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Swipe Right: The Pursuit for Intimacy

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This analytical study of mobile dating applications offers insight into how the gamification of dating shapes the perception and influences the pursuit of intimacy by users. This study explores the rhetorical theory of gamification, utilizing it as a lens through which to look at the construction of user experience (UX) by app developers as well as the navigation of user interface (UI) by 'players.' Delving deeper into the three sites of study- Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid- through gamification provides a clearing understanding of the ways in which turning dating into a game changes how individuals approach intimacy. The project proves these dating applications are games through the application of Richard Bartle's player theory. Then, it turns to Ian Bogost's conceptualization of gamification to understand what it is and how dating app developers use it. From here, the research pulls in Liza Pott's work in digital architecture so as to identify three gamified systems in dating application design and explores how each transforms dating into a game. The analysis then works retroactively to apply these systems to Bartle's player theory in order to form understandings of how they create each player, shape their perceptions of intimacy, and guide their pursuit for it within the app. Lastly, the piece addresses ethos, specifically the perpetuation of authentic self versus ideal self in the construction of dating profiles. This is to understand how the creation of gamified players molds user perception of character and credibility.

I. Swipe Right into My Heart

The Courting Tradition of Technology

The collaboration between technology and humans as a means to initiate intimacy has been a central theme within humanity since the early centuries of courting. In 1685, the personal ad began being published within British journals. Fast-forward two centuries to The Matrimonial News, an 1870 print publication for singles founded in San Francisco. This publication allowed men and women to write up their own personal ad to be advertised within the newspaper. This triggered the production of similar papers by the start of the twentieth century, including one during the First World War aimed at ads for "lonely soldiers."

During the mid twentieth century, the fascination with human intimacy began to intersect with digital technology, turning the pursuit for intimacy into a science. The company, Introduction, used sets of data to find a human being's "social equivalent" and shortly after a Stanford student utilized a similar foundation of data to develop the first computer dating service. The service gamified the pursuit for human connection through a set of questions that each user answered. This set the stage for Operation Match, a service created by Jeff Tarr, a Harvard student that generated more than a million users for his program. In an interview regarding his dating service, Tarr said, "We're not trying to take the love out of love. We're just trying to make it more efficient." This prompted the desire for efficiency in love. Forty years after his site launched, four new Harvard students founded OKCupid in 2004, which continued to use compatibility algorithms to connect human beings.

The structure of the modern day pursuit for human connection is not one that appeared within the last decade of the twenty-first century, but rather sitting securely on the support beams of centuries of trials and tribulations. As noted by Tarr in 1966, the goal of the collaboration between human beings and technology within dating culture is to establish approachability and efficiency within the pursuit for intimacy and genuine connection. In 2013, 40 million Americans had tried their hand at online dating, making it the second-most-common way for human connection to form. This finding is not one that came with little warning; in 2009 61 percent of heterosexual couples had found their partners using online dating services. This is a significant increase from the 23 percent who found human connection through technology in 2007 and 2008, or the 11 percent during the final years of the twentieth century at the conception of eHarmony.

Fast forward to 2017- we are presented with three of the most popular mobile dating

applications: OkCupid, Bumble, and Tinder. The change from online computer dating services to mobile application has garnered significant popularity over the past half a decade due to its approachability. This approachability allows users to take their search for intimacy everywhere they go, where as prior to this app development they were tied to the location of their computer. Approachability also regards the simplicity of design, users being able to swipe left or right to dozens of potential connections within minutes, right from their smartphone. How has the accessibility presented by mobile smartphone applications, however, altered the very nature of the pursuit for intimacy?

It is important to make the distinction in saying that this project will concern to some extent the approachability produced by mobile applications, as the concept of approachability within the creation of intimate relationships is not new. Approachability as generated by technology has been a necessity within the foundation of human intimacy for over a century, dating back to the mid 1800s. Telegraph operators, through their hours spent communicating via wires, would establish strong human connections with specific telegraphers whom they would find themselves frequently sending messages to. Unlike current mobile dating applications, these interactions were faceless, but regardless of this "apparently impersonal nature of communicating by wire, it was in fact an extremely subtle and intimate means of communication" (Standage, pg 130). Through this practice, operators would build sustainable relationships, both friendships and romances, all of which could be formed regardless of geographical barriers.

Many operators sustained intimate connections in far away states, and despite never meeting the face on the opposite end of their wires, "experienced operators could even recognize their friends merely from the style of their Morse code- something that was, apparently, as

recognizable as an individual human voice" (130). As strong intimate relationships formed, operators became increasingly more territorial of specific wires so they may continue messaging with specific workers. Operators would become synced with one another's style through this intimate bonding, creating a situation in which some were only their most efficient when working with specific people they have bonded with via wires.

Although approachability is not a contribution to dating made by dating applications, the contrast between the design of connecting through telegraphs versus through smartphone- as presented by the historical development of approachability and intimacy within technology- provides important comparable context when analyzing how today's mobile design affects the practice of intimate connection in ways not found during the 1800s. Through this project, I will be looking at how dating application design, which encompasses both its interface and usability, gamifies intimacy. This work will seek a better understanding of how turning dating into a game shapes the type of intimacy a user pursues via the application as well as influences the ways in which users interact with the app.

In order to achieve this, I will first be utilizing game researcher Richard Bartle's player theory to prove that dating applications have been designed similarly to multi-user gaming domains. Once this connection is established, I will be pulling from game designer Ian Bogost to introduce the rhetorical lens of gamification and its definitional framework, which will provide structure to its application to mobile dating applications and the associated analysis. With this framework in place, I will pull from Liza Potts work in digital architecture as a means of applying gamification to dating application design specifically. Lastly, I will take the various gamified components of the apps and apply it retroactively to Bartle's player theory, forming an analysis of how each player's perception and pursuit of intimacy is influenced.

The Mobile Dating Phenomenon

   The idea for this project developed from a greater awareness of the prevalence of dating applications within the lives of millennial aged persons. Prior to my using Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid for research, I had never personally used dating applications for its intended purpose of seeking out intimacy, so I was far removed from the culture. Due to this lack of involvement, I was unaware of an entire world of interactions, specific dating application subcultures, unspoken digital dating rules, and a plethora of social and gender scripts. In "Liquid Love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy" Mitchell Hobbs, Stephen Owen, and Livia Gerber suggest "a 'digital revolution' is underway in regard to dating, courtship, and modern romance" (Hobbs). I witnessed this very revolution happening around me with a persistent consistency that suggested the practice of dating via mobile app to be deeply entrenched in twenty-first century pursuit of intimacy.

   My awareness of dating applications' tremendous presence within modern dating was initially sparked by recognition of patterns within casual conversations occurring in any given day, most times between acquaintances and close friends, other times occurring in the conversations of strangers around me. I noticed that the mention of dating application usage- whether mentioning the application itself or alluding to app usage through the mentioning of an individual met or date initiated through the technology- occurred at least once in these conversations. I recognized the nature of these conversations were not with the intentions of specifically providing one another with updates of Tinder endeavors, but rather a means of connecting and catching up. Dating applications were brought up within every single one of these conversations, however, as they have become a deeply prioritized aspect of daily life

within the millennial demographic.

Despite the consistent participation in dating application culture, users demonstrated an interestingly unbalanced relationship with the applications. As my fascination with the practice of dating via mobile application flourished, I began to engage in conversations with those within my social network regarding their success of finding intimacy through apps such as Tinder, Bumble, or OkCupid. Individuals found themselves trapped within a perpetual routine involving dating applications, experiencing spurts of motivation and general content while using the app followed by lulls in which they felt significant loneliness and discontent with the connections they were making through the application. These informal conversations in which I explored this lull suggested these feelings of dissatisfaction stemmed from an inability to truly connect with others on a deeper emotional or intellectual level, as the primary parameters of mobile dating applications center on aesthetics. Yet these very users would always return to the application eventually, regardless of knowing they would undoubtedly end up back in the lull. There is an addictive quality to the mobile dating application culture, similar to that of a game.

It wasn't until a conversation about dating application experience revealed a user's intentions when using the dating app Bumble, saying that she feels confident in herself when she can *win* all of the matches. The word "win," found in competitive, game-like culture, struck me as a peculiar way of viewing dating, which historically has been a practice centered on human connection rather than winning and losing. The use of gaming terminology, however, is not specific to this single user as the design of modern mobile dating applications were created intentionally to assimilate a game. Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber explain in their research that popular dating app *Tinder* was designed to provide a less stressful dating experience through turning the practice into a game that was more time efficient and mindless when users played.

They note, "This design philosophy is reflected in the features of the software, where people's profiles are similar to a deck of playing cards, and love, sex and intimacy are the stakes of the game" (Hobbs). The concept of turning love and courtship into a game so as to lessen emotional investment as a means of relieving stress brought me to my ultimate inquiry: How is the gamification of dating, as caused by the design of mobile dating apps, affecting the type of intimacy pursued by users as well as their overall approach of intimacy through the applications?

I will be applying gamification to dating application culture, using it as a lens through which to identify design choices implemented by app architects and analyze how these features specifically turn dating in to a gaming experience, in turn shaping and influencing player perception and pursuit of human connection through the app. There is particular interest within the gamification of dating concerning the role of users as 'players,' looking closely at how the design of mobile dating applications cause users to file into one of the four standard gamer roles: Achiever, explorer, socializer, and killer. A deeper analysis of these gamer roles, how they interact within the mobile dating culture, and how the design of the application causes users to take on these roles will provide insight regarding the influence of design on pursuit and user approach of intimacy.

Sites of Study

In a 2016 study done by Applause, a research company providing insight on various technology and tech brands within the digital community, presented a definitive ranking of 11 current dating applications available to users. Of the 11 ranked, *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid* all ranked in the top five of this list, *OkCupid* coming in first, *Bumble* at four, and *Tinder* in the number five spot. A factor of these three apps ranking high within the list was due to a large user

base. This popularity, as well as the three apps demonstrating similarities in design, made these sites ideal for studying. Additionally, each site demonstrated at least one single distinct characteristic despite general similarities in usability, which not only differentiated them but also presents the potential to offer different angles at which dating can be gamified. Using all three sites provides a unique point of comparison through which to gather consistent and meaningful data.

Tinder, although much younger than *OkCupid*, which serves as the pioneer within online dating culture, was conceived as a mobile application, where as *OkCupid* began in 2004 as a dating website and later made the transition to a mobile application interface in 2015. *Tinder* explicitly presents itself as a game, referring to user profiles as "cards" and providing "players" with a "deck" of other users' cards to swipe through. Users swipe right to a card to indicate they are interested and left to indicate their disinterest in that particular card. *Bumble*, which was created in 2014 by a former co-founder of *Tinder*, shares this similar swiping technique when playing within the application, but strays away from standard gaming terminology. Rather than a deck of cards, *Bumble* plays off of the word "Bumble Bee" and presents users- referred to as "bees"- with a hive of potential bees to match with. *OkCupid* doesn't rely on any clever terminology to augment or mask the gaming experience presented through the application, which is true to its original design created in 2004.

