Sociology SOCIOL 190-005
"What Makes Us Click": Dating in the Age of Modern Romance

Instructor: Skyler Wang
**Semester: Spring 2021**
Seminar meetings: Thurs 12-2PM at https://berkeley.zoom.us/my/skylrwang
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What do love and dating look like today? A recent Pew Research Center survey shows that almost half of 18 to 29-year-olds in the U.S. have dated online and that 17% have committed either to a relationship or marriage with someone they have met through a dating site or app. What can we learn about the state of contemporary relationships by examining a myriad of dating practices alongside the changes ushered in by romance's digital migration? How is the age-old concept of 'compatibility' measured in today's terms? Are apps changing the ways we relate to others? How has online dating opened up more possibilities for those who belong to the 'thin market' of dating (i.e., non-heterosexuals, non-whites, seniors, the divorced, etc.)? And what does this fast-evolving landscape of modern romance say about our attitudes towards the infiltration of new technologies into spaces we deem sacred? This course will examine the state of modern romance from various angles, incorporating discourses on culture, gender, sexuality, race, class, and selfhood.
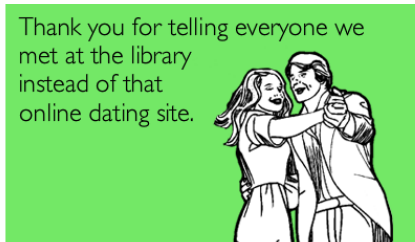
Course structure

The seminar will meet once a week for two hours. Each class will consist of a wide array of activities, including but not limited to weekly student presentations, in-depth discussions, debates, and guest lectures (by journalists, research scientists, or app designers, etc.). Every week, a group of students will lead the facilitation of a portion of the class by first opening up with a presentation of the assigned readings, followed by an organized class discussion (total time should not exceed 40 minutes). The students in-charge of facilitating that week's class will have the opportunity to plan the time allotted in a way they believe will lead to the most constructive discussion of the materials as long as they adhere to the theme of the topic. All students are expected to come to class having done all the required readings assigned for the week.

Required texts

All required texts will be accessible via bCourses.

Grading and evaluation

The evaluation of the course is broken down as such:

1) Weekly group presentation & discussion facilitation (20%)
- The group presentations will draw focus from the assigned readings. The presenters' main objective is to add value to the readings by providing additional insight into the theoretical and empirical contributions of the papers. The presenters are free to choose their style of presentation, incorporating media content as they please. At the end of the day, the goal of the presentation is to generate discussion and invoke new paradigms of thinking. The presenters can critique, revise or extend the scope of knowledge as they deem fit. The presentations should last approximately 30

minutes and be followed by a 10-minute guided discussion. The entire process should not take longer than 40 minutes.

2) First writing assignment: app/website recommendation brief + presentation (25%)
- Students will download and explore the features of any dating platform of their choice for at least three days and write a recommendation brief to the respective service. The goal of the assignment is to get students to think critically about the structural design of online dating apps or sites and how they contribute to challenges for different user populations, leading to inequitable platform experiences. By incorporating knowledge from course readings, students will identify areas of improvement and make evidence-based design or interface suggestions. Students are required to demonstrate their ability to use academic knowledge in a real-world setting by making their briefs accessible to the companies that they hope to preach to. The briefs should not be longer than 5 pages (double-spaced).
- Time will be dedicated to the presentation of these briefs. Each student will be given 3 minutes to present to a panel (which is formed by class participants who would role-play as company representatives). The idea of this component is to have students present or sell their ideas in a professional and creative manner. The panel will be given the opportunity to ask questions and challenge the presenter's arguments. Evaluations will be based on both content and delivery. The presentation will be worth 10% of this component of the final grade.
- **Due date: <u>Mar 11</u> before class.**

3) Second writing assignment: Research paper (40%)
- Students can use this opportunity to explore an area of modern romance that interests them the most. Although you have the freedom to choose a substantive topic of your interest, the paper should be *comparative* in nature; that is, it needs to juxtapose the experiences of two or more groups of people. For example, students can compare and contrast the relational and romantic strategies of two generations—those of their parents' generation and those of their peers. They could also write a paper on how young adults with different sexual identities experience dating apps differently.
- Students are required to collect primary data for the final paper, either in the form of content analysis, surveys, interviews, or ethnographic (either online or offline) research. This means you should start thinking about your projects early on in the semester. I recommend attending office hours to discuss your topic with me if you are not confident about the direction of your paper.
- A two-pager (double-spaced) outlining your research questions, a preliminary literature review, and methods, is due on **<u>Apr 7</u> at 11:59PM**.
- The research paper should be between 15-20 pages long (double-spaced).
- The last session will be dedicated to individual presentations of the final paper (the presentation constitutes 10% of this component of the final grade).
- **Due date for final paper: <u>May 2</u> at 11:59PM.**

4) Attendance & participation (15%)
- Students will prepare at least one question for each assigned reading and bring them to class to discuss. Participation will be graded based on the thoughtfulness of the student's questions, in-class responses, general participation, and attendance.

<u>**Academic Integrity**</u>

Any test, paper, report or homework submitted under your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course. All words and ideas written by other people must be properly attributed: fully identified as to source and the extent of your use of their work. Cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct will result in a failing grade on the assignment, paper,

quiz, or exam in question and will be reported to The Center for Student Conduct. Please be sure to review UC Berkeley's rules on Academic Integrity and email me if you have any questions: https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/design/academic-integrity

Accommodations

For students who require accommodations for accessibility reasons, please send me an email in the first week of class and request that the DSP office provide me with a digital copy of your accommodation letter.

