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Department of Sociology

Narcissism, Love and Consumption

A qualitative study on young men's experience of love and romantic
relationships on Tinder

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Online dating is growing rapidly within society. In the light of the covid-19 pandemic, the popular online dating app Tinder provides a new social setting for dating and romantic relationships. There is some debate whether online dating apps liquify (devolves) love - as proposed by Zygmunt Bauman - or make dating more accessible and efficient. This thesis aims to understand and create knowledge of young male experiences on Tinder. This thesis is a case study investigating the group of young men on Tinder with the entrance point of critical theory and the notion of social acceleration. Through semi-structured, phenomenological interviews, the thesis will answer the research question: *How does Tinder affect young men's attitude towards romantic relationships and love?* The results in this thesis are that interaction on Tinder tends to become uncertain, strategic, gamified, and narcissistic. My empirical findings suggest that Tinder is an app creating experiences of uncertainty and that self-esteem is gained through what is referred to as the libidinal investment of the Other's desire. The results also indicate that male Tinder users become emotionally numb and self-alienated when implementing gamified and strategic actions on the app. The structure of this thesis will consist of a background with points of theoretical departure and previous research, then I will continue with presenting my research questions followed by chapters on theory, method, and analysis structured in accordance with the three sub-research questions: *How can we understand the effects on self-esteem through the use of Tinder? How do young men strategize on Tinder? How do young men feel when using and interacting on Tinder?*

Keywords: *Online Dating, Social Acceleration, Ontological Uncertainty, Narcissism, Consumption, Strategic Action.*

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Era of Connectivity

We are walking data generators in the eyes of big-tech companies. Personal information can, has, and is being used - as in the case of Cambridge Analytica - to map out behavioral patterns and nudge as well as aim political messages in the direction of specific demographic groups (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). A dystopian picture bearing reference to George Orwell's book *1984* and the "big brother society" is emerging, not as fiction but as fact. The Chinese government's camera and face-recognition technology is yet another example of the widespread development of surveillance capitalism. There are many reasons for critical scholars to aim their crosshairs towards understanding the vast and fast development of new technologies and how these affect everyday social interaction. In the field of online dating, there has been an upstream of literature and dystopian documentaries investigating how the various uses of new technology shape our view on romantic relationships. Sociological scholars have argued that modernity, capitalism, and technology accelerate our social life. The notion of social acceleration will be the entry point to my study of Tinder; I will investigate how Tinder as an online dating app affects young men's attitudes towards romantic relationships. I will further limit my selection to young heterosexual cis-men between the ages of 18-30.

Tinder is a location-based real-time dating app that invites users to create profiles, upload pictures, and write a short biography of themselves. On Tinder, the user navigates between different profiles, and by swiping yes or no Tinder arranges matches – a match occurs when two users swipe yes on each other's profiles. Tinder is an app free of charge - however, the user pays the app with personal data. Tinder has around 57 million users worldwide and 5,9 million on the monthly paid subscription to Tinder gold, the premium subscription to the app (Iqbal, 2020). The public discourse surrounding Tinder can, in many ways, be viewed as critical. However, online dating is growing larger every year and is now a common way to date. The app is arguably becoming more significant now during the covid-19 pandemic as it becomes harder to find romantic encounters in times of social distancing.

Before presenting the reader with the research questions, I will present a short theoretical background as well as an account of previous research. After that, I will present my research questions followed by the theory, and after this a chapter on method, explaining how the interviews were conducted. Lastly, I will share the results and analysis in chapter 6, followed by a conclusion and discussion.