The main similarity between the applications is the swiping motion as a means of sifting through potential matches and seeking out the ones a user is most interested in pursuing. *Tinder* the original of the three as far as mobile dating application design is concerned, pioneered this very swiping process, with the intentions of creating a more efficient and less emotionally involved pursuit of human intimacy. *Bumble*, although founded by one of the original creators of

Tinder, was created with a different idea for dating. The application was created with heterosexual females in mind, offering the same swiping activity, but only allowing women to initiate the conversation once they've received a match. Bumble declares itself the "feminist" Tinder, giving more control to the woman and empowering her to initiate the conversation despite gender scripts within dating. The man does not have the ability to reach out until the female bee sends the first message within the given 24 hour period, after which the match will disappear back into the hive. *OkCupid* takes a more mathematical approach, structuring its app to factor in an algorithm designed to calculate more accurate matches for users. Upon creating a profile, users provide the algorithm with data by answering 21 questions. Unlike the other two applications, which are based primarily on aesthetical parameters, *OkCupid* uses its algorithm to provide parameters based on personality and chemistry. Regardless, physical attraction is still relevant within this app; users swiping left and right to the provided "calculated" matches.

Throughout the primary analysis featured in chapter four of the project, which aims to explicate how gamified features within each site of study influences and shapes the perception and pursuit of intimacy as experienced by each player type, I will be relying on various screen grabs of the applications' design as viewed through the mobile interface. Any screen grabs that may include personal information of users within the app's database will undergo the appropriate measures to remain confidential.

Methodology

This project will utilize the definitional and rhetorical framework constructed in chapters two and three to carry out a greater analysis based on observational research. This research will be presented in deeper detail during the fourth chapter of this project containing the analysis, but

will also be incorporated throughout the player theory and gamification frameworks of the previous chapters so as to provide a clearer conceptualization of how the lenses are relevant to dating application culture. The observational research will aim to gather information about the design of the interface and infrastructure of *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid*. The particular design elements focused on will fall in line with Liza Pott's presentation of locative, nostalgic, and reward systems created by app developers. Through various screen grabs of each site of study, I will be able to visually explicate these systems at work, setting the foundational work for the chapter four analysis regarding how these features affect player perception and pursuit. No specific dating profiles of unsuspecting players will be used in samplings as a means of locating patterns within the design, so as to avoid an overtly invasive infringement of user privacy. Any screen grabs that may include personal information belonging to an existing user will be used in conjunction with necessary measures to protect user privacy. Ultimately, this observational research will solely look at patterns within the ways profiles and application functions are designed as it relates to interface. This serves to locate patterns within each application that explicitly or implicitly gamify the mobile dating experience.

Chapter Breakdown

Following this initial chapter, this project will be mapped out across four more. Chapter two will concern Richard Bartle's player types theory, which focuses on the types of players found in multi-user domains (MUDs). During this chapter I will introduce the four player types as explained by Richard Bartle in his work "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit Muds," and identify each one within dating applications. The aim of this is to prove that dating

applications are multi user games by proving the existence of each player type. Providing

foundational information regarding the characteristics of the Bartle's four player will lead to a

stronger contextual understanding of how each player is created and appealed to within the

design of mobile dating applications. This information will prove useful in understanding the

ultimate analysis provided in chapter four

Chapter three will introduce the *gamification*, both as an individual concept and as

applied to the three dating applications: *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid*. This chapter will turn to

Ian Bogost for a greater understanding of how gamification is used outside of games, looking at

how it became generally conceptualized within the business sector. In addition to this general

understanding of gamification, I will focus on the psychology of why app developers turn to

gamifying intimate human practices as an approach for successful application design. This

introduction to gamification will lead to a more specific understanding of the rhetorical practice.

I will be pulling from Liza Pott's work in digital architecture to identify specific game like

features app architectures use within dating applications to effectively gamify a player's search

for intimacy. This part of the chapter will begin to feature screen grabs of each application's

design as a means of showcasing the specific game like features Pott's suggests supports the

gaming simulated experience.

Chapter four works retroactively to draw upon the definitional and contextual framework

laid out by chapters two and three. It does so to craft an analysis providing readers with insight

on how the four player types within dating applications experience a reshaping of their

perception and pursuit of intimacy due to the gamified features employed by developers. This

analysis will include a deeper exploration of Bartle's player types, place them in conversation

with Pott's specific game-like features, and locate influence using Bogost's rhetorical lens of

gamification. This analysis will lead up to the conclusive chapter, which will serve to provide

answers regarding how the gamification of dating as created by *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid*

alters user experience, primarily in reshaping the type of intimacy users choose to pursue as well

as the influence it has on a users approach of human connection within the application. This

conclude the different ways in which the role users obtain through playing these dating

application games restructures their wants and needs regarding intimacy as they take on the

characteristics of this specific role.

II. The Players of Love Games

The practice of dating is naturally one of strategy. Individuals seek out others they may

be interested in based on a set of personal standards and values, and, should the other person

choose to follow the pursuit, a date may follow. The succeeding interactions between these two

parties unfold according to either's strategic navigation of typical social norms and scripts

surrounding intimacy and the pursuit of such relationships. On this very basic level, dating is of

some sorts a game, in that what is seen traditionally as a game involves strategy. The emergence

of dating applications, however, served as the first blatant attempt to transform dating into a

game that individuals seeking intimacy could play.

Turning Love into a Game

Although *OkCupid* was the first site of study founded, *Tinder* was the first mobile dating

application of the three, as well as the only one that remains vocal about its clear intent to design

a usable application that turns dating into a game. Although a classified social media app, the founders consciously gamified its design, founders Sean Rad and Justin Mateen building the mobile app to "take the stress out of dating by being a type of 'game' that requires less time and emotional investment to play" (Stampler, 2014). Buying into love, more specifically their desire for human connection on some level whether it is emotionally of strictly physical, draws users to dating application such as *OkCupid*, *Tinder*, and *Bumble*.

These brands pass as social media apps due to their technological architecture looking dramatically less like traditional games played on mobile devices or other gaming consoles. In his work *How to Do Things with Videogames*, game designer Ian Bogost (2011) presents the concept of casual gaming, which looks similar to the design and associated player-app interaction experienced within the dating applications. As defined by the International Game Developers Associations (IGDA), "casual games 'generally involve less complicated game controls and overall complexity in terms of gameplay or investment required to get through game[s]'" (p. 96). By this definition, *OkCupid*, *Tinder*, and *Bumble* fall into the category of 'casual games' due to their simplified interface and uncomplicated usability.

The conception of casual gaming takes form across two axes, being design and player resources. On either end of the x axis are players and world, while the y axis spans from acting to interacting. Concerning the character of the world, or domain, itself, game like MUDs fall above the x axis as they focus on *acting* on the domain while social MUDs reside below the axis due to its nature encouraging interaction with the domain and its inhabitants. Bogost explains that "casual games sport designs and controls of reduced complexity that take little time to learn and to play, that come at modest cost and are easy to purchase…Such titles offer short gameplay sessions, measured in minutes, to be sold from websites or app stores for play on personal

computers and mobile phones" (p. 97). The three dating apps all have similar interface designs, structured to be usable using one hand to hold the mobile device and navigated using quick swipes of the finger.

As reported by a 2014 study produced by The New York Times, these dating applications also experience shorter gameplay sessions as typical of casual games. *Tinder*, which holds an estimated user base of 50 million, reports, on average, "people log into the app 11 times a day. Women spend as much as 8.5 minutes swiping left and right during a single session; men spend 7.2 minutes. All of this can add up to 90 minutes each day" (Bilton, 2014). Although the overall accumulation of gameplay may seem significant, as well as similar to the 6.3 hours traditional video gamers spend weekly playing- which comes out to be roughly 54 minutes a day- the manifestation of this time spent is done so throughout multiple spurts of play (Nielson, 2014). It is this interval style of gaming that makes dating applications 'casual games.' Lastly, according to Bogost's definition of casual games, dating applications adhere to casual gaming's approachability standard, being able to be purchased from the mobile app store for free, or a low cost should the user decide to upgrade their dating account.

Dating applications are not only casual games but fall into the category of multi user domains as well (MUDs). Game designer Richard Bartle's (1996) research on MUDs explicates this specific sub culture of gaming as multiplayer worlds existing in real time, unfolding in various forms such as player versus player, role-playing games, and online chat (Bartle, 1996). Although there has been a long debate regarding 'social' versus 'gamelike' MUDs and social MUDders place in gaming culture, Bartle suggests that social MUDs cater heavily to players seeking socialization and exploration, which remain two vital player types to any given gaming domain. This supports his claim that social MUDs are a major sector of the multi-user domain

genre and, although considered to be a sub-category are, "nevertheless, still [in] it, and are therefore still MUDs." (Bartle, 1996) By this logic, it can be concluded that dating applications like *OkCupid*, *Tinder*, and *Bumble* are examples of casual games within the social MUD sector of multi-user domain gaming. With any game, comes not only strategy and specific technological architecture, but a set of players as well. In the following section, I will delve into Bartle's player theory as presented in his research "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players who Suit MUDs" and illustrate how each player manifests within dating app MUDs. In order to apply gamification as a lens within the analysis provided in chapter four of this project, I will first prove that dating applications are games. This will be done using Bartle's theory, which suggests that a traditional gaming template may extend into that of casual gaming, should these player types still exist.

The Players of Love

According to Bartle's gaming theory as it relates to multi-user domains, any given MUD has four players- achievers, socializers, explorers, and killers- that provided users with four distinct approaches to navigating the game. Each of the four player types include distinct characteristics that, if consciously followed, directly shape the user's perspective of gameplay, including the domain itself as well as other players within the world, as well as influence the user's interactions overall. Some users *choose* to become a specific player type, others may naturally assume the role according to intrinsic personality traits they possess prior to gameplay. Considering that the dating applications *OkCupid*, *Tinder*, and *Bumble* can be categorized as both casual games and social multi-user domains, they are comprised of these four player types.

Bartle's original map of player types fall into the aforementioned axis, achievers and killers residing in the *acting* area of the axis as they characteristically act upon the world and its inhabitants, while socializers and explorers lean towards the interacting end of the y axis. Pertaining the x axis, which spans from player to world, killers and socializers fall closer to the player side of the axis as characteristically they act on or with players (Bartle, 1996). Conversely, achievers and explorers fall closer to the world side of the axis as they act on or with the domain. His 2005 adaption of the same player grid allowed for fluidity within these player types, opening up the possibility that a given player could possess a personality within game play that represents a hybrid of two types.

2.1 Bartle's original player types model
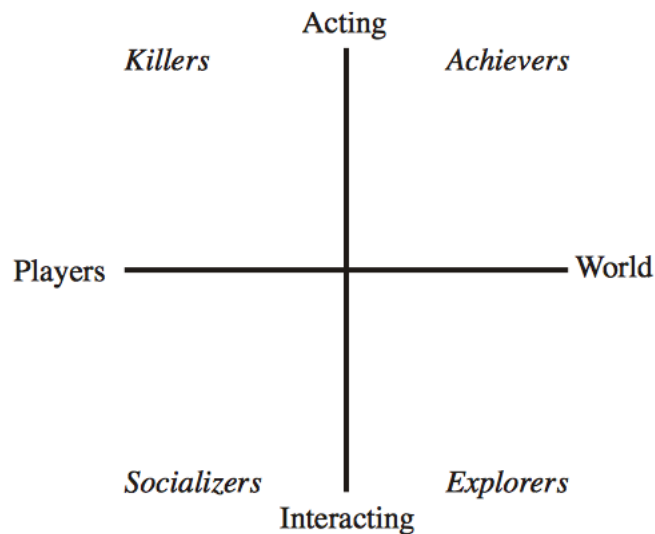
 Within Bartle's modified grid, there are eight players that adhere to one of the original four player types, wither implicitly or explicitly: Politicians, Griefers, Opportunists, Planners, Friends, Hackers, Scientists, and Networkers.

