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## **SWIPE ME IF YOU CAN: CULTURAL AND GENDERED USES OF TINDER IN TURKEY<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Dating apps have become a worldwide trend since Tinder. The predominantly Anglo-American literature generally pays less attention to how they are used in and affected by different cultural contexts. Based on an online survey (N=915), this study explores Tinderers' motivations, swiping strategies, and the context of using Tinder in Turkey in relation to gender. First, the paper finds that although Tinderers mostly use the app for casual sex, socialization and entertainment emerged as other popular motivations. Second, we find some support for the "status vs. beauty" stereotype though physical appearance is also the top criterion for women. Lastly, unlike the Anglo-American contexts, we find that the social stigma around Tinder in Turkey is more likely to affect women who limit their use to contexts that they associate with privacy. Defining Tinder as an algorithmic cultural object, this paper highlights how technology and culture are intertwined in a relation of co-production.

**Keywords:** Online dating, Dating app, Mate selection, Motivation, Social stigma

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## SIKIYSA KAYDIR: TINDER'IN TÜRKİYE'DEKİ KÜLTÜREL VE TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYETÇİ KULLANIMLARI

### ÖZET

Flört uygulamaları, Tinder'la birlikte dünya çapında bir popülerite kazandı. Ağırlıklı olarak Anglo-Amerikan bağlamlara odaklanan çalışmaların bulunduğu literatür, genellikle bu teknolojilerin farklı kültürel bağlamlarda nasıl kullanıldığını ve bu kültürel bağlamlardan nasıl etkilendiğini göz ardı etmektedir. Çevrimiçi anket yöntemine dayanan bu çalışma (N=915), Türkiye'de Tinder kullanan kişilerin motivasyonlarının, kaydırma, yani eş seçme, stratejilerinin ve Tinder'ı kullanma bağlamlarının toplumsal cinsiyetle olan ilişkisini keşfetmektedir. Bulgular, öncelikle, Tinder'cılarının uygulamayı çoğunlukla seks amaçlı ilişkiler için kullansa da sosyalleşme ve eğlenmenin diğer popüler motivasyonlar olarak öne çıktığını göstermektedir. İkinci olarak, fiziksel görüntünün de kadınlar için başat kriter olduğunu gözlemlese de "statü-güzellik" kalıbını destekleyen bazı bulgularla karşılaştık. Son olarak, Anglo-Amerikan bağlamların aksine, Türkiye'deki Tinder'a dair toplumsal damganın kadınları erkeklere nazaran daha fazla etkilediğini, kadınların uygulamayı özel alanlarda kullanmayı tercih ederek kullanımlarını kısıtladıklarını gözlemledik. Tinder'ı algoritmik kültürel obje olarak tanımlayan bu çalışma, teknoloji ve kültürün nasıl bir eş üretim ilişkisi içerisinde olduğunu altını çizmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çevrimiçi flört, flört uygulaması, eş seçimi, motivasyon, toplumsal damga

### INTRODUCTION

Associated with ease of use and connectivity, mobile dating technologies have become a worldwide trend in the dating landscape. Launched in October 2012, Tinder as the first location-based dating application designed for heterosexual individuals has achieved a global popularity. It has become the leader of dating applications with its more than 50 million global users in 196 countries and more than 20 billion matches since its inception (Duguay, 2017; Ward, 2017). Even though it can be used by people of various gender and sexuality identities, Tinder is mostly popular with heterosexual and cisgender individuals (Greenfield, 2013; Mason, 2016).

Tinder is a smartphone application centered around user-uploaded images accompanied by a short description of age, education, and other individual characteristics in up to 500 words. Users are asked to indicate preferences regarding their potential partners' gender, age, and geographical range. The app functions by these preferences as well as the smartphone's GPS to locate matches. Users swipe right (or press heart) if they are interested or swipe left (or press X) if they are uninterested. They are allowed to start online conversation only when a match is made, that is, when both users swipe each other right. As the first location-based dating application, Tinder has opened the path for individuals to arrange dates via smartphones, with a quick thumb movement. Dating has never been this easy, quick, and effortless before.

The app's popularity has given way to a boom in the online dating business. New mobile device applications such as Her, Hinge, Tastebuds, Badoo, Bumble, Happn, Hater, Coffee Meets Bagel, etc. have joined the e-dating market while the existing dating websites like OkCupid, Match.com, and eHarmony.com have turned into smartphone applications. Some of them (OkCupid, Match.com, Tinder, PlentyOfFish, OurTime, Pairs, and Meetic) are owned by the same subcompany named Market Group of IAC. This lucrative business has also paved the way for new occupations such as dating coaches, matchmakers, and experts who teach how to use these technologies properly to find a partner. Generally intended for women, these services teach how users should decorate their profiles to attract more potential partners (Bryans, 2018; Ettin, 2014; Hoehn, 2015; McKinlay, 2013). Part of this dating expertise involves instructing on the algorithmic logic behind dating technologies and how to beat algorithms to find the ideal mate (Birger, 2015; Oyer, 2014; Rudder, 2014; Webb, 2013). Despite increasing competition, Tinder keeps its popularity commercially and as a popular cultural phenomenon. The noun Tinder is defined by Urban Dictionary and used by e-daters "as a description of a person you are hooking-up or have hooked-up with (e.g., 'a Tinder')" (Mason, 2016, p. 823).

