because we feel that this best represents the variety of ways these applications are employed by users, without limiting the range of apps explored, or features present. Other terms used are location-based apps and hook-up apps.
2. This research was authored prior to the onset of the widespread lockdowns implemented due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. While the landscape of meeting up through GSNAs has (temporarily) changed, we believe that the findings of this research will remain relevant as users and companies find new ways of connecting.
3. Redbytes.in, 2018, provides brief descriptions of 24 of the most popular apps, and a search of the android app store stops at 250 dating apps in a basic search including *SingleParentMeet, Threesome Dating*, and *Veggly* for vegan and vegetarian dating.

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