2.2 Bartle's new player types model
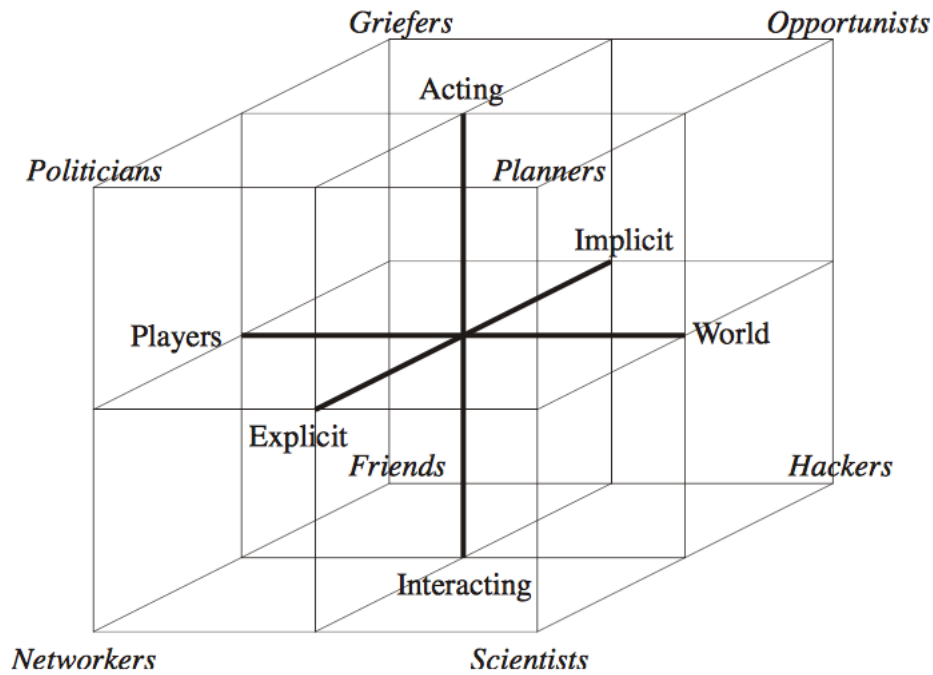
On this new matrix, a diagonal axis is added: *implicit* and *explicit*. This new graph creates a 3D version of the original, further demonstrating the complexity of social gaming within a virtual domain, allowing each of the original four types to "now come in two flavors" (Bartle). Achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers can manifest in both an implicit or explicit form. Opportunists are implicit achievers, while planners are explicit achievers. Scientists are explicit explorers, while hackers are implicit explorers. Networkers are explicit socializers, while friends are implicit socializers. Finally, griefers are implicit killers, while politicians are explicit killers. The spectrum of implicit to explicit creates the distinction of "'thinking before doing': implicit action is that which is done automatically without the intervention of the conscious mind; explicit action is that which is considered or planned for, generally as a means to achieve some desired goal or effect" (Bartle) Unlike the original model, this version doesn't just suggest

change in player type but also provides explanations for how this change may occur. Additionally, this 3D model provides gamers with a more detailed breakdown of the character each foundational player type takes form in and their associated behaviors, suggesting that a given player doesn't exist in a fixed identity.

The Achievers of Dating Apps

As defined by Bartle, "Achievers are interested in doing things to the game, i.e. in ACTING on the WORLD...the point of playing is to master the game and make it do what you want it to do...Achievers are proud of their formal status in the game's built-in level hierarchy, and of how short a time they took to reach it" (Bartle, 1996). These are players who venture into the game with a specific goal set and spend the majority of gameplay reaching these goals, more logically understood as those who play to win. According to Bartle's axes separating game like games and social games like dating applications, full-fledge achievers are typically not the majority within a casual gaming domain.

Within Bartle's new player types model, achievers exist as opportunists and planners. Opportunists are implicit achievers, who constantly change direction. The attributed characteristics of opportunists include taking chances as they recognize them, the tendency to "flit about from idea to idea," and "if there's an obstacle, they do something else instead" (Bartle, 1996) Planners are explicit achievers, who are entirely directionally oriented. This type of achiever sets "a goal and aim to achieve it…If there's an obstacle, they work round it…They pursue the same idea doggedly" (Bartle, 1996).

When applied to dating applications, achievers typically wish to achieve one thing: matches. The nature of these matches can entail most anything, from players solely seeking physical intimacy or those looking for a traditional, confluent human connection. Achievers within the mobile app culture do not concern themselves with pursuing any of these specific matches, aside from swiping right and – at minimum- indicating possible physical attraction to the player. Achievers within this domain are more interested in accumulating the most matches possible, and pay close attention to the numerical count at the top of their match queue, quantifying their success within the application. They take pride in knowing they are desired by a large number of other users, attributing this quantity to their self-proclaimed status as a "top-tier" player within the domain. This player type is fueled by ego rather than pursuit of true human connection.

The Explorers of Dating Apps

Bartle describes explorers as players who "delight in having the game expose its internal machinations to them. They try progressively esoteric actions in wild, out-of the way places, looking for interesting features and figuring out how things work" (Bartle, 1996). These are players most interested in truly experiencing the game, not afraid to put themselves out there and interact with other players in unconventional or experimental ways. Unlike Achievers, they are not overly concerned with earning or keeping matches, and do make up a significant part of the players within social MUDs.

Within the 3D model, explorers exist as either a hacker or a scientist. Hackers are implicit explorers, experimenting to "reveal hidden meanings within the virtual world" and following intuition to "discover new phenomena" (Bartle, 1996). Scientists are explicit explorers, who are

theory dependent and interact with the world to test them, as well as use methods to address their inquiries (Bartle, 1996).

As explained by Bartle, explorers are more interested in "having the game surprise them…in INTERACTING with the WORLD…other players add depth to the game…[they] are proud of their knowledge of the game's finer points" (Bartle, 1996). Explorers will pursue a conversation with another player once the match has been established. Explorers are players who will not simple begin a conversation with the traditional "hello," but will exercise creativity in their interactions as a means of testing limits and pushing other players to respond in different ways. Unlike achievers, who will never pursue conversations with the majority of their matches, as they care more about having a large quantity of matches rather than quality connections, explorers do not care if they lose a match through being blocked or deleted by other players within the app's universe. This player is largely supported by the disposable nature of the game's design.

Socializers of Dating Apps

Bartle describes the socializers as players who are "interested in people, and what they have to say. The game is merely a backdrop, a common ground where things happen to players. Inter-player relationships are important: empathising with people, sympathising, joking, entertaining, listening" (Bartle, 1996). Socializers have no interest in winning as seen with the achiever, and unlike explorers, they have little interest in using other players as experiments for entertainment. They want to put themselves out there, but with hopes of finding and sustaining genuine interactions with other players. The socializer is proactive rather than reactive, and makes up a significant part of the players within a social MUD.

Within the 3D model, socializers exist as friends or networkers. Friends are implicit socializers who interact primarily with those in their known circle but have "deep/intimate understanding" of these select people, truly "enjoying their company" and accepting "their little foibles" (Bartle, 1996). Networkers are the explicit counterpart who actively seek to meet new people and expand their network, making "an effort to get to know their fellow players" and "learn who and what these people know" (Bartle, 1996).

As described by Bartle, socializers are "interested in INTERACTING with other PLAYERS. This usually means talking, but can extend to more exotic behaviour... Socialisers are proud of their friendships, their contacts and their influence" (Bartle, 1996). Similar to explorers, socializers are interested in learning about the universe in which they are playing. Unlike explorers, however, socializers are genuinely interested in learning about the other players they are playing alongside within the domain. These players appeal strongly to the concept of confluent love, understanding that intimacy on any level requires patience and work from each player, and therefore they put in the effort to initiate and sustain genuine conversations with matches. Socializers are the players that approach the game with its face value in mind, being that of a dating application designed to help users access a dating network with potential genuine relationships. They swipe through the player deck with the intentions of finding a player who they are not only physically attracted to but connect with personally as well. Additionally, socializers are the players that experience the most death, so to speak. This player approaches the game with the highest level of empathy and respect for other players. When they interact with players who do not possess the same level of respect and consideration for the application's intended function, causing them to treat the socializer as less of a human and more as just

another player card within the deck, the socializer experiences hurt, deceit, betrayal, and feels ultimately unfulfilled by the intimacy found within these mobile apps.

Killers of Dating Apps

Bartle describes killers as players who "get their kicks from imposing themselves on others…Killers are interested in doing things to people…ACTING on other PLAYERS. Normally, this is not with the consent of these "other players," but killers don't care; they wish only to demonstrate their superiority" (Bartle, 1996). Killers typically utilize these casual spheres in a sadistic way, looking only to demean other players as a means of establishing power or conduct player interactions on shallow terms. As described by Bartle, "Killers are proud of their reputation and of their oft-practiced fighting skills" (Bartle, 1996). Killers are not the dominant majority in social gaming domains, but are present enough to sustain this type of digital space as a MUD.

In the 3D graph, killers exist as griefers and politicians. Griefers are implicit killers who have not true understanding of "why they act as they do, although they may offer rationalisations they'd like you (or they themselves) to believe." Many times, their only vague goal is to assume a negative reputation (Bartle, 1996). Politicians are the explicit counterpart within the killer player type, acting "with forethought and foresight" to "manipulate people subtly" (Bartle, 1996). These killers are explicit despite subtle manipulation as their actions are carefully calculated so as to meet a goal. Achievers and killers are the minority within social gaming domains, possibly because they have intersecting characteristics.

Within the dating application, a killer's pride in being emotionally unavailable and "savage-like" in their approach of empathy and human beings protects them from remorse, allowing them to continue to utilize the game's interface and structural design to place others at disadvantages while looking out solely for their own needs. Additionally, despite true killers making up the minority within a social MUD, other player types-namely explorers and especially socializers- will assume the persona of killer as a protective strategy while navigating the dating app. Placing oneself within a dating universe is vulnerable, and causes players to consider opening up more to matches and taking deeply honest approaches when attempting to establish sustainable intimacy. The caveat to this vulnerability, however, is the possibility that a player can experience rejection after placing themselves in an open position, which can bring the player immense embarrassment. When non-killers use the killer persona as protection, they play the game in a way that focuses less on dating and more on ensuring they are not placed in a position of vulnerability. This prevents them from effectively seeking out the aspects of the game they personally find most fulfilling, whether it be achieving matches, exploring the various reactions of players, or receiving genuine connections. Within the digital space, players have a tendency to present themselves in a way different from what they truly are looking for from the game.