Studies on online dating generally focus on Anglo-American contexts and indicate that mobile dating technologies have changed the dating landscape in irreversible ways. Nevertheless, this predominantly Anglo-American literature pays little attention to how dating rituals are highly sensitive to the existing face-to-face cultural scripts that guide the interactions between potential partners. In this paper, we con-

tribute to the relevant literature by concentrating on the technology-culture interaction in the Turkish case. We trace the influence of Tinder as a technological artifact in the cultural landscape of relationships and gender, especially focusing on how Tinder as a dating application is used in and affected by both the immediate setting of the user (e.g., being in a public or private area) and the broader cultural context. We believe that gender has significant consequences for the motivations, strategies, and context of using mobile dating technologies. The 200-year-long history of modernization in Turkey placed gender and sexuality at the center of its transformation. While the outcomes of this transformation were mixed in terms of changing patriarchal cultural codes and women's actual conditions, the discourse of modernity placed gender to the symbolic center of nation building (Altan-Olcay, 2009; Ilkkaracan, 2008).

This study explores three broad areas, which we expect to be sensitive to cultural and contextual patterns around gender. The first area of focus has to do with people's *motivations* to use Tinder. What kind of reasons Turkish users give for signing up for Tinder, and how do these motivations differ among genders? The second broad question has to do with the *strategies* behind selecting potential matches. How do users select or eliminate potential partners? What are their decision processes in swiping? The third issue is related to the *context* of using Tinder. Where and when do Turkish Tinderers use the app? How do users perceive the perceptions of Tinder and its users in society? How do they respond to these perceptions? We expect that users will regulate the context of their Tinder use based on the perceptions of perceptions—that is, how they think others would respond to their Tinder use. To examine these dimensions, we first conducted a pilot study entailing in-depth interviews with four Tinder users (two men and two women). Based on the responses, we designed an online survey to gauge Tinder users' motivations, mate selection strategies, and their contexts of use as well as relevant demographic information.

The study shows that Tinder users in Turkey generally use the app for short-term relationships like hookups although women are more likely to use it to find long-term romantic partners than their counterparts. The physical appearance/attractiveness is the most important criterion for mate selection with significant gender differences. Men are more likely to value physical appearance whereas women tend to

prioritize socioeconomic status on Tinder. These results show overlaps with the dating literature in the Anglo-American contexts. Nevertheless, our findings demonstrate that Tinder users in Turkey generally think that non-users have a negative perception of Tinder as a hookup app, and women are more likely to be affected by these perceptions of perceptions and limit their use in public as well as semi-public places than their counterparts. The fact that more people are using dating apps globally does not necessarily mean that the culturally produced social stigma has been decreasing equivalently across the world. In contrast to the predominantly Anglo-American literature, we draw attention to the fact that the cultural and social stigmas around dating and sexuality continue to affect Tinder users in a gendered way.

### **Dating Technologies as a Cultural and Gendered Genre of Usage**

The relevant literature mainly concentrates on dating platforms (Albury, Burgess, Light, Race & Wilken, 2017; Bivens & Hoque, 2018; Cohen, 2015; David & Cambre, 2016; Krüger & Spilde, 2018; Vuzharov, 2019), motivations (Alam, Islam, Mokhbul & Makmor, 2018; Chin, Edelstein & Vernon., 2018; Gatter & Hodgkinson, 2016; Gudelunas, 2012; Hance, Blackhart & Dew, 2018; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Sumter & Vandenbosch, 2019; Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017; Timmermans & Caluwé 2017), self-presentations (Duguay, 2017; Ferris & Duguay, 2020; Gewirtz-Meydan & Ayalon, 2018; Mason, 2016; Narin, 2018; Richey, 2016; Ward, 2017), and mate selection (Chappetta & Bart, 2016; Felmler & Kreager, 2017; Kreager, Cavanagh, Yen & Yu, 2014; Li et al., 2013; McGloin & Denes, 2018; Peters & Salzsieder, 2018). This predominantly Anglo-American literature tends to underestimate how technology and culture are in a relation of co-production (Jasanoff, 2004), and subscribe to a technologically determinist narrative. For example, according to the research conducted by Pew Research Center (Anderson, Vogels & Turney, 2020; Smith & Anderson, 2015), as more people in the U.S. use digital dating, their perceptions adapt to consider these technologies as a good way to meet people. Thus, as the argument goes, online dating is changing not only dating patterns, but also the norms and behaviors around love, marriage, and cohabitation. However, in different cultural settings, the social stigma around dating technologies still exists and influences users unequally.