Thematic outline

Week 1: Jan 21 – Introduction & class overview

Week 2: Jan 28 – The stories we tell ourselves
- "Plato's Other Half" in *Lapham's Quarterly*: https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/eros/platos-other-half
- Swidler, A. (2013). *Talk of love: How culture matters*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter(s): 6
- Essig, L. (2019). *Love, Inc.: Dating Apps, the Big White Wedding, and Chasing the Happily Neverafter*. University of California Press. Chapter(s): 1

Week 3: Feb 4 – Forces beyond us
- Illouz, E. (2012). *Why love hurts: A sociological explanation*. Polity. Chapter(s): 1.
- Bauman, Z. (2013). *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*. John Wiley & Sons. Chapter(s): Foreword & 1.

Week 4: Feb 11 – The demise of traditional dating?
- Ansari, A., & Klinenberg, E. (2015). *Modern romance*. Penguin Press. Chapter(s): 1
- Rosenfeld, M. J., Thomas, R. J., & Hausen, S. (2019). Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(36), 17753-17758.
- Heino, R. D., Ellison, N. B., & Gibbs, J. L. (2010). Relationshopping: Investigating the market metaphor in online dating. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 27*(4), 427-447.

Week 5: Feb 18 – Playing the numbers game
- Christian, B., & Griffiths, T. (2016). *Algorithms to live by: The computer science of human decisions*. Macmillan. Chapter(s): Introduction & 1.
- D'Angelo, J. D., & Toma, C. L. (2017). There are plenty of fish in the sea: The effects of choice overload and reversibility on online daters' satisfaction with selected partners. *Media Psychology*, *20*(1), 1-27.

Week 6: Feb 25 – Judging the book by its cover
- Luo, S., & Zhang, G. (2009). What leads to romantic attraction: Similarity, reciprocity, security, or beauty? Evidence from a speed-dating study. *Journal of personality*, *77*(4), 933-964.
- Hancock, J. T., & Toma, C. L. (2009). Putting your best face forward: The accuracy of online dating photographs. *Journal of Communication, 59*(2), 367-386.
- Bruch, E. E., & Newman, M. E. J. (2018). Aspirational pursuit of mates in online dating markets. *Science Advances*, *4*(8), 1-6.

Week 7: Mar 4 – Love me gender
- Lever, J., Frederick, D. A., & Hertz, R. (2015). Who pays for dates? Following versus challenging gender norms. *Sage Open*, *5*, 1-14.
- Guadagno, R. E., Okdie, B. M., & Kruse, S. A. (2012). Dating deception: Gender, online dating, and exaggerated self-presentation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *28*(2), 642-647.
- MacLeod, C., & McArthur, V. (2019). The construction of gender in dating apps: An interface analysis of Tinder and Bumble. *Feminist Media Studies*, *19*(6), 822-840.

First writing assignment due before <u>Mar 11</u> class.

Week 8: Mar 11 – Recommend brief presentations
- Please read the briefs that will be assigned to you (for when you serve as a panelist).

Week 9: Mar 18 – Race & intersectionality
- Ward, J. (2008). Dude-Sex: White Masculinities and 'Authentic' Heterosexuality Among Dudes Who Have Sex with Dudes. *Sexualities*, *11*(4), 414-434.
- Han, C. S. (2008). No fats, femmes, or Asians: The utility of critical race theory in examining the role of gay stock stories in the marginalization of gay Asian men. *Contemporary Justice Review,* *11*(1), 11-22.
- Buggs, S. G. (2017). Dating in the time of# BlackLivesMatter: Exploring mixed-race women's discourses of race and racism. *Sociology of race and ethnicity*, *3*(4), 538-551.

Week 10: Mar 25 – Spring break

Week 11: Apr 1 – Cruising the queer web
- Blackwell, C., Birnholtz, J., & Abbott, C. (2015). Seeing and being seen: Co-situation and impression formation using Grindr, a location-aware gay dating app. *New media & society*, *17*(7), 1117-1136.
- Hightower, J. L. (2015). Producing desirable bodies: Boundary work in a lesbian niche dating site. *Sexualities*, *18*(1-2), 20-36.
- Pond, T., & Farvid, P. (2017). I do like girls, I promise': Young bisexual women's experiences of using Tinder. *Psychology of Sexualities Review*, *8*(2), 6-24.

Two-page outline due <u>Apr 7</u> at 11:59PM.

Week 12: Apr 8 – Awkward relations: when money meets intimacy
- Scull, M. T. (2019). "It's Its Own Thing": A Typology of Interpersonal Sugar Relationship Scripts. *Sociological Perspectives 63*(1), 135-158.
- Nayar, K. I. (2017). Sweetening the deal: dating for compensation in the digital age. *Journal of gender studies*, *26*(3), 335-346.

Week 13: Apr 15 – International & comparative lenses
- Krause, M., & Kowalski, A. (2013). Reflexive habits: Dating and rationalized conduct in New York and Berlin. *The Sociological Review*, *61*(1), 21-40.
- Chan, L. S. (2016). How sociocultural context matters in self-presentation: A comparison of US and Chinese profiles on Jack'd, a mobile dating app for men who have sex with men. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 20, 6040-59.

Week 14: Apr 22 – Guest lecture with Dr. Emily Hittner (emilyhittner.com), Director of Research at Hinge
- *Recommended reading:* Joel, S., Eastwick, P. W., Allison, C. J., Arriaga, X. B., Baker, Z. G., Bar-Kalifa, E., ... & Carmichael, C. L. (2020). Machine learning uncovers the most robust self-report predictors of relationship quality across 43 longitudinal couples studies. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *117*(32), 19061-19071.

Week 15: Apr 29 – Wrap up & final presentations

Second writing assignment due <u>May 2</u> at 11:59PM.