III. Gamification: Turning Dating into a Game

On the basis of the logic presented in chapter two, in which Bartle's player types are applied to dating applications, it can be argued that mobile dating apps are social MUDs and therefore can be categorized as casual gaming. If these player types emerge in any given ratio within a gaming sphere, then by Bartle's distinction the domain can be deemed a game. Now that the likes of *Tinder*, *Bumble,* and *OkCupid* can be identified as games, I invite another lens in to

the analysis: Gamification. Dan Dixon, human-computer interaction researcher at the University

of the West of England, presents a general definition of gamification within his scholarship

Player Types and Gamification, which provides a critical analysis of Bartle's original player

types research. Gamification is "the practice of making activities more like games in order to

make them more interesting or enjoyable" (Cambridge). Gamification is also, as Ian Bogost

argues, *'bullshit'*- a rhetorical strategy for marketing purposes "invented by consultants as a

means to capture the wild, coveted beast that is videogames and to domesticate it for use in the

grey, hopeless wasteland of big business" (Bogost). Make no mistake, Bogost categorizing the

rhetorical lens as *'bullshit'* in no way discredits it tremendous influential power, but rather sheds

light on the very fact that it has massive power in coercing those who its used on to continue to

consume the very things that feed the capitalistic values that allowed for gamifications

conception.

Contrary to the connotations '*bullshit'* may suggest, "Bullshitters…are not stupid. The

rhetorical power of the word "gamification" is enormous, and it does precisely what the

bullshitters want: it takes game—a mysterious, magical, powerful medium that has captured the

attention of millions of people—and it makes them accessible" (Bogost). It is the approachability

of turning an otherwise frustrating or complex concept into a game that makes it so addictive to

'users.' This is what motivates users of *Tinder*, *Bumble,* and *OkCupid* to consistently open up

and use their apps. The idea behind the designs of these apps is to, simply put, turn a vulnerable

and at times frustrating practice like dating into an easy-going game. Bogost coins

"exploitationware" as a synonym for gamification, as those who apply the strategy, such as

designers of mobile dating apps, do so to exploit the consensus that human beings find dating to

be overwhelming, stressful, and wish it were infinitely easier to find and build intimate

connections. Plainly put: Human beings want to be loved and cared for by other human beings, and consequently will consistently act on this need for affection through pursuit of intimacy. This is why mobile applications, like *Tinder*, have done so well. Love sells.

Explotationware "captures gamifiers' real intentions: a grifter's game, pursued to capitalize on a cultural moment, through services about which they have questionable expertise, to bring about results meant to last only long enough to pad their bank accounts" (Bogost). Mobile dating app designers construct the architecture of the interface and gameplay with the explicit intention of making dating less emotionally involved and thus less stressful, evoking similar enjoyment found in playing a game. These designers have no objective expertise in dating or intimacy, but as inventors within a greater capitalist system, recognize that gamification will create an addictive application garnering extensive gameplay from users and earn more revenue. Additionally, they structure a game that, due to its noncommittal and casual nature, makes it rather difficult to find a sustainable connection, causing them to return to the game in another attempt. This end goal to gamification prolongs the time in which money is going back into the pockets of app developers from any given player.

There is real intent on the side of the 'gamifier.' They are affected just as much as the player within the gamified setting, though the players have far less control than the developers over the level of influence. To conceptualize the process of gamification, it has been defined as "a process of enhancing services with (motivational) affordances in order to invoke gameful experiences and further behavioral outcomes…gamification can be seen to have three main parts: 1) the implemented motivational affordances, 2) the resulting psychological outcomes, and 3) the further behavioral outcomes" (Hamari). Dating app users become so immersed in the gamified system, of which they are motivated to actively engage with, they are less cognizant of the ways

in which the application's design reshapes the ways they perceive intimacy as well as influence their behavior when engaging with the app and its players.

In the following sections, I will be analyzing the interface design and game play structure of *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid*. From this analysis, I will be detailing the ways in which these characteristics of design and development gamify dating. This will include the exploration of casual game design v. traditional game design as touched upon in Ian Bogost's *How to do Things with Video Games*. Additionally, I will be pulling from Liza Pott's *Rhetoric and Experience Architecture*, looking at the use of badges within gaming as a means of motivation. Within the latter half of this chapter, Pott's work will be used as the foundation for understanding the ways in which casual games like dating applications are designed and developed, and how the basic principles for digital architecture intersects with the gamification of real-life practices like dating. Lastly, the conclusive section of this chapter will suggest ways the proposed gamified designs influence the psychological and behavioral outcomes of users submerged in its gameplay.

I Can Stop Whenever I Feel Like it! Casual Game Play

Bogost discusses the distinction between casual game design and traditional game design, which lends a stronger understanding of the construction of mobile dating applications, particularly the 'how' of players becoming addicted to its play. Bogost writes, "According to the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), casual games 'generally involve less complicated game control and overall complexity in terms of gameplay or investment required to get through game[s]" (96). The application architecture of *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid* is designed with simplicity in mind so as to compensate for the extensive strategy involved when

seeking out and establishing human connection. The achievement of intimacy through the app is a difficult feat, so developers intentionally design casual games to include easy to learn gameplay. This is to maintain balance in the player's relationship with the game, minimizing risk of playing, which in turn provides a larger incentive to play. Bogost writes of casual game conception, "Casual games sport designs and controls of reduced complexity that take little time to learn and to play, that come at modest cost and are easy to purchase" (97). The design empowers players, as there is power in knowing they didn't sacrifice too much initial investment in order to play. In the long-term goal of casual game design, however, "a common design philosophy is… 'easy to learn, hard to master'" (98).

This philosophy serves as an act of deception, players inferring the promise for quick achievement through the ease with which they successfully master the basic controls of gameplay. This deception is brought about by the design's respect for the player's time, "making it easier to learn to play the game. But the notion of mastery raises doubt about low commitment in casual games…the maxim 'easy to learn, hard to master' reveals that casual games actually demand significant total playtime" (98) The hope of the developers is, by the time players realize casual games truly require significant commitment, they've already become invested in the gameplay's mission. This investment, however, is not recognized by players as being 'addicted' to gameplay, which is the terminology tightly associated with traditional players of game-like games. The term 'casual' separates users of casual games like dating apps from the traditional gamer. Bogost explains that the concept of casual within casual gaming refers to the informality of game play rather than the simplicity of its design and controls, and may take form in three ways: indifferent, spontaneous, and fleeting. In terms of indifference, Bogost writes, "we sometimes use *causal* to refer to a lack of concern…In this sense, *casual* conjures notions of

apathy, insouciance, and nonchalance." When *casual* conjures spontaneity, it creates a sense of "offhandedness. In this sense, *causal* raises notions of unpremeditated action, doing something off-the-cuff." Finally, when casual gaming evokes a feeling of fleeting within the player, it refers to the awareness that "something is short-lived and momentary, something superficial, like a temporary or part-time commitment, or an irregular activity" (100). Developers of casual games take advantage of the justification indifference, spontaneity, and fleeting lends players, as it provides them with a safety net that encourages them to continue playing.

The perception that dating apps are *casual* and therefore players aren't overly concerned with 'winning' or are compelled to engage in constant play, which supports a spontaneous experience, such as playing only when bored, or that it lacks the level of commitment required with traditional game design allows players to convince themselves that they are in complete control of their play. They can convince themselves that, similar to the logic of an addict, they can stop whenever they'd like. Casual games are intentionally designed to lend this sense of pseudo power to players. Dating application users may believe they are not entirely invested in the game, and can essentially 'throwaway' the app and its play whenever they'd like, but this very perception of lack of commitment translates as not having anything to lose by continuing to play because they virtually aren't affected by its culture. Subconsciously, of course, they are addicted, allowing developers to consistently cash in on their game play.

Why Can't I Stop Whenever I'd Like? The Gamification of Dating

Bogost provides insight as to how developers can garner a player base for casual games, including dating apps. Although this isn't directly explaining the gamification of dating, it is important to understand how the design of casual games evokes addictive responses in players,

similar to traditional games. Apps like *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid* are used for dating, the pursit of human connection and intimacy, and therefore are commonly categorized as social media or communicative tools despite having game like effects on users. Recognizing that users behave more so like players, and experience a particular level of investment that causes consistent gameplay even if in short spurts, is a clear sign that gamification is at play. Liza Potts and Michael Salvo insights and compilation of scholarship within *Rhetoric and Experience Architecture* provide more context into the architecture of applications, highlighting specific design and developmental tactics to assimilate gaming experiences within non-gaming practices like dating.

This section will explore three developmental tactics app developers may employ as a means of effectively gamifying dating and achieving much of the goals aforementioned by Bogost in his breakdown of gamification and explotationware. The three characteristics Pott's discusses include: Locative, nostalgic, and rewarding. Understanding locative systems within the gamification of dating applications reveals the strategy in manipulating the feature of *Tinder*, *Bumble*, *OkCupid* that allows a player to set geographical ranges for finding intimacy, and how location influences their approach of these other players upon matching. Exploring the presence of nostalgia within these apps, more specifically how design supports the emergence of nostalgia, will provide an understanding of what motivates players to continue booting up the apps and swiping regardless of past failures. Lastly, looking at the reward systems put in place by developers, such as badges, upgrades, or certain features providing immediate feedback and reinforcement for positive outcomes, allows for an understanding of more explicit gamification that encourages player usage.

Locative Applications

Traditional games require strategy. The process of gaming is a practice that makes the consideration of 'moves' and adjustments to tactics central to the ways players interact with the world and its other players. Combining classical rhetoric and game theory highlights how the design of a dating application provides a platform on which strategic gameplay is necessary for success. Anders Fagerjord, a scholar of media and communication, provides insight to locative technology in chapter thirteen of Pott's and Salvo's book. Locative technology would include apps like *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid,* which rely on geographical location so as to create the opportunity for discourse. Fagerjord's exploration of locative technology can be used as a lens for understanding how locative applications support the gamification of dating by presenting opportunities for discourse between players that are navigated through strategy.

Fagerjord discusses how the users of locative technology subconsciously author discourse through three of Cicero's classic Aristotelian frames: Inventio, Kairos, and Dispositio, When inventing the discourse, Fagerjord notes that most "locative projects…seem to start from a general topic: an idea of what could be interesting to communicate in a certain spot" (226) Within dating apps, a player's location is known to the app itself. Players are then able to determine their locative range, setting the span of miles they would prefer to search for other players within. Some players prefer to find matches within a geographically close span, so as to make the connection more accessible. Others strategically set a wide locative range in order to explore beyond their geographical limitations or intentionally keep distance between them and their matches in case the discourse fails. Location then becomes the deciding factor as to whether the player (1) swipes right and pursues the possibility of discourse with the other player or (2) how they determine what to say when creating the discourse. The location of another player, and

how this location may relate to the primary player's own geographical standing, can heavily influence the invention of conversation.