Turkey provides a compelling example. Similar with many other countries, more people in Turkey have been using dating technologies to meet people. According to the study conducted by Gemius Turkey (Birgün, 2019), Tinder is the most popular dating app in the country as one person in every 80 individuals use Tinder. However, we need to look at the increasing use of dating technologies from cultural and gendered perspectives, as these social pressures ordinarily affect dating practices, functioning as a type of control mechanism on, especially, female bodies. Hence, this paper draws the attention to how Tinder use goes beyond the technological affordances and is interwoven with cultural scripts surrounding gender. In other words, we expect that Tinder users in Turkey are hesitant to use the app in public and semi-public places due to the cultural and social stigma around Tinder and its users, which goes against the app's biggest technological promise, its portability (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Schrock, 2015).

In this paper, we consider that technologies, including Tinder, cannot be “disaggregated into their material as against their cultural aspects” (Miller & Horst, 2012, p. 29). Our goal is to go beyond technological and social determinist accounts of Tinder, and argue that technology does not necessarily annihilate but sometimes reinforces culturally specific patterns around gender, dating, and sexuality. However, this should not blind us to the power of dating technologies as technological artifacts in shaping preferences, practices, and relations. First, the algorithmic design of dating technologies, especially Tinder's swiping feature, turns dating and love into a commodified game (Albury et al., 2017; Badiou & Truong, 2012; Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2007, 2019). Hence, the gamified nature of dating apps is important to understand preferences, especially when respondents invoke boredom as a reason for their use (Bryant & Sheldon, 2017; Pozsar, Dumitrescu, Piticas & Constantinescu, 2018; Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017; Ward, 2016). Second, app designs reproduce heteronormative and cisgender relations by reinforcing normative gender codes (Bivens & Hoque, 2018; Duguay, 2017; Gillespie, 2015; Murray & Ankersen, 2016). For example, Bivens & Hoque's material-semiotic analysis (2018) displays how Bumble, whose aim is to avoid any kind of toxic masculine performances by allowing only women to initiate the conversation after a mutual match, in fact addresses and provides control and safety for heterosexual cisgender women only.

Finally, algorithmic interfaces lead online daters to pursue gendered mating strategies (Illouz, 2007; Illouz & Finkelstein, 2009; Tong, Hancock & Slatcher, 2016). For instance, matching is not limited to a user's swiping practices, because culturally specific practices in the form of collective preferences are pre-framed by Tinder's algorithmic design. Since 2016, Tinder uses an Elo Score rating system in which the algorithm rotates all uploaded pictures and determines which picture receives the most likes (Krüger & Spilde, 2019, p. 7). Users gain points when being matched especially with higher rated users while they lose points when rejected. The more the users gain points, the more likely they are being rotated and shown to other profiles. Such technology has gamified mating in a sense. This game of "swipe me if you can" involves algorithms shaping users' swiping practices in culturally specific patterns. In this regard, in Galloway's terms, Tinder operates as an "algorithmic cultural object" (2006, p. 6). Therefore, one should never forget that the hidden algorithmic logic of dating technologies intervenes in online daters' mate preferences by promoting some profiles over others (Holden, 2020).

### **The Love vs. Sex and Beauty vs. Status Binaries in Heterosexual Dating**

Swiping strategies and self-presentation are the most extensive topics of inquiry in online dating research. The literature identifies two gender-specific salient criteria: (1) physical appearance and attractiveness, (2) socioeconomic status. Online dating studies on mate selection as well as self-presentation demonstrate that men offer status and demand beauty whereas women offer beauty and demand status (Chappetta & Bart, 2016; Felmler & Kreager, 2017; Gewirtz-Meydan & Ayalon, 2018; Kreager et al., 2014; Li et al., 2013; McGloin & Denes, 2018; Peters & Salzsieder, 2018). Tinder's simple design plays a role in this gendered relationship. Because Tinder provides limited space and tools, users rely on well-established cultural scripts for self-presentation: photographic representations of bodies, cultural capital through occupational and educational credentials, and brief texts meant to impress potential partners. These scripts replicate dominant cultural patterns that assign stereotypical roles to men and women.

The mate selection literature generally explains "the beauty-status exchange" (McClintock, 2014) through two perspectives. The evolutionary perspective (Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Li et al., 2013) highlights reproductive value. Because

men's fertility decreases relatively slowly, they may have evolved to prefer partners who appear sexually mature but youthful and more fertile. On the other hand, women may have evolved to value social status, which is associated with access to resources and earning capacity (Li et al., 2013). The social structure/stratification theory (Arum, Roksa & Budig, 2008; Blackwell & Lichter, 2000; Blossfeld, 2009; Blossfeld & Timm, 2003) seeks the origins of sex differences in the patriarchal hierarchy, which ensures that women take care of (unpaid) domestic tasks while men own productive resources (Eagly & Wood, 1999, p. 415). Socioeconomic status provides women information on an individual's future earning potential (Hitsch, Hortaçsu & Ariely, 2010a, 2010b). In contrast to the evolutionary perspective, the social stratification theory underlines that the beauty-status binary does not derive from biological differences, but is socially constructed and reproduce the social inequalities, unequal social roles and positions among genders. Nevertheless, despite differences, both perspectives tend to view women as economically more dependent on their partners, hence, they tend to ignore women's increasing economic independence and their prioritization of men's physical appearance and attractiveness.