1.2 Background

Before we go any further, I want to give the reader insight into the critical framework in which I place my thesis. This framework revolves around the notion of acceleration in our modern society; this is the cornerstone for my vantage point. Sociologist Hartmut Rosa claims that critical theory and sociology should be built on a ‘critical impulse’, the feeling that something is not what it could nor should be, that something is on the verge of dissolving. This impulse is for Rosa the *raison d'être* of sociology (Rosa, 2014:8). Rosa's critical impulse and theory are centered around modernity. Modernity is constituted by three accelerating forces that are pushed forward by what Rosa calls the economic engine; capitalism, echoing the phrase that "time is money", the cultural engine, “the promise of acceleration”, and the structural engine, “functional differencing”. These engines generate three types of acceleration; technological acceleration, social acceleration, and acceleration of life (Rosa, 2014:41). Rosa argues that acceleration comes with a promise that if you live your life with double speed, you will live two lives – the faster we live, the more we get to experience (Rosa, 2014:40). He describes this with the allegory of standing on a slippery slope, on the verge of falling, while at the same time feeling the fear of falling behind, of not being in the race. One has to run this is the accelerating pace of life (Rosa, 2014:39). This acceleration leads in many ways to a competitive and fast passed life. What Rosa calls ‘resonance’ is the foundation for a good life, the capacity of being in the world. Rosa argues that the experience of resonance depletes with the acceleration of the pace of life. My intentions are not to give an account of Rosa's entire theory. However, I believe Rosa's thoughts on modernity are engaging, inspiring, and poses as an excellent background to understand Tinder as an application.

Another critical issue posing as a background to this thesis is the question of rational choice. The Slovenian philosopher and sociologist Renata Salecl writes in *The Tyranny of Choice* that rational choice theoreticians suggest that humans reflect upon their actions before acting; they try to maximize their utility while minimizing their affordances. The rational choice theory assumes that the well-informed individual will choose what benefits the individual interest under the right circumstances. Salecl claims that this does not have to be the case; sometimes, individuals seem to act in conflict with their interests (Salecl, 2016:15). Salecl points towards psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework that can help us understand how we sometimes find satisfaction when acting in conflict with one's utility. Psychoanalysis suggests that an individual can be aware that a behavior is "bad" and irrational but can't stop as the individual gains some satisfaction in the pain (Salecl, 2016:48). She claims that rational choice is glorified in our

culture, and life-changing decisions become similar to our choices of products as consumers (Salecl, 2016:15). Although the threat of terror and pandemics terrify the individual, the core worries for the individual are the individual problems, worrying about our job, social position, and the meaning of life. There is a feeling and frightens of failing, a feeling of guilt and worry of making the wrong choice (Salecl, 2016:14). The anxiety of making the wrong choice is met with the avoidance of feelings of loss and regret - the personal strife for minimizing risk and or making the risk predictable (Salecl, 2016:18). Identity and sexuality become objects of choice under constant re-negotiation (Salecl, 2016:51). Salecl means that choice concerning love is particularly problematic as there always is a possibly better option (Salecl, 2016:84). Salecl claims that choice in our capitalistic western culture is rooted in consumerism and economic rationality, making our free choice limited within this understanding of the choice (Salecl, 2016:143).

2. Prior research

The field of online dating has been an increasingly popular subject of inquiry. Many sociological studies are exploring online dating as a new social phenomenon, some of which I now will give a short account for. My reasoning when choosing these articles has been to present a background closely connected to my research. These articles have posed as food for thought, leading me towards specific questions, and at the same time, I have received answers to some of my initial questions.

In the article “*Liquid Love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy*” by Mitchell Hobbs, Stephen Owen, and Livia Gerber examines Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of *Liquid love* - Bauman’s claim that technological change transforms modern courtship into a commodified game. The article understands online dating as a mediator in which individuals participate in strategic action to find love, sex, and intimacy (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:271). The article is based on a mixed-method study consists of a survey study N=364 and six follow-up interviews (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:275). The authors asked the question:” is Tinder ‘tearing society apart’?”. According to their findings, it seems like the online users’ views on dating hold the traditional values of monogamy. Their survey study also shows that app users prefer to meet face-to-face instead of on the app (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:276f). The authors suggest that individuals can, via online media, master the self through various strategic actions. The authors mention the interviewee Alice who, after a break-up, used the app as a way to gain validation (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:277). An example of strategic action is their interviewee, Tim, who uses Tinder as strategic gaming; he asks his matches for their phone number claiming that he will remove the app – something he does not do. The authors also argue that Tinder becomes an efficient way of controlling one’s dating life – the app becomes time-efficient (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:279). However, the authors agree with Bauman’s account of self-commodification. It seems like Tinder users use different techniques to make their profiles stand out on the app – encouraging other users to ‘buy’ their profiles (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:280). Contrary to Bauman’s theory, the authors claim that love is not liquified; instead, most of the ideals of romantic love are still very much present in society. The authors state that not everyone has the same experience from the app and that Tinder brings new anxieties and risks and new pleasures and opportunities (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017:281f).