Cicero's second rhetorical frame, Kairos, refers to the author's sensibility for the rhetorical situation. This relates to self-awareness, which is vital to effectively navigating discourse between players within dating applications once the conversation has begun. Fagerjord writes that Karios "is often described as the time and place, [but] it is rather the audience gathered in a particular place at a certain time that should be the rhetor's concern" (228). Approachability is the root of the appeal with dating applications, and this extends to location. Players may strategically set their locative range to make their goals within gameplay more attainable. Socializers may set a range that only reaches 20 miles beyond their location, so that any matches they earn have a higher chance of becoming a genuine intimate connection. Kairos allows the socializer to be aware that an individual is more inclined to meet another player in person if there are fewer geographical limitations. Achievers, explorers, or killers, may set their range up to 100 miles beyond their location, either to optimize the chances of earning a high number of matches or to avoid the potential for in person confrontation should the discourse have a negative outcome.

Dispositio, according to Fagerjord, relates more to the developer's explicit decisions in design of the application rather than the player's conduct of discourse, although the interface's organization does influence player behavior. Cicero's frame regards the organization of the parts of a given discourse within the given space. While players may engage in discourse with one another within the game, they are most consistently in discourse with the dating app itself. Developers pay close attention to the organization of the interface architecture so as to guide future discourse, between itself and the player as well as any that may emerge between the

four player types. Fagerjord writes, "a user interface to the navigation system guides the user from point to point, and we [want] it to be easy, logical, and as expected" (229). He adds, "well-functioning interactive media find a balance between a dramatic flow and allowing choices for the user" (231). The design features that make *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OkCupid* locative apps are the ability to set the distance across which a player wants to search for intimacy as well as the apps' awareness of each player's location. The player's location and the locative range are the two points that provide the guidelines for the game, which guide the invention and Kairos involved in the creation of discourse necessary for the pursuit of intimacy. When the player begins to understand the importance of location within their pursuit, they are able to recognize what locative range works best for the type of intimacy they wish to pursue. When they've established a locative range in relation to their own, they are able to then invent strategies vital in crafting effective discourses most accessible to other players they are matching with.

How Nostalgia Fuels Gameplay

Human beings have a natural inclination to, whether it be conscious or subconscious, catalyze situations assimilating certain feelings or experiences that they perceive as pleasant. This stems from nostalgia, which occurs when an individual develops a sentimental association with a particular event, period of time, or occurring behavior. Dating app developers recognize human attraction to nostalgia, and strategically design these apps to appeal to it. William Kurlinkus offers insight into this strategy in digital architecture, in his section of Pott's work titled "Memorial Interactivity: Scaffolding Nostalgic User Experiences." Memorial interactivity [(MI)] refers to "how rhetorical designers scaffold the memories that make texts meaningful. To illustrate this strategy, [Kurlinkus] divide[s] MI into three types: 1) narratability (the appetitive to

tell stories about meaningful interactions), 2) craft (memories associated with building an object), 3) connoisseurship (participating in consumerism that requires memorable protocols as badges of membership)" (275). Memorial interactivity is the component integrated into dating app design and is in conversation with a player's nostaligia, which motivates player strategy akin to behavior seen in traditional gameplay. In this section, nostalgia as it relates to narrative refers to a "gap in the past to be resolved through story; an authentic trace to be mused over; an experience that one cannot duplicate; a means to pose the self as champion…the best gifts follow variable reward; they plan for randomness and loss; they follow a nostalgic stream by creating a longing for a unique past that can't be duplicated" (276-277) If app developers can provide a design in which players can have at least one memorable experience, then they will continue to keep playing, being provided a new challenge within the game: recreate this significant moment.

The implementation of memorial interactivity gamifies dating by turning the recreation of a meaningful, intimate (whatever intimate may mean to the particular player) interaction into a perceived end goal to achieve through strategic gameplay. Players will employ a multitude of strategies so as to achieve this goal with no qualms regarding the amount of gameplay this may require, leading to a heavy investment in the app not unlike addictive traditional gaming. User experience (UX) architects, like dating app developers, rely on the craft formula so as to have this effect on players: "Labor + intricacy + memory = meaning….craft is defined by such self-reflective nostalgia" (281). UX developers aim to "evoke emotional reactions in their users and thereby, prevent them from leaving a service through nostalgic loss aversion" (281). Through this, developers can not only evoke gameplay behavior within those who download the app but also keep them invested in the play.

Rewarding Gameplay

A predominant characteristic of gamification is the inclusion of rewarding systems and components. These include granting players the ability to level up or earn badges indicating recognition for a particular level of gameplay and achievement. Badges are the standard way in which developers can provided players with instant gratification for the gameplay they invest within the app. As explained by Stephanie Vie in her section of Pott's work, "Badges as Architectures of Experience: From Signaling to Communication," badges are "visible markers of achievements…rhetorical objects that provide meaningful information about both designer intent and user experience…illuminate users' interests and activities in an environment (or, in some cases, what the designers *believe* users' interests and activities might be)" (304). The theory of badge development intends to "amplify the social elements of the systems within which they reside; they encourage communication within that social network- between the humans in that system and between the participants and the system itself" (305). In context of dating applications, developers of these types of 'socially networked games,' as Vie refers to the genre as, "attend to larger interpersonal concerns to create immersive, interactive spaces that include badging designs" (305). To clarify, badging is a developmental strategy and may not appear concretely in the form of badges as seen with traditional game design. With applications like *Tinder*, *Bumble*, and *OKCupid*, the similar concepts and approaches employed or addressed by developers when engaging with badging will not include literal badges but other features eliciting a rewarding experience.

The following images are screen grabs from the various applications, all of which exist within the badging system executed by application developers. The general purpose of the badging system is to provide incentives for users to continue being players within the game.

Relating back to the chapter involving the reasons why developers and companies execute

gamification as a tactic for consumerism, these designers want to implement systems that will

create an addictive relationship with their product. This, in intersection with the aforementioned

locative and nostalgic systems, sustains the user's emotional and psychological investment in the

application. Without incentive, the player has no tie to the application and is free to regress back

into a distant user, who is detached from the game and feels no compulsion to continue playing

regularly.

One common component within the badging system of the three sites of study is that of

upgrades. *Tinder* offers Tinder Plus, *Bumble* offers Bumble Boost, and OkCupid offers A-List,

which are all paid upgrades to a player's account unlocking special features within the

application under the promise that the overall experience or success will be enhanced. These

upgrades may be advertised as the following:
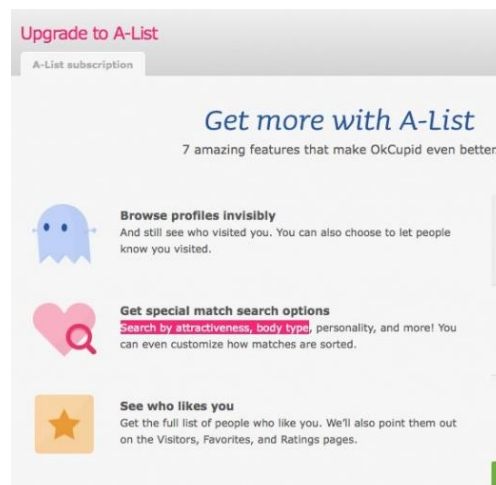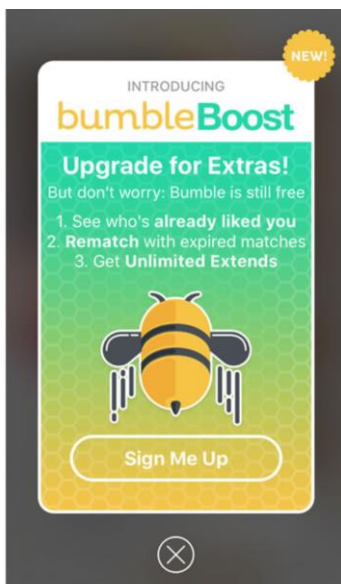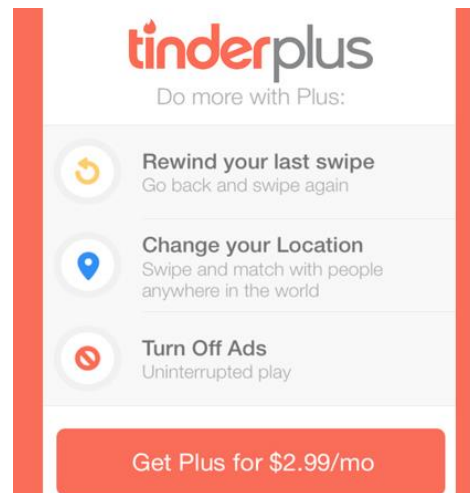
For Achievers, these upgrades are enticing because they open up the potential to increase matches. Socializers feed into the nostalgic systems and recognize that enhanced features may increase the possibility to recreate positive experiences they've had within the application. Explorers and killers may view the special features as an opportunity to increase the range in which they can act on the digital world, no matter what their overall goal be. Universally, this offered upgrade provides the feeling of exclusivity. Players feel incentivized by the idea that they are apart of an exclusive sector of users who experience the application differently due to their special privileges associated with their boosted account. Additionally, there is incentive to make use of the features one has paid for, whether or not they find the upgraded account helped their overall goals.

     Bumble utilizes color-coding effects as a means of incentivizing gameplay. When a match is made, a user has 24 hours to initiate a conversation. Otherwise, the match will 'expire' and can only be recovered through a rematch, should the player have the upgraded bumbleboost account, or found again through the original swiping method. When the match is successfully made, there will be a yellow ring around the connection, which slowly disappears in a clockwise

motion as the 24 hours come to an end. When the connection is in danger of expiring, the ring

will turn red so as to alert the user of this expiring connection. The colored rings signifying the

status of matching appear as follows:
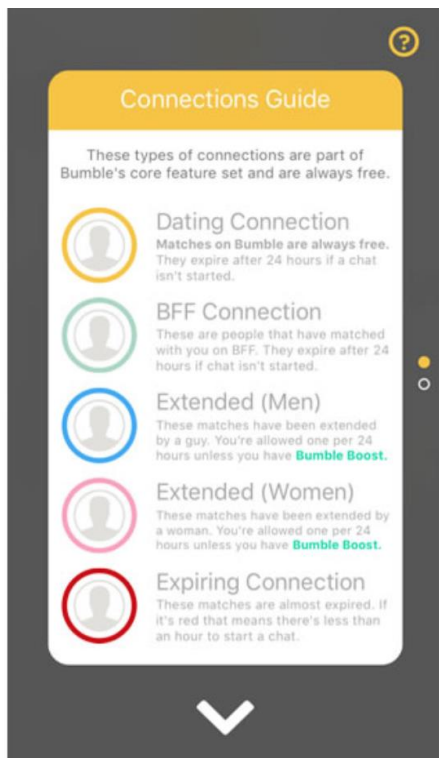
App developers utilized bright colors as found in traditional gaming design as a means of

creating associations between making matches and players acting on them. Seeing the bright

yellow ring every time a match is made conditions the player to feel excitement for the new

opportunity to connect, which leads to a desire to initiate a conversation with someone who

reciprocated their interest. Should the player always act on their match, they may never see the

red ring. However, once they've experienced the yellow ring dissipating and eventually

transforming into the red ring indicating an expiring connection, the player may become

conditioned to respond to this alert. The player may become affected by the nostalgic system,

suddenly becoming aware of a potential connection they may miss out on should they not initiate

a conversation. Developers are hopeful that these color associations within the badging system will trigger consistent responses in players so that will continue to fire up *Bumble* and swipe.