In addition to mating strategies, motivations are also very much gendered. Male e-daters report using dating technologies for casual sex whereas women look for long-term, romantic partners (Bryant & Sheldon, 2017; Clemens, Atkin & Krishnan, 2015; Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016; Sumter et al., 2017; Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017). This pattern seems to reproduce another gendered binary, love vs. sex. Hence, not only beauty but also love, in Ahmed's terms (2014), "stick" to women while status and sex stick to men. The love vs. sex and beauty vs. status binaries seem to be an extension of sociocultural constructions into technological platforms. Our findings partially support these gendered binaries.

### **The Online Survey and Sample**

We conducted an online survey in May 2018 to measure cultural patterns of Tinder use in Turkey. The survey was programmed in Qualtrics and took an average of five minutes to complete. To recruit participants, one of the authors posted a link to the survey on Facebook and encouraged followers to share the link on different social media platforms. As a result, 948 individuals filled out the online survey without any



monetary incentive. After eliminating incomplete questionnaires, the resulting sample size was 915. We first requested demographic information such as age, gender, sexual orientation, education level, employment status, and place of residence. We then asked the participants questions regarding the purposes of Tinder use, mate selection criteria, and non-users' perception of Tinder (See Table 1 for survey questions). Survey questions were designed to test three hypotheses. First, following the research on the gendered use of the Internet and online dating (Baumgartner, Valkenburg & Peter, 2010; Clemens et al., 2015; Sumter et al., 2017; Tappé, Bensman, Hayashi & Hatfield, 2013), we expect that men are more oriented toward Tinder to seek hookup partners than their counterparts. Second, based on the gendered love vs. sex and beauty vs. status binaries, we expect women to place a higher value on socioeconomic status as opposed to men who are more likely to pay attention to physical appearance/attractiveness. And third, we expect the social stigma around Tinder to affect users in unequal and gendered ways. That is, women in Turkey are more likely to conceal their use in public as well as semi-public places than their counterparts.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the scales regarding motivations, perceptions, mate selection, and locations of use for the whole sample

|  | Mean (SD)   |
|--|-------------|
| <u>How much do you use Tinder to ...</u>                 |             |
| Casual Sex Motive  |             |
| Have sexual experiences?                                 | 3.37 (1.28) |
| Have a one-night stand?                                  | 3.05 (1.35) |
| Relationship Seeking Motive                              |             |
| Find a long-term relationship                            | 2.76 (1.21) |
| Meet a potential partner                                 | 2.31 (1.25) |
| Socialization Motive                                     |             |
| Find new friends?  | 3.03 (1.27) |
| Build social/friendship network?                         | 2.83 (1.28) |
| Entertainment Motive                                     |             |
| Look at profile pictures                                 | 2.25 (1.25) |
| Alleviate boredom  | 3.53 (1.21) |
| <u>How much is your swiping decision affected by ...</u> |             |

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Physical appearance   | 4.16 (0.82) |
| Age   | 3.41 (1.06) |
| University affiliation  | 3.02 (1.31) |
| <u>Non-users think that Tinder is used to ...</u>                   |             |
| Casual Sex Motive   |             |
| Have sexual experiences?  | 4.21 (0.84) |
| Have a one-night stand?   | 4.17 (0.86) |
| Relationship Seeking Motive   |             |
| Find a long-term relationship                                       | 2.80 (1.18) |
| Meet a potential partner  | 2.44 (1.21) |
| Socialization Motive  |             |
| Find new friends?   | 2.71 (1.19) |
| Build social/friendship network?                                    | 2.67 (1.16) |
| Entertainment Motive  |             |
| Look at profile pictures  | 2.48 (1.25) |
| Alleviate boredom   | 3.36 (1.19) |
| <u>How much do you feel comfortable about using Tinder when ...</u> |             |
| Alone   | 4.55 (0.78) |
| With friends  | 3.50 (1.18) |
| With family   | 2.29 (1.31) |
| People you do not know are around                                   | 2.52 (1.33) |
| At home   | 4.52 (0.78) |
| At office or school   | 3.05 (1.30) |
| In a restaurant, café or bar  | 3.21 (1.27) |
| In public transportation  | 2.27 (1.26) |
| At a public station   | 2.60 (1.33) |

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Note. N=915.