The article “*Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment*” by Nicole Ellison, Rebecca Heino & Jennifer Gibbs explores online dating through the metaphorical reference of a marketplace. With 34 in-depth interviews, the authors claim that online dating is salient with the metaphor of online dating as a marketplace (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006:427). The authors argue that metaphors tell us how we perceive and construct reality and how we perceive others (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006:430). The phrase “time is money” signifies that time is a limited and precious commodity. Terms like “sell yourself” and to refer to the potential partner as a “package” play into the market metaphor (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006:431). When users make choices on online dating sites, they filter through many different profiles adapting a shopping mentality akin to searching for the perfect parts to a machine (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006:437). Viewing online dating as a numbers game creates strategies for adapting different sales approaches to hedge one’s bets (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006:438f). The authors conclude by claiming that online dating apps encourage users to adapt the marketplace metaphor online, leading towards a new understanding of how individuals perceive relationships online (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006:445).

Joaquín Linne’s article named: “*it's not you, it's Tinder.*” is a qualitative study consisting of 20 semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of online dating profiles in Buenos Aires. Linne's article is written in Spanish, except the abstract; I have tried to get a general understanding of the article as a whole, although my Spanish skills are relatively limited. Linne is interviewing young people using Tinder, Happn, and OkCupid. He suggests that online dating is “gamified”, what Linne means is that online users adopt strategies to meet the goals on online dating apps; matches and likes manifest success on online dating apps. The results show that users of online dating apps have a gamified experience. He further claims the users view other profiles as objects of consumption, implying a constant selection of possible partners and the time-consuming process of managing one's online dating profile (Linne, 2020:1).

Media and Communication scholars Olga Solovyeva and Olga Logunova's “*Self-presentation strategies Among Tinder Users: Gender Differences in Russia*” is an article where the authors analyzed 400 profiles on Tinder of males and females between the ages of 20-40. Their results suggest that self-representation varied greatly between gender and these differences held a solid connection to the cultural traits in modern Russia (Solovyeva & Logunova, 2018:474).

Steffen Krüger and Ane Charlotte Spilde's article: "*Judging books by their covers – Tinder interface, usage, and socio-cultural implications*" gives us an analysis of Tinder's interface and design. The authors claim that the design of Tinder promotes a consumeristic and commodity-oriented culture. Their analysis uses Michel Foucault's theory of power and finds that there are objectifying tendencies on the Tinder interface. Another aspect of Tinder's design was the binary logic inherent in the act of swiping when selecting a possible match. The authors conclude that Tinder reduces authentic personal relations (Krüger & Spilde, 2020:1396).

The article by media and communications scientists Yu-Chin Her & Elisabeth Timmermans: "*Tinder blue, mental flue? Exploring the associations between Tinder use and well-being*" is a qualitative survey study exploring the correlation between well-being and Tinder usage. The sample consisted of n=351 US residents, 61% of the participants identified as male, and 39% female. The sample was made in the age interval 18-29 (Her & Timmermans, 2020:8). The study's results show a negative correlation between Tinder usage and well-being. The strongest correlation was found in the groups of compulsory users, people searching for romantic partners, and individuals who tended to compare themselves with others. However, individuals who were successful on Tinder felt joviality (Her & Timmermans, 2020:13).

When searching for previous research, I was surprised by the lack of articles exploring young men's Tinder usage. I hope to build and complement these articles by focusing on young men on Tinder. Much of this research has been very close to my own, helping me to navigate within the research field. In relation to Hobbs, Owen & Gerber's article, I was inspired by their focus on strategic actions as this phenomenon has been relatively unexplored. Hobbs, Owen & Gerber's article made me interested in the paradoxical relationship between, on the one hand, believing in romantic ideals and, on the other hand, acting strategically. How is this romantic ideal applicable with Ellison, Heino & Gibbs metaphor of online dating as a marketplace? Further investigations are to be made. I will focus on young men in Sweden, furthering our knowledge of strategic actions.