A badging system that *OkCupid* utilizes is that of a numerical algorithm, which mimics the statistics provided to a player in traditional gaming so as to provide the individual with concrete measures of their skill level and success. *OkCupid's* app, despite having a similar swiping structure to *Tinder* and *Bumble*, prides itself on its one distinct difference: promising its user base compatible matches based on a numerical algorithm designed to increase the potential of successfully finding sustainable intimacy. To recap from chapter one's discussion of the sites of study, players are asked 21 questions when creating their account within the application. The answers to these questions are factored into the algorithm, and the potential matches shown to the player are done so through the assumption that these other users have a certain level of compatibility. The statistics as figured by the algorithm are shown to the player as depicted in the following screen grab:
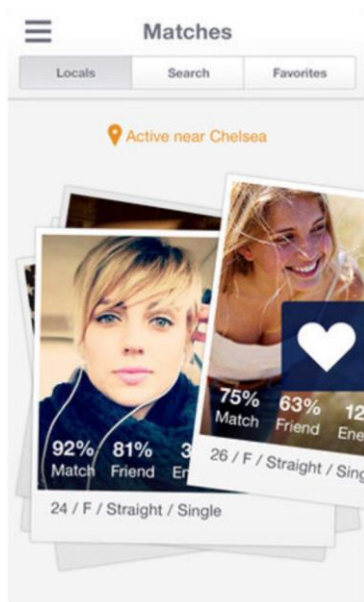
Each profile is designed to provide the player with an idea of how compatible of a match they are to the individual shown. Consequently, this triggers a similar gaming strategy found in

traditional game play. Players begin to study these statistics and infer who they may reach out to, what they may say based off of profile similarities, and ultimately how much investment they may place into igniting the match. This strategic mindset is a result of the gamified feature within *OkCupid*, prompting players to want to avoid failure by putting forth the effort to enhance their chances of successfully connecting through an implemented game plan.

In the following chapter, I will finally be providing an analysis aiming to answer the question: *How does the gamification of dating applications reshape and influence the ways in which players perceive and pursue intimacy?* As briefly mentioned in the end of the intial chapter to this project, this analysis will work retroactively, pulling from the concepts mentioned in chapters two and three to establish a concrete understanding of these apps' architecture's influence on dating. I will be reintroducing Bartle's player types as the core users being analyzed and, using Bogost's breakdown of gamification as a lens, look at how the locative, nostalgic, and reward systems discussed by Pott's affect their perception and pursuit of intimacy.

IV. It's a Match! When Users Date Gamification

As explained in the second chapter to this project, the four player types are not necessarily an innate part of an individual's identity. A user of the game may have natural characteristics akin to one of the four player types, but ultimately their identity outside of the game still is partially separate from who they become within the game. It is the features of the game that elicit a player type emergence. I will first explain how each player type comes to be within the dating applications, looking at which system as presented by Potts brings about this player type emergence. Following this part of the analysis, I will return to each individual player

type and explore how their individual perceptions and pursuits of intimacy are influenced by these systems of gamification.

Who am I within the game?

Relating back to Bartle's player descriptions, Achievers are players who approach the game with a specific end goal in mind. Achievers are many times statistically driven, needing a quantifiable axis across which to numerically measure their success. This is so they may concretely determine to what degree they have achieved their ultimate goal. Achievers are not players whose end goal is to achieve a sustainable human connection with another player. Although this is the assumed goal of the application due to its intended function, the probability of achieving this connection has a low success rate and ultimately cannot be easily measured along a numerical axis due to concepts like love and connection being ambiguous and impossible to express quantitatively.

Conversely, Achievers are motivated by the application's feature allowing them to accumulate a bank of matches. A number showcasing how many matches have been successfully achieved through swiping accompanies these banks. This particular player type is pulled out of a user through the badging system that provides immediate feedback and positive reinforcement when a match is achieved. When a match is made immediately upon the user

swiping right- meaning that the other user has already swiped right to the player first- the sites of

study all provide a screen similar to the following screen grabs from *Tinder*:
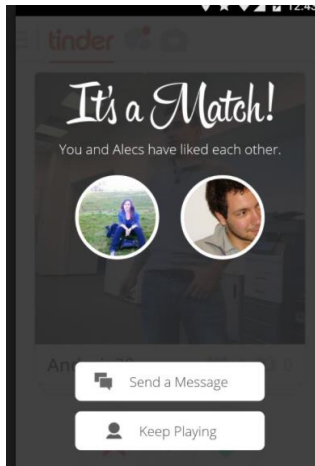

When the player receives a match in the time following their swiping right to another player-

meaning they were the ones who swiped first, and the other user received the similar

aforementioned screen grab- they will receive a blinking notification similar to the one

showcased in the following screen grab from *Bumble*:
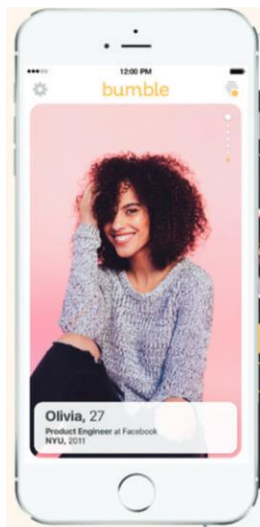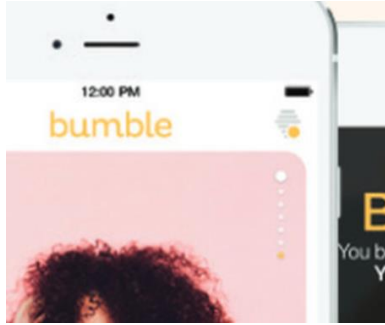
The upper right corner features a beehive with a notification marker indicating there is a new message. The hive will blink yellow if there are new matches. This game-like feature within the badging system put into place by the application architects draws out the achiever in a user as it conditions an association between visual positive reinforcement and seeking matches. Once the achiever is active within the application, they become addicted to consistently receiving these reward markers, understanding it to be an indication of an increase in the number of matches they've successfully gained. The higher this number goes, the more successful they determine themselves to be.

Explorers, being players who act on the world the game exists within as well as other users as a means of eliciting various reactions, are drawn out by Pott's locative system. The applications grant users the ability to customize settings, including geographical distance. This enables users to determine the range within they would like to seek for a potential match. These locative systems appear in the interface as shown in the following screen grabs:
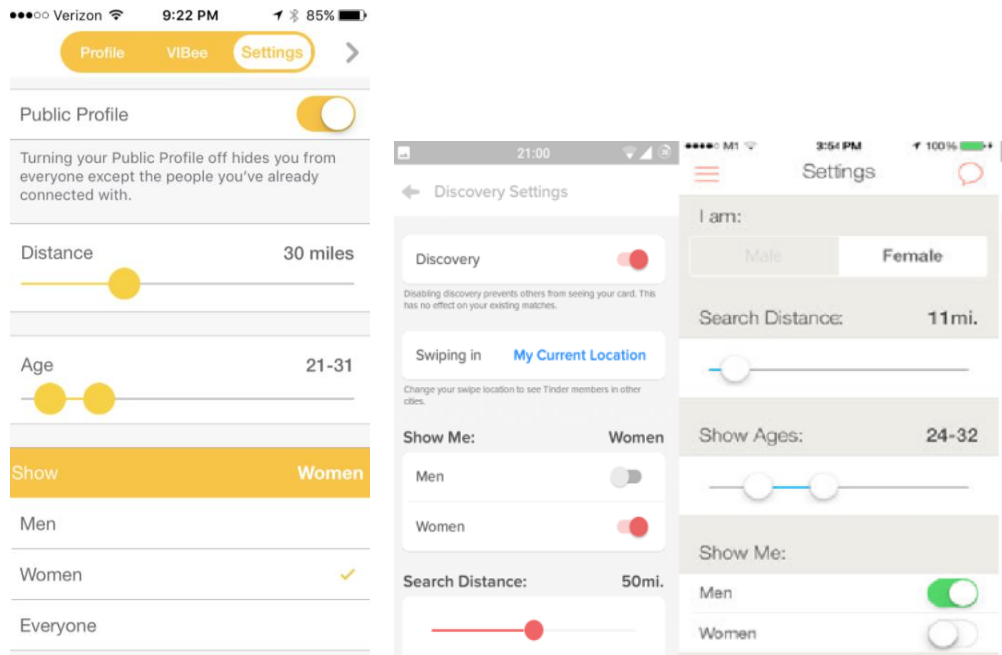
Like a game, the app developers have provided the ability for players to tweak settings according to the game play they would like to engage in. This is particularly appealing to explorers, as they aim to engage with a variety of game play scenarios. The opportunity to manipulate distance, age, and gender preference, enables them to open themselves up to a vast range of opportunities to explore. Users who find this intriguing and spend time consistently switching around settings eventually develop into an explorer.

Socializers, the players looking for sustainable intimate connection, emerge within the application due to the nostalgic system implemented by app developers. This system is supported by the potential of experiencing a positive and fulfilling connection through the application. Once the first positive experience is encountered, the consistency in structure of the apps' design consistently promises the socializer that, through repeated usage, they can recreate that moment they are so nostalgic. This system appeals to the user that recognizes, logically: *If I did it once by doing x and y, then I can certainly do it again by employing the same x and y strategy*. This particular player is hooked through the nostaligic mindset, but the continuous emergence of the

socializer is drawn out by an intersection of nostalgic and badging systems. The user may have a desire to continuously experience the positive connection they once had despite the greater amount of failures, but ultimately may need a push to pursue that want. Application developers transform the user into a socializer or, a player dedicated to recreating this nostaligic experience, through the use of notifications offering encouragement. Examples of these notifications can be found in the following screen grabs:
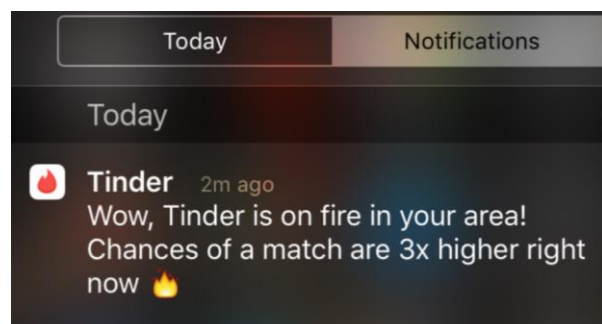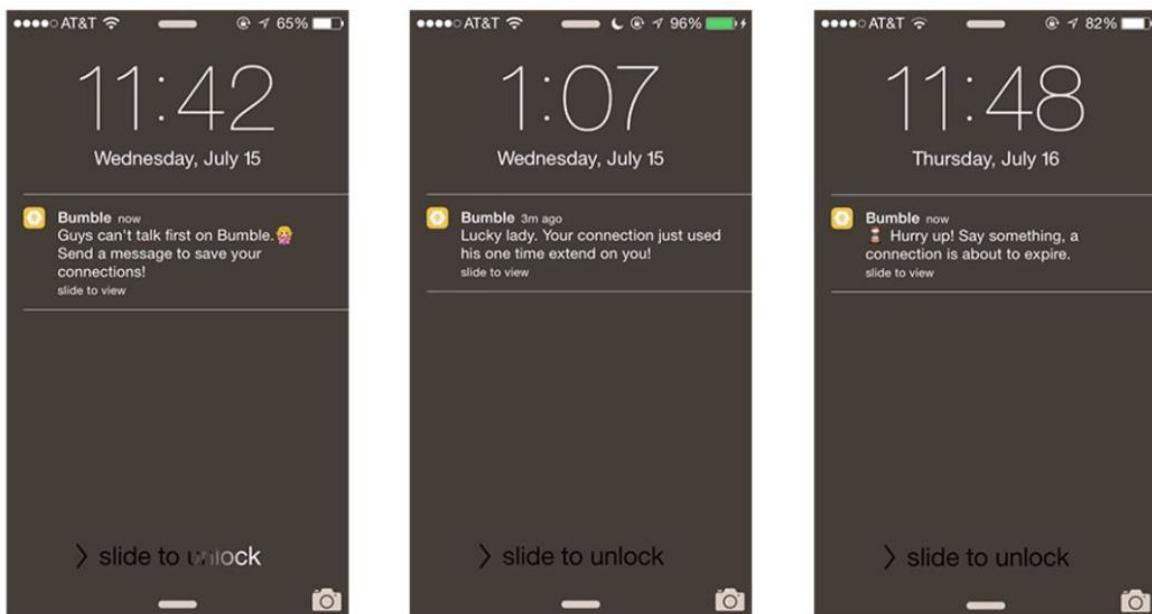
Application developers create notifications that serve as subtle reminders of the promise of potentially experiencing recreated nostalgia. As they become sent to the user, the socializer is drawn out; being enticed to eventually begin interacting with the application in a more dedicated way. Ultimately, it is this switch in dedication that determines the transformation from user to socializer.