### Measures and Methods of Analysis

Adapted from Ranzini & Lutz (2017), the measures for user motivations include using Tinder for hooking up/sex, friendship and networking, finding relationships/partners, and seeking entertainment. We included “entertainment” instead of “traveling”,

because, as many studies (e.g. Bryant & Sheldon, 2017; Pozsar et al., 2018; Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017; Ward, 2016) highlight, the former is a dominant motivation to use mobile dating technologies. We expect the similar results in the Turkish context. These motives were assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

The mate preference literature identifies two gender-specific salient criteria: physical appearance/attractiveness and socioeconomic status. Tinder profiles mainly center around images with a very little textual information since the app provides a limited textual space for self-expression. Users are only asked to fill in name, age, gender, sexual orientation, interest, and university. Therefore, we focused on three criteria that reflect mate selection strategies: age, physical appearance, and university name. We measured them on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

To measure the perceptions of social stigmas against the dating app, we used the same motive scale by reorganizing the questions about motivations, and used a question regarding whether non-users' view on Tinder users is negative, neutral, or positive. Lastly, to measure where they are "Tindering", we identified public and semi-public time periods (with my friends, with my family, when people I don't know are around) and settings (at office and/or school, at restaurant, bar and/or café, in public transportations, and at public stations), as well as their private counterparts (alone and at home). The time periods and settings regarding public, semi-public and private realms were assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale. As we discuss below, the descriptive findings show that Turkish users interact with the app mainly when in private or with close friends. Negative perceptions of Tinder do not make the app suitable to be used in public or in presence of family members, hence affecting the portability feature of the app.

To answer the research questions, we followed Sumter et al. (2017) and used two methods of analysis. Paired-samples T-Tests were used to find out the differences between genders, and ANOVA tests were used to measure whether there are statistically significant differences between them in terms motivation, mate preference, and Tinder use.

### **Tinder Universe in Turkey: Young, Heterosexual, Educated, and Urban**

According to the demographic information of our sample, Tinder is mostly popular among young and heterosexual urbanites in Turkey (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic composition of the sample

|                              | <i>f</i> | %    |
|------------------------------|----------|------|
| <b>Gender</b>                |          |      |
| Male                         | 454      | 49.3 |
| Female                       | 451      | 49.6 |
| Other                        | 10       | 1.1  |
| <b>Age (years)</b>           |          |      |
| 18-21                        | 183      | 20.0 |
| 22-25                        | 357      | 39.0 |
| 26-29                        | 235      | 25.7 |
| 30-33                        | 77       | 8.4  |
| 34-37                        | 36       | 3.9  |
| 38 or older                  | 27       | 3.0  |
| <b>Education (completed)</b> |          |      |
| Primary school               | 1        | 0.1  |
| Secondary school             | 1        | 0.1  |
| High school graduate         | 270      | 29.5 |
| Associate degree             | 6        | 0.7  |
| Bachelor's degree            | 493      | 53.9 |
| Master's degree              | 134      | 14.6 |
| Doctoral degree              | 10       | 1.1  |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b>    |          |      |
| Heterosexual                 | 749      | 81.9 |
| Homosexual                   | 51       | 5.6  |
| Bisexual                     | 98       | 10.7 |
| Other                        | 17       | 1.9  |
| <b>Current city</b>          |          |      |
| Istanbul                     | 557      | 60.9 |
| Ankara                       | 112      | 12.2 |
| Izmir                        | 75       | 8.2  |
| Other cities                 | 168      | 18.4 |
| Total                        | 912      | 99.7 |

|                   |     |      |
|-------------------|-----|------|
| Missing           | 3   | 0.3  |
| Employment status |     |      |
| Working           | 474 | 51.8 |
| Not working       | 441 | 48.2 |
| Total             | 915 | 100  |

Note. N=915

The popular dating app is predominantly used by heterosexual individuals (81.9 percent of our sample), followed by bisexual (10.7 percent) and homosexual online daters (5.6 percent). Only 1.9 percent of our sample marked the category “Other.” People between 18 and 29 years old are the top users of Tinder (84.7 percent). The majority of Tinderers lives in three largest cities of Turkey, Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir (81.3 percent). Unsurprisingly, with more than 15 million inhabitants, Istanbul hosts the majority of Tinder users in Turkey (60.9 percent), followed by the capital Ankara (12.2 percent) and İzmir (8.2 percent). 18.4 percent of our sample live in other cities. In terms of education, 53.9 percent of Tinderers have at least a bachelor’s degree compared to the 16.36 percent of college educated individuals in Turkey’s population 15 of age and over (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2019). Gender and employment status distributions of Tinder users participated in the research were about equal, 454 male and 451 female users completed the survey while 51.8 percent of the sample is currently working. However, the employment status distribution among male and female users differs: While 44.1 percent (199 out of 451 female users) are currently working, the percentage of employed Tinder users is 59.5 (270 out of 454) for male users (results not reported in tables). Based on the results indicated in Table 2, we can conclude that the users tend to be young, heterosexual, and educated urban individuals.

### **Tinder as a Multipurpose Platform**

We conducted paired-samples T-tests to find out motivations that are significantly different in terms of gender. Table 3 demonstrates mean scores of motivations both in general and by gender, and mean differences between women and men. According to the table, the most common motive for using Tinder is to engage in sexual encounters (2.20), followed by socialization (2.01) and entertainment (1.90). In contrast to

the study of Sumter et al. (2017) on Tinder use in the Netherlands, which found that the love motivation is stronger than the casual sex motive, Tinder is least often used to seek long-term partners in Turkey. However, Table 3 highlights that Tinder is not used only as a hookup app, but it satisfies various needs as a multipurpose platform depending on the context of use.