3. Purpose

In this thesis, through qualitative, phenomenological, semi-structured interviews, I will develop an understanding of young men on Tinder, connecting this understanding with critical theory examining Tinder as a technology that is driven by uncertainty, narcissism, commodification, and consumption of the Other. We will also investigate the emotional regime of competitive masculinity and how this cultural script interplays with our critical understanding of Tinder. I will also examine/elaborate on the notion of Tinder as a gamified dating app. By examining young men's Tinder use, I hope to gain new perspectives and knowledge regarding the all-increasing phenomena of online dating. Although many studies of Tinder have been made, there seems to be a gap in sociological knowledge concerning strategies on Tinder and the young male experience and emotions on the app. By studying the young male experience on Tinder, I hope to develop and further our understanding of the group's desires, insecurities, and actions. My research question is as follows:

Research Question:

How does Tinder affect young men's attitude towards romantic relationships and love?

Sub-questions:

How can we understand the effects on self-esteem through the use of Tinder?

How do young men strategize on Tinder?

How do young men feel when using and interacting on Tinder?

My research sub-questions will build on each other, where I will answer the third sub-question in relation to the two previous. The main research question ought to be seen in relation to my theory, previous research, and background as it is based on a critical assumption of social acceleration and the tyranny of choice. My analysis will be structured in accordance with my three sub-questions. Together they will answer my main question: *How does Tinder affect young men's attitude towards romantic relationships and love?*

4. Theory

The book *Culture of Narcissism* by Christopher Lasch has been an abundant source of inspiration in this thesis. Lasch's ideas have led me towards a psychoanalytical understanding of narcissism leading me to use theoreticians Erich Fromm and Jacques Lacan. Zygmunt Bauman and Eva Illouz, extensive works on online dating and love have given me a cultural and critical understanding of consumption and love. Vincent Miller's account of the philosopher Martin Heidegger's and his notion of 'enframing' has helped me connect the uncertain self into a technological and hyper-subjective context on Tinder. Lastly, Sherry Turkle has been excellent to help me understand loneliness and how Tinder, although connecting people online, can make us lonelier.

4.1 Metaphysical Presence

The pop-modern joke "I swipe therefore I am," while manifested as a humoristic phrase, holds a great deal of insight. The phrase points towards a western philosophical tradition on metaphysical presence originated in René Descartes classical "*cogito ergo sum*": "I think therefore I am". Philosopher Vincent Miller means that we ought to understand Descartes as presenting us with a metaphysical presence and being in the world – through mind/world dualism. A view where the human is a self-enclosed individual subject while the 'Others' are, using Miller's words: "...separate substantive objects of experience to be considered, thought about and empirically examined." (Miller, 2012:271). Miller connects the use and experience of the internet with the Cartesian notion of metaphysical being, as subject-centered and transcendental. Miller means that there seems to be an instrumental, rational, almost mathematical preciseness of predictability on the internet; there is no room for accidents (Miller 2012:272).

Further, Miller states that online experience, to a large extent, is disembodied. Although internet activities like viewing pornography, playing video games, or listening to music are sensations, they are, for Miller, minimal sensory inputs (Miller 2012:273). Using Martin Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian view of metaphysical presence, Miller emphasizes that a technological presence creates a nihilism, where meaning and worth are reduced to means in which the subject can exploit the things (objects) in the world. Through his use of Heidegger, Miller means that the feeling of controlling nature through technology is nothing but an illusion – we are beings captive in the technology. Henceforth humans are becoming 'enframed' or what Heidegger calls *Gestell*: humanity is enframed the same way as nature is controlled and consumed (Miller 2012:274). Heidegger's notion of '*Gestell*' is quite complex; I understand

enframing as when humans treat nature and other beings the same way we treat machinery - being as efficient as possible. Enframing becomes the structuring of our experiences (Heidegger, 1977:324). Miller exemplifies technological control with the example of Google and Facebook; these sites reduce the human subject to “measurable and calculable properties”. These platforms’ reductionistic architecture creates templates and categories within which we relate to one another. Miller’s main point is that the notion of humans as masters of technology seems to be an overly optimistic view; instead, Miller suggests that technology dictates our behavior and transforms our human relations for the worse (Miller 2012:275). Miller further states that technological efficiency increases emotional and intimate distance in our everyday life (Miller 2012:276).