Killers arise from both the locative and badging systems. These are users who love the pay off of receiving matches as provided by the badging systems, and are encouraged to keep using the app knowing they will receive positive outcomes. Relating to the locative features, they revel in the idea of having access to a large player base to satisfy their specific personal needs. These systems, in addition to their desire to seek out shallow intimacy, lead them to perceive the actual players as games. This results in a perception of intimacy as easily disposable. Due to their noncommittal pursuit of human connection, killers have the ability to simply dispose of anyone who has already satisfied their need or conversely has failed to do so, opening themselves up to move on to the next.

Reshaping perception and navigating pursuit of dating

Once the locative, nostalgic, and reward systems draw out specific player types, transforming users into players themselves, these particular characteristics begin to deeply influence the ways these individuals perceive and pursue their search for intimacy within the game.

As their bank of matches increases, achievers begin to associate humans with numbers. The consistent reinforcement they receive from the reward system implemented by developers visually shows them a count of matches they have successfully achieved. The consequence of

this is a psychological association between high self-esteem, high level of attractiveness, and high number of matches. This system enables the achiever to utilize human beings as a quantifiable measurement of their success within the application. The interesting thing is, they are not mneasuring their success in the application in the same way as a socializer is. A socializer sees success as finding a sustainable human connection. The achiever becomes sucked into the reward system, viewing the objective of the application as being attractive enough to the majority of other players. They view success as the confirmation that they are in the highest percentile of attractiveness within the application, which can only be inferred across a numerical axis depicting a large amount of interest in the user through high quantities of matches. The achiever perceives intimacy as shallow, something that comes in the form of ego stroking and physical attraction. Due to this shallow perception, the achiever rarely reaches out to a significant chunk of these matches, as they don't view much use for these other players beyond what they've already achieved in getting them to swipe right and elicit a match. This is how the reward system alters the achiever's pursuit of intimacy, convincing them that there is no need to pursue an emotional or psychological connection for fulfillment.

The explorer, similar to the achiever, doesn't see much pay-off in pursuing an emotional or psychological connection with those they match with. Due to their ultimate goal being acting *on* the world and its inhabitants, they have little investment in the application's intended purpose of finding a sustainable intimacy. They view the intimacy they seek within the application as serving an entertaining purpose, one in which they fail to take the process as seriously as a socializer and ultimately perceive the intimacy as impossible to be sustained. The explorer exists within the application's gameplay to stir things up, and from this behavior it becomes safer to assume they perceive love not as impossible, but rather unlikely to attain within this particular

domain. Their perception of intimacy and its potential within dating applications consequently alters the ways in which they approach the app, specifically through its locative systems.

The ability for explorers to quickly and easily access a vast database of users to impart a variation of experimental tactics as a means of entertainment only enables their behavior. The unlimited access the explorer has to features within the application allowing them to set locative and age ranges further cements their association between intimacy and experiment. The settings are not unlike independent variables within an experiment, which elicits a certain level of detachment between the player and others. They are not necessarily so detached that they disregard human emotion. Conversely, they are in tune to human emotion, which is how they understand how to elicit certain emotions with specific behaviors. Unlike an achiever, they do see purpose in sparking up interaction with the player they have matched with, and not similar to a killer, an explorer doesn't view humans as entirely disposable. Despite this, the locative system paired with the explorer mindset does support an approach to intimacy similar to that of a researcher: Aware of existing humans and their emotions, but distant enough to not feed bias. The additional digital walls existing within an online dating application enables the explorer to easily move from user to user without too much responsibility for the chaos they may have elicited through their actions.

Socializers, as suggested through the analysis thus far, perceive and pursue intimacy different from the other player types. Due to their character being deeply rooted in the nostalgic systems implemented by developers, they perceive intimacy as something special and worth putting in the work for. They recognize that the positive experiences they've received through the connections found within the app have satisfied a physical, emotional, and psychological intimacy. The socializer, who is invested in human connection and the emotions of others within

the domain, understands, with the help of the nostalgic systems, that this level of intimacy is fulfilling and therefore worth continuing on with playing regardless of numerous failures in between successes.

The socializer approaches intimacy with a unique level of empathy and thoughtfulness not found in the pursuits implemented by other players. Socializers take into account physical attraction when choosing a player to interact with, as well as other components of this person's identity suggesting compatibility on an emotionally and psychologically intimate level. The nostalgic system convinces the socializer to put effort into attaining a well-rounded intimate experience, which remains a constant for them throughout their gameplay.

Killers perceive and pursue intimacy in a one-sided way. Similar to an achiever, their perception of intimacy is archetypically based off of shallowness. Similar to the explorer, there is a certain level of distance between them and the emotionality of other players they interact with. They are unaffected by the romantic side of nostalgia, but are motivated by the satisfaction they have received through interactions in which their needs have been met (regardless if the needs of the other person have been met).

V. The Art of Authenticity

This final chapter to this project serves not only as a conclusion to the previous framework and analysis, but to also offer an additional lens for readers to take away from the powerful influence of mobile dating applications. This conclusive chapter will delve into how the gamification of dating and its reshaping of pursuit and perception of player intimacy also extends its influence into questions regarding character. The user interface and general application design creates a set of digital walls within which the four player types interact with one another, the

game, and their personal relationships with intimacy. As users assume their player identity, they begin to navigate the construction of their profiles, which serve as a representation of themselves. This is the artifact through which they self-market to others, providing a visual and written representation of their identities using constructed bios and curated photos. Digital walls provide distance between players, creating space allowing for manipulation of the parameters guiding ethos in identity construction. Not only does the gamification of dating applications garner awareness to the various types of players interacting within the game and what these characters look like, but also how these characters are presenting themselves to others and if who they are is in alignment with how the player actually view themselves. This potential discrepancy between reality and ideal self presents a convoluted understanding of ethos that players are forced to navigate in time with their personal pursuit and perception of intimacy.

The Tradition of Ethos

There is a long-standing assumption within the historical tradition of rhetoric that ethos is both a central and necessary requirement to an orator's identity. Ethos has always been tightly associated with the "audience's assessment of a speaker's moral character (e.g., honesty, benevolence, intelligence) primarily as reflected in the discourse." (Sloane) It has been thought that the establishment of credibility is important when establishing connections with the counter parties within a given context. This understanding of ethos being a fundamental component of presenting one's identity- which includes a vast spectrum of culture, including morals, core values, political affiliations, etc.- dates back to Aristotle's original teachings. In his 4th century work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes, "The sources of personal credibility …demonstrate proofs, which inspire belief, sagacity, higher and good will…if a person is supposed to command them

all, he will be deserving of credit in the eyes of his audience." (114) It is also understood that, while demonstrating ethos establishes a relationship between the individual presenting their identity and that of the person experiencing it, this is ultimately not enough to sustain it. It is not enough to assume the identity of credibility, one must consistently *be* the very character that enabled them to receive positive endorsement in order for the relationship to last.

Aristotle's parameters regarding credible appeal has served as a foundation on which mediums such as contemporary technology has developed, these ethical guidelines providing new context within newly formed digital environments in which orator and audience interact. This has provided a new arena to apply these original parameters to, guiding the establishment of relationships, particularly those centering on romantic intimacy. Romantic relationships require an extensive level of credibility to be established due to the vulnerability associated with the nature of this type of intimacy. Balanced romantic relationships are confluent, achieving a balance across physical, emotional, and psychological intimacy, and in which both parties put in equal effort to sustain it. Balance and sustainability is unattainable should credibility of one person's identity falter. If authenticity is a core component of attaining and sustaining a confluent love, how do dating application players utilize profiles to demonstrate their ability to be genuine? Put differently, how does a player know if the person they are interacting with is marketing themselves as the player type most accurate to their perception of intimacy and the way they behave within the app?

This digital space offered by mobile dating applications has made dating infinitely more approachable, enabling users to access a database of millions of individuals though its locative systems. This new approachability, however, has consequently opened up the opportunity to be less authentic in the identity being represented through dating profiles due to the digital walls the

game's multi-user domain presents. These 'walls' create space between users that makes the

aforementioned consistency in credibility difficult to achieve, because it now has become an

option rather than a requirement. This tempts players with the possibility to presenting their

"ideal self" as the initial impressions other players will interact with when coming in contact

with their profile. Ethos is undermined by approachability as credibility can easily be

compromised when a player manipulates their truest self to conform to a *version* of their

authentic self. Although a player may have the intentions of working towards their ideal self, this

is not the reality of their identity.

 If mobile dating applications have offered a multi-user domain without strict parameters

regulating authenticity in profile construction, then suddenly the meaning of ethos has shifted to

acclimate the nature of this environment. Ethos, when established by a player through their

digital profile, is subjective. Authenticity is no longer the fixed reality of what is real and not real

about the person's identity, but rather what is real according to the players's perception of

themselves. Without witnessing an orator establish their credibility in person, the player has little

initial context, like an analysis of modifying nonverbal communication such as kinesics, that

may provide clues enabling an inference as to whether or not they are being truthful about who

they are. Within these dating application domains, the player has to trust that reality lines up with

the individual's profile representation of how they view themselves.