Table 3. Motivations for Tinder use by gender

|                      | Total       | Gender      |             | Mean Difference<br>(Women-Men) |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
|                      |             | Women       | Men         |                                |
| Casual Sex           | 2.20 (0.91) | 1.80 (0.90) | 2.61 (0.72) | -0.81*                         |
| Socialization        | 2.01 (0.93) | 2.21 (0.89) | 1.82 (0.92) | 0.38*                          |
| Entertainment        | 1.90 (0.88) | 2.09 (0.86) | 1.70 (0.85) | 0.39*                          |
| Relationship Seeking | 1.69 (0.86) | 1.82 (0.88) | 1.56 (0.82) | 0.26*                          |

Note. N=915; A Bonferonni correction was made.

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 also establishes significant gender differences in terms of the motivations for Tinder use. Research across the world report findings regarding gendered motivations for Tinder use that differ from our results. Ranzini & Lutz (2017), for instance, find that male online daters in the U.S. are more oriented toward relationship seeking than women. However, our findings are consistent with other studies that report men's higher use of the internet for hookups (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Clemens et al., 2015; Sumter et al., 2017; Tappé et al., 2013). According to Table 3, men are more likely to use Tinder for casual sex, the least popular motivation for women. Women report higher rates of using Tinder for, respectively, socialization, entertainment, and relationship seeking. Interestingly, seeking romantic relationships are almost as unpopular among women as casual sex. All the differences between men and women are statistically significant.

### **Swiping in Line with the Beauty vs. Status Binary**

Given that the sex vs. love binary appears to work along gender lines, a relevant question to ask is if male users set a criterion of beauty on Tinder as opposed to

women's search for status symbols. Beauty is associated with subjective evaluations of profile pictures whereas status symbol has to do with university affiliation. ANOVA tests partially support the hypothesis of gendered motivations, demonstrating that physical appearance is more crucial for male Tinderers whereas educational status and age are more important for female Tinder users (Table 4). Based on these results, men place more value on the pictures than accompanying information while women give approximately equal value to the pictures and profile text.

Table 4. Mate selection criteria by gender

|                     | Total       | Gender      |        | Mean Differences<br>(Women-Men) |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|--------|---------------------------------|
|                     |             | Women       | Men    |                                 |
| Physical appearance | 4.16 (0.82) | 4.09 (0.83) | 4.24   | -0.15*                          |
| Age                 | 3.41 (1.06) | 3.63 (0.97) | (0.81) | 0.45*                           |
| Educational status  | 3.02 (1.31) | 3.43 (1.21) | 3.18   | 0.83*                           |
|                     |             |             | (1.09) |                                 |
|                     |             |             | 2.60   |                                 |
|                     |             |             | (1.29) |                                 |

Note. N=915; A Bonferonni correction was made; 95% confidence interval of the difference.

\*p < 0.05

Our findings are consistent with the mate selection literature; however, we need to pay attention to two important qualifying observations about the status vs. beauty stereotype in Table 4. First, while men are statistically more likely to report appearance as part of their selection rationale, women's mean score for using appearance to judge prospective dating partners is not substantively much smaller than men's (the difference is only 0.15 points on a 5-point scale). Additionally, physical appearance is the top criterion of selection for women as well. Age and educational status are a distant second and third criterion. Also, age appears to be a more important selection tool for women. In other words, women appreciate youthful appearances in Tinder profiles, which may be a different way to express desire for attractiveness and beauty.

Second, given that 44.1 percent of the females in the sample are currently employed, we cannot claim that female Tinder users in Turkey attach a higher value on status because they are economically dependent on their potential partners. In fact, our analysis shows (results not reported in tables) that there is no significant difference between employed and unemployed women in terms of their selection criteria. In our in-depth pilot interviews, female Tinders expressed preferences for prospects from elite universities, but this inclination was not rooted in financial concerns. Instead, they seemed to be more concerned with finding matches with similar cultural values and tastes. Individuals with good earning potential but insufficient educational capital (i.e., those who are students or graduates of less prestigious rural universities) were seen as members of a non-refined cultural worldview. Despite the small sample size, these perceptions correspond to the significance of educational and cultural hierarchies in the Turkish context (Ergin, Rankin & Gökşen, 2019). Women are sensitive to a diverse set of cues in the Tinder universe that clearly go beyond economic concerns. Therefore, we cannot disregard that physical attractiveness is the top criterion while status is the least important criterion for women. We also cannot claim that women value status because they are economically more dependent on their partners. A future qualitative research shall certainly provide a valuable perspective to the beauty vs. status binary in mate selection.