4.2 Alone Together

Psychologist, likewise sociologist Sherry Turkle brings forward a paradoxical thesis – in her book: *Alone Together*. Turkle states that a more connected social world does not seem to make us more connected to one another; instead, we seem to become lonelier. We are indeed networked with one another to a more considerable extent than ever before in history; however, Turkle means that we expect less from each other. Loneliness carries a risk of a shift in attitude, to perceive each other as objects which can be valued by their usefulness towards the “subject” (Turkle, 2011:154). Turkle also submits to the idea that who we are online is mostly our fantasy of whom we want to become; Facebook profiles are presentations of somebody else, our fantasies of whom we want to be (Turkle, 2011:153). She further states that the self is made and shaped by the success of one’s online presence by receiving measurable responses, likes, matches, or texts (Turkle, 2011:166). Turkle suggests that the internet and networking make it easier to play with identity, but it also makes it harder to leave these identities as “internet is forever” and posts and pictures on social media can lock an identity (Turkle, 2011:169). Turkle also claims that self-reflection – while not impossible to obtain via the internet – is hard to cultivate in the time of fast-phased text-driven online media (Turkle, 2011:172). Turkle, inspired by sociologist David Riesman, claims that a loss in the inner sense of a purposeful self turns to an “other-directed” awareness of the self; this other-directed awareness is furthered fueled by our phone use and the easy access to online media (Turkle, 2011:176). Online we present ourselves in a role-playing-like fashion; Turkle beautifully describes this: “When we perform a life through our avatars, we express our hopes, strengths, and vulnerabilities. They are a kind of natural Rorschach.” (Turkle, 2011:212). Turkle points towards her interviewees, claiming that online life is surveilled and that they feel that everything is tape-recorded. Because

you cannot “change your mind” after a message or comment, there seems to be – Turkle argues – a loss in spontaneity as well as an increase in anxieties (Turkle, 2011:158f). Turkle makes the immediate connection to Michel Foucault’s notion of the panopticon, the surveillance method of modernity situated in the fact that one can never know whether one is surveilled or not, leading to a self-surveillance among the “prisoners” (Turkle, 2011:262). The togetherness through social media creates panopticon-like circumstances where we are self-censoring and surveilling one another. One last important wisdom and insight we can draw from Turkle is the pressure of performing in online settings, having friends on Facebook etc. For Turkle, this creates a weaker focus on social connection, making social connections a number game (Turkle, 2011:280).

4.3 Liquid Love

In his book *Liquid Love*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the romantic notion of “till death us do part” has been liquified in the age of technology and individualism. Courtship is nowadays more similar to a commodified game. Bauman means that we live in a consumeristic culture that esteems the immediate use of products, instant gratification, and a money-back guarantee with an all money back on return. Bauman claims that our modern society is commodifying the love experience. For Bauman, humility and courage are the pillars of love that modernity has demolished (Bauman, 2003:7). One would wish to be able to conquer the uncertainties of love with solid confidence. However, love is – for Bauman – as frightening as death. He writes: “Love is a mortgage loan drawn on an uncertain, and inscrutable, future” (Bauman, 2003:8). This sentence captures Bauman’s argument, that love is frightening and uncertain and that there is an attraction to escape, to control, or to seek a safer way to love (Bauman, 2003:9). The thought-out solution to this challenging and, indeed, quite spontaneous act of love is relationships. Bauman means that the relationship in our culture can be seen as an investment just like any other. It’s an investment of time and money, and the payoff is safety and security – however, as Bauman points out, relationships do not come with the promise of guaranteed security; most of the time, you never know what will happen (Bauman, 2003:13f). He claims that seeking out partners in modernity springs from a desire to escape frailty; however, the relationship is for Bauman the household of frailty (Bauman, 2003:25). The future is frightening and unknown; Bauman seems to point towards the activity of ‘surfing the network’ to move around the uncertainties, to “drown the silence in messages” by doing this, the messages might increase quantity but lose qualitative content (Bauman, 2003:34). The thought of “consuming love” is that it is measured against its cost – “value for money” (Bauman, 2003:42). The craving

for what Bauman calls complete fusion – or simply sex – the escape from loneliness is an illusion: “...climax ‘leaves strangers as far apart as they were before’ so that ‘they feel their estrangement even more markedly than before’” (Bauman, 2003:45). Bauman brings forward the classical notion of ‘sublimation’. The idea that the sexual instinct is switched and replaced with its “original sexual aim”. The sexual drive is redirected towards a new and socially constructed field (Bauman, 2003:56). Bauman claims that the “coercive pressure” of sexuality has been sublimated and replaced with sexuality focusing on the objects of desire (Bauman, 2003:57).