 Despite the lure of the ideal self, app creators still side with the original rhetorical

teachings found in ancient Greece, believing that a user's best bet at finding genuine, sustainable

human connection is done through an authentic self. Christian Rudder, one of the founders of the

dating application *OkCupid*, writes in his work *Dataclysm* that there is power in authenticity,

advising users to "be yourself and be brave about it. Certainly, trying to fit in, just for its own

sake, is counterproductive." (52) Authentic self does not only mean presenting the most honest version of oneself. Aristotle's conceptualization of ethos in terms of persuasion- not unlike dating profiles, which are persuading other players to swipe right and pursue a match- stems from wanting to represent specific qualities they recognize as being most valuable to the audience. When the audience sees their values mirrored by the orator, they are more likely to identify with them and thus begin to trust them, which in turn establishes their credibility. In addition to be honest, the authentic self also means presenting the most honest representation of qualities that are in line with the particular perception of intimacy the player has, so that they may attract this through their profile. Socializers most likely don't want to attract killers, who approach the game with little intention of pursuing confluent love, so they wouldn't want to construct a profile that conveys nonchalance about relationships or detachment from commitment. A socializer may be tempted to do this, believing that advertising their desire to connect deeply would be too intense and push people away. They may convince themselves that a flippant attitude akin to a killer is the ideal self, but in doing so they are mirroring the type of love they don't perceive as their ideal intimacy and ironically repel the kind they initially entered the game to pursue. This presents the idea that, should a user choose to eliminate authenticity simply because the digital domain allows for it, they will in turn eliminate ethos entirely from digital rhetoric as well as their identity, ultimately potentially marketing themselves to individuals who aren't an ideal fit.

The following two sections will explore discrepancies between player type and how users express their type through profiles, followed by an analysis of how those who abandon ethos within profile construction consequently present a situation where identification works against them. The emergence of player types presents a new understanding of identity existing in fixed

ways with specific pursuits and perceptions of the application's purpose, and this may cause

users to go into the game cautiously analyzing profiles so as to determine if a player is accurately

advertising themselves. This section will explore the concept of ideal self, the psychological

component of identity construction that convinces an individual they are different from the

player they subconsciously behave as within the game. Who they say they are through their

profiles may be who they wish to be, but ultimately does not match their behavior and

consequently causes the imbalances within the game that lead to exhaustive failures experienced

by the apps' players. The latter section will explore Burke's identification theory and address the

irony of choosing an ideal self over an authentic self, and in doing so marketing oneself to those

who do not genuinely identify with the player, leading to a potentially less fulfilling connection.

A lamb disguised as a lion, a killer disguised as a socializer

The extensive definitional and analytic frameworks provided regarding player types, how

they thrive within specific gamified systems of the application, and what their specific pursuits

and perceptions of intimacy look like may present a misleading understanding that these specific

identities are easy to spot during gameplay. This is not always the case, as a player's first

encounter with any other player within the game is through their dating application profile.

Typically, a user decides who they want to pursue a match with through a quick qlimpse of their

pictures and bio. Should the match be achieved, the player may look at the profile once more

before deciding if they wish to initiate a conversation and if so, gather some hints as to what they

may spark a conversation about. If the preliminary conversation via this digital space has a

positive outcome for both users, they may decide to pursue a face-to-face interaction and further

the pursuit of intimacy. The caveat, despite the seeming simplicity of this process, is that players eventually become aware of the different player types within the given domain and must trust that whom they are pursuing is presenting their selves honestly.

Character, in terms of Bartle's player theory, is concrete. All four player types have their own definition, and all have an archetypal form they emerge as within the mobile dating applications. Personal identity, however, namely how we view ourselves, is very fluid and at times ambiguous. Bartle's theory may, objectively, prove that player 1 behaves as a killer and therefore is a killer, but this player may view himself or herself as a socializer looking for a genuine connection. The socializer may be their ideal self- the individual they hope to be or the type of individual they would ideally like to attract. Without the appropriate behaviors associated with that particular identity, however, this projected version of their identity ultimately breaks down once they begin attempting to build these connections with other players. Even the most well crafted profile, one that expertly hides what the person feels as unattractive characteristics and augments or creates ideal qualities, can be pulled apart and analyzed once other players begin to apply their general understanding of the four types of dating app users.

The opportunity to easily create personalized version of a user's assumed player type conveys the misguided belief that character, particularly in a digital space, is subjective. Credibility and honesty regarding one's character or assumed player type suddenly become open to the player's interpretation. Transparency is, of course, nearly impossible when interacting within digital spaces. The digital space between a player and their constructed profile, and another user, provides enough distance to absolve the individual of guilt for projecting a false self and fabricating their identity to even a small extent within their dating profile. Additionally, most players can convince themselves that projecting their ideal self is not lying due to their

having all the intentions of becoming that person eventually. There is an entire rhetoric being

applied by the various players of dating applications when constructing their profiles. This

subcultural rhetoric consistently makes an argument for why the parameters of ethos are

consistently being altered according to each individual's own interpretation of self, which

ultimately undermines the hope that, should a player choose to put it in their profile, then it must

be true.

Masks

In the weeks that led to the decision to pursue this exploration of ethos in identity

construction when pursuing intimacy, I engaged in a brief search of the child's poet Shel

Silverstein. There was no reason for this search, aside from becoming wrapped up in sheer

nostalgia, my desperation for a reason to procrastinate from the 'now' distracting me in old

memories. In my search, I came across Silverstein's poem "Masks," as featured in the

compilation of poems titled, "Everything On It." The poem reads:

She had blue skin,

And so did he.

He kept it hid

And so did she.

They searched for blue

Their whole life through,

Then passed right by-

And never knew.

The assumed (and presented) purpose of dating applications is to help connect users with matches that potentially could result in genuine, sustainable human intimacy. When searching for love, there is a desperation to find the "one," the *fit*, if you will. The archetypal version of the *fit* would represent the person's ideal match, typically someone who possesses similar characteristics or differing ones that complement their own. Additionally, there is a desire to find someone who can accept or complement the components of one's identity that they find to be 'unattractive,' 'shameful,' or off-putting. In order to find this type of *fit*, however, a significant level of vulnerability is needed so as to effectively figure out if their assumed flaws can be accepted. This vulnerability is difficult, the negative connotations we attach to the characteristics we deem 'flaws,' leading us to wear masks. The irony of Silverstein's poem is the very one that exists in mobile dating: The expectation to find our other half, the one who will most accept us, while simultaneously assuming a different identity to protect ourselves from rejection. This is how the inability to confidently navigate identity throws users into a vicious cycle of disappointment. They spend so much time perpetuating an identity that will mitigate the rejection form the *wrong fits*, they never take off their masks long enough to allow the right ones to identify with them.

The masks, in terms of dating applications, are the digital walls provided to users when engaging with other through the interface of their smartphones and presenting their selves through profile pictures and bios. With a background in rhetoric, I have a natural investment in the rhetoric appeal *ethos*, both in its definitional context and application within argumentative, persuasion, and interpersonal situations. In this case, a user is arguing for themselves through the construction of their profiles: *Here is a condensed profile suggesting why I am the right fit for you*. This practice of self-advocacy within dating has deeply rooted persuasion influences within

what has the potential to be a tremendously interpersonal experience when two users match up and begin to build a relationship.

Burkean Rheotric is a sector of rhetorical theory influenced by Rhetorician Kenneth Burke's work, primarily his most influential piece *A Rhetoric of Motives*, which deals with strategies for persuasion. Of the strategies elucidated within this work, he focuses on identification most heavily, which has since become a known association with his name and scholarship. I claim that identification is a central influencing factor in the ways dating application users approach ethos in profile construction, and thus it is crucial to understand the context of the Burkean lens.

As suggested in the beginning of this section, dating application profiles are essentially a means of persuading other users to see the constructor as a potential *fit*. It is a condensed place in which users put forth what they see as the best photos and written bio illuminating characteristics that will afford them the highest success rate on the app. Burke describes rhetoric as the "use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents…The use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (41-43). There is a rhetorical component to profile construction. Users intentionally choose certain pictures or showcase specific characteristics (likes, dislikes, interesting facts, etc) that will persuade the user viewing their profile to form a positive judgment about them. This positive judgment may induce a positive action that works in the user's favor, such as swiping right (indicating the user is interested in pursuing a match) or initiating a conversation once the match is established. The profile serves as a rhetorical artifact that the user creates to present a greater symbolism for their potential as the other half of a genuine intimate connection. The positive attitudes formed towards user profiles are based on identification. The user puts out

information that their 'ideal fit' will identify with. The users who identify with the information presented in the given profile will be most persuaded to form positive judgments and act on them.

The irony of a user's tendency to manipulate the parameters of ethos, advertising themselves as a player not representative of their actual behavior with hopes of attracting a particular user that would only identify with their presented self, is they will consistently be unfulfilled by the connections they find through their pursuit of intimacy. Their very intent of using the application will always be undermined by their creating a situation in which they are attracting the types of players their most authentic perceptions of intimacy will never identify with. It seems like an obvious move, then, to remain entirely authentic in a profile so as to heighten the chances of matching with someone who genuinely will identify with the player and their associated characteristics. Returning to the beginning of this section, putting ones self out there, even digitally, with the intentions of pursuing some level of intimate connection is a vulnerable process. Psychologically and emotionally, a player does feel the pressure brought on by fear of rejection, which causes them to construct a mask that they feel is the most attractive to the greater player base. Relating back to the last section, as long as the digital walls allow the manipulation of ethos as an option, players may continue to opt for presenting their ideal selves despite the difficulties in identification.

Digital Love: The perception, the pursuit, and the deception

Despite the flack that dating applications receive – *these digital dating sites take the person out of dating! How can two people find love in such a shallow medium, based on looks*

alone?- there is no denial that its inception and rapid popularity has provided valuable insight

into dating, both in the way we view love and the way we chase it. App developers have

provided a new approach on the same love human beings have been innately seeking throughout

centuries. This time, the gamified format applied to dating created a new set of rules that have

built an entire framework regarding the types of players users become, the ways their assumed

player influences the type of love the look for, and the how the application's architecture hinders

or enhances their pursuit of this love. There is no guarantee that a user will be able to find a

sustainable intimate connection through this type of digital dating format, similar to there being

no guarantee in traditional gaming that a player will dominate every level every time. Just like

any game, it is ultimately less about the developer's rules they've created within their application

and more so about how each player strategically navigates these rules, its domain, and their

interactions with others existing in the same space.

Understanding the application of Bartle's player types allows users to develop a stronger

sense of self-awareness when entering the game. An individual cannot begin to pursue intimacy

if they don't first recognize who they are and what their preferred intimacy looks like.

Recognizing the ways in which developers design the application and its user interface to gamify

dating will equip players with a more concrete comprehension of the domain they are searching

for intimacy in, the rules applied to this world, and the potential influence of gamified

components on their personal pursuit. A player can either ignore the influences from the locative,

nostalgic, and badging systems or take advantage of them to enhance their success once they

master how to navigate them. Lastly, receiving a clearer awareness of how identity is constructed

within game play and the potential parallels between an individual's actual player type and who

they present themselves as will further enable a player to adeptly seek out and recognize those

they truly identify with, as well as remain conscious of their own credibility. As Bogost defined

play in light of his 2016 work *Play Anything*, which explored the very concept of play as a

human language in its own right, "Play is this process of operating the world, of manipulating

things. It's related to experimentation, and it's related to pleasure, but not defined by it" (Beck).

The very nature of these dating applications being games needs not to determine a fixed outcome

for users. Most games are not designed to be unwinnable. In the tradition of game play,

succeeding has always been an option; rather it comes down to how each player chooses to play

their game.

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