### **Sliding Into Tinder: The Unequal Impact of Social Stigmas on Tinder Users in Turkey**

To understand the influence of stigmas around Tinder, we asked users about their perceptions of non-users' perceptions. Tinder users in Turkey tend to believe that non-users see Tinder overwhelmingly as a platform for arranging casual sex activities. While Tinder users identify casual sex as one of the motivations to use the app, they believe that non-users consider the app *exclusively* in terms of sexuality (see Table 1). While our data do not allow us to find out if this perception corresponds to actual views of non-users, the users' expectations of stigma shape their behavior. We also asked the participants whether they think people who do not use Tinder have a negative, neutral, or positive view on Tinder users. 731 of 915 respondents (79.9 percent of the sample) agree with the statement that non-users view the mobile dating technology negatively (Table 5).



Table 5. Users' perception of non-users' views on Tinder users

|  | f   | %    |
|--|-----|------|
| In your view, is non-users' view on Tinder users ... |     |      |
| Negative,  | 731 | 79.9 |
| Neutral or   | 139 | 15.2 |
| Positive?  | 45  | 4.9  |

Note. N=915.

The results of our ANOVA-analysis demonstrate significant gender differences (Table 6). The understanding of women in our sample regarding non-users' view on Tinderers is more negative than their counterparts', and the difference is statistically significant. In other words, Table 6 demonstrates that in contrast to men, women who use Tinder in Turkey are more likely to believe that people who do not use the dating app have a negative understanding of Tinder.

Table 6. Means, standard deviations, and mean differences in users' perception of non-users' view on Tinder users

|            | Gender      |             | Mean Differences<br>(Women-Men) |
|------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
|            | Women       | Men         |                                 |
| Perception | 1.18 (0.46) | 1.32 (0.59) | -0.14*                          |

Note. N=915; A Bonferonni correction was made; 1.00 = negative; 2.00 = neutral; 3.00 = positive.

\*p < 0.05

To test our hypothesis that female Tinder users are more likely to conceal their use in public as well as semi-public places, we asked the respondents how much they feel comfortable about using Tinder in different settings and time slots. The findings of our ANOVA-analysis in Table 7 demonstrate that the differences between men and women depend on the context of Tinder use.

Table 7. Means, standard deviations, and mean differences of Tinder use in terms of time and location by gender

|                             | Gender |        | Mean Differences<br>(Women-Men) |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|---------------------------------|
|                             | Women  | Men    |                                 |
| Alone                       | 4.47   | 4.63   | -0.150*                         |
| With friends                | (0.79) | (0.75) | 0.032                           |
| With family                 | 3.51   | 3.48   | -0.260*                         |
| Others around               | (1.17) | (1.89) | -0.009                          |
| Home                        | 2.16   | 2.42   | -0.090                          |
| Office and/or school        | (1.27) | (1.35) | -0.29*                          |
| Restaurant, café and/or bar | 2.52   | 2.53   | -0.14                           |
| Public transportations      | (1.33) | (1.34) | -0.24*                          |
| Public stations             | 4.48   | 4.57   | -0.33*                          |
|                             | (0.79) | (0.77) |                                 |
|                             | 2.90   | 3.19   |                                 |
|                             | (1.29) | (1.30) |                                 |
|                             | 3.14   | 3.28   |                                 |
|                             | (1.25) | (1.29) |                                 |
|                             | 2.14   | 2.38   |                                 |
|                             | (1.20) | (1.31) |                                 |
|                             | 2.43   | 2.76   |                                 |
|                             | (1.26) | (1.38) |                                 |

Note. N=915; A Bonferonni correction was made.

\* $p < 0.05$

According to the table, women seem less comfortable when they are in public transportations (2.14), with family (2.16), when they are at public stations (2.43), when others are around (2.52), and when they are at office and/or school (2.90). They feel more comfortable when they are at home (4.48), alone (4.47), with friends (3.51), and in a restaurant, café and/or bar (3.14). On the other hand, men feel less comfortable when they are in public transportations (2.38), with family (2.42), when others around (2.53), and when they are at public stations (2.76). In contrast, they seem

more comfortable when they are alone (4.63), at home (4.57), with friends (3.48), in a restaurant, café, and/or bar (3.28), and at office and/or school (3.19). Table 7 indicates that Tinderers are generally more comfortable when they use Tinder in private (when they are alone and at home) than public and semi-public places such as public transportations, family, others, and public stations. However, women are less comfortable about using Tinder when they are alone, with their family, at school or office, at public transportation, and waiting at public stations such as bus stations. This demonstrates how social stigmas not only affect users unequally, but they also influence the mobility and portability of dating technologies.

This unequal impact of the social stigma on Tinder users can be observed at a linguistic level as well. There is a popular term in Turkish digital dating jargon, *Tinder'a düşmek* (to slide into Tinder). The one who slides into Tinder is first and foremost a woman but never a man. The term reminds the unfortunate women portrayed in Yeşilçam, Turkish Hollywood. There is always an innocent as well as unfortunate woman in Yeşilçam classics. She finds herself on the street because of various misfortunes, mostly because of another woman, a jezebel who presents herself as helpful and benevolent. Being on the streets, that is, becoming a sex worker, she becomes “dirty.” Hence, she brings shame on the family and dishonors the family’s name. The term *Tinder'a düşmek* connotes, in this sense, being on the streets. There is an entry named “the Turkish girl who has slid into Tinder” on EkşiSözlük (2018), the oldest and most popular urban dictionary in the Turkish cyberspace. Under the entry, people talk about female Tinderers as “that kind of woman” (Illouz, 2019, p. 220), i.e., a woman who engages in sexual activities, as if they happen to be on the streets like these Yeşilçam women. In both a documentary series named *Digital Flirting* by Sami Öztürk (2020), aired on BluTv (Turkish Netflix) and a short documentary called *It's a Match!* (Mevzu, 2020), female Tinder users, regardless of their sexual orientation, draw the attention the term, the feel of the term, and the gender inequality in the use of dating technologies. A Tinder user, Hande, from *It's a Match!* (Mevzu, 2020), for instances, underlines the social pressure on women in terms of Tinder:

There is a tremendous pressure on especially women. Women are absolutely not free about it. If we are talking about Turkey, they are not free at all. Hence, using Tinder in our culture is seen even as a shame. I am sure, everybody turns notifications off (3:17-3:28)

Hande's narrative emphasizes the unequal impact of the social stigma around Tinder and its users in Turkey. This shows not only how technology is shaped by culture, but also the gender inequality in im/mobile technology use. As the Turkish context of Tinder use demonstrates, the fact that more people prefer dating apps to meet people does not necessarily mean that such technologies have revolutionized the dating culture. To put it another way, even though people share the similar aims in terms of technology use, they do not have the same relationship to it in different cultural contexts.

## CONCLUSION

With smartphones dominating more and more our lives, mobile dating applications are here to stay. Therefore, it is important to observe how these new and popular applications culturally influence the current dating landscape as well as individuals' daily interactions and relationships with others. Viewing Tinder as an algorithmic cultural object, this study explores the Tinder landscape in Turkey. It aims to understand three broad areas, motivations, strategies, and the context of using Tinder in Turkey. Based on an online survey that 915 Tinderers in Turkey filled out, this research highlights that the answers are multi-faceted and contextually dependent because Tinder is used as a multifunctional tool to address various needs in different contexts. However, it is important to note that since the amount of Tinder users in Turkey is unknown, this explorative study allows limited generalizability.

In terms of motivation, we found evidence confirming the gendered love vs. sex binary. However, we need to note that neither men nor women use Tinder exclusively for sex or love. The users in our sample identified other popular motivations, such as socialization and entertainment. Interestingly, romantic love was identified as the least popular motivation by the participants. A future qualitative research shall explain why online daters are less likely to prefer dating apps to find a long-term, romantic partner even though these technologies are claimed to provide the ideal mate for individuals. As far as mate selection strategies are concerned, we found some support for the status vs. beauty stereotype, but again with important qualifications. Although men are more likely to identify appearance as part of their selection strategy, appearance is also the top criterion for women. In addition, given that almost

half of our female participants have university degrees, it is unlikely that they consider status symbols as signs of a man's future earning potential. Instead, we suggest that certain status symbols, such as university affiliation, signal a match in cultural worldviews and lifestyles that may be more important than the earning potential of a prospective match. A future qualitative research shall certainly provide a valuable perspective to the beauty vs. status binary and users' mating behaviors. Our contribution to the predominantly Anglo-American literatures lies at our third area of concern, the context of Tinder use, in which the significance of cultural factors emerges even more forcefully. Unlike the findings from North America and Europe that identify Tinder as a liberating drive in romantic relationships, we found that users in Turkey are acutely aware of negative perceptions of Tinder. Despite Tinder's promise of carrying romance beyond contextual barriers, especially female users tend to limit their app use to contexts that they associate with privacy. This shows how the technology-culture interaction affects individuals in unequal and gendered ways.

As research on Tinder goes beyond the Anglo-American settings, it will be easier to see how users experience technology as a cultural genre of usage, because technological artifacts and cultural patterns are in a relation of co-production in different geographies. Technologies like Tinder are not independent of cultural stereotypes and prejudices, especially in domains that are as socially regulated as romance and sexuality. It is not surprising, then, to see some of the gendered stereotypes that exist in face-to-face relationships become replicated in the online world. The culture-technology relationship becomes especially salient in terms of the users' perceptions of non-users' perceptions. Individuals but especially women use Tinder by responding to stigmas and regulating their behavior accordingly.

In this multi-layered relationship, we also need to pay attention to the way technologies shape dating culture, rituals, and practices. Once a technology becomes mainstream, its design features begin to affect user choices. We need not to forget that mobile dating platforms like Tinder intervene in users' mate selection. They do not simply circulate images, but algorithmically promote some over others (Holden, 2020). In contrast to the predominantly Anglo-American literature that tends to ignore the relationship between technology and culture, we highlight that digital technologies and cultures shape each other and studies should pay attention to cultural variation in the adoption of these technologies and how the cultural adoption affects

technology users differently. Last but not least, future research should not give primacy of the one over the other, but focus on the complex interaction between technology and culture.

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