Being connected is also something Bauman understands as something less expensive than being engaged (Bauman, 2003:63). This leads to the archetype of ‘*homo economicus*’, a lonely rational choice actor. He treads carefully to not fall in and out emotions that do not generate profit (Bauman, 2003:69). This part in Bauman’s theory seems to refer, in many ways, to the Durkheimian notion of *anomie*, the notion of a dissolved morality – in Bauman’s case as a consequence of neo-liberalistic “freedoms” - creating a weakened social glue and collectivity. There is, Bauman says, no fully structured human togetherness “...free from ambivalence, no hierarchy is totally frozen.”. There are many similarities in Bauman’s argument to both Jurgen Habermas and Max Weber’s notion of the colonialization of ‘life-worlds’ and the notion of the ‘iron cage’ or the demystification followed by new technologies. The last idea we can conclude from Bauman is that love and to love in many ways – in contemporary society – is something one has to deserve: “... if they are so much more perfect than myself that I can love in them the ideal of my own self...” (Bauman, 2003:77). Bauman continues his line of thought by stating that in order to be self-loving, one has to be loved – being a worthy love object in the eyes of the other (Bauman, 2003:80). I will end this part with Bauman referring to Emmanuel Levinas, the question ‘why should I care if so many others do not?’ (Bauman, 2003:92). This phrase is for Levinas the sign of amorality and, for Bauman, one of the consequences of our modern society’s liquidized love.

4.4 The Art of Loving

It is hard to write about love in a sociological context without mentioning the Frankfurt school theoretician and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. Fromm opens his book with the fundamental assumption that humans are born into a socially situated context filled with uncertainty, the only certainty being death. He further claims that separateness in this world filled with uncertainty is the leading source of anxiety (Fromm, 2006:8). For Fromm, the fundamental goal for man becomes to overcome separateness/loneliness; with orgasmic pleasure, alcohol, and

drug use, one can triumph these feelings of loneliness. However, this effect is only momentary. Like many sociologists before, Fromm claims that through conformity, being like everyone else, one can escape the claws of loneliness (Fromm, 2006:12). Hence the desire for “interpersonal fusion” becomes a fundamental passion for the human (Fromm, 2006:17). According to Fromm, love is first and foremost the act of giving and not receiving; he opposes the view of giving as sacrificing, viewing the gift as the highest form of potency and joy (Fromm, 2006:21). The narcissistic characteristics hold the diametral opposite love, as this trait of character is based on hoarding and exploiting the other (Fromm, 2006:24).

Consequently, one should not use another person as a mean but rather respect his/her uniqueness (Fromm, 2006:26). Fromm - fueling Bauman’s line of reasoning - states that the Christian imperative ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’ is central in the art of loving; this differs from narcissism where the libido is turned towards oneself – not giving (Fromm, 2006:54). Fromm connects the modern capitalistic society and the market as “regulator of all economic, hence social relations, on the other” (Fromm, 2006:77). Individualization becomes an alienating factor; coercion through morality is the social glue and the fundamental principle to overcome loneliness. Nevertheless, coercion in our atomized culture does not lead to togetherness rather to participate in a collective competition, which enforces loneliness, anxiety, guilt, and insecurity (Fromm, 2006:80). Fromm suggests that the pathology of love should not be seen as an individual psychological problem but rather a question revolving around our modern atomized culture and as a socio-emotional phenomenon.

4.5 The Culture of Narcissism

The historian Christopher Lasch’s critical notion of modernity includes, like Bauman and Fromm, the notion of narcissism. Just as Bauman beliefs self-loving is centered on the love from the other, Lasch argues in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) that narcissism, rather than growing from selfishness and self-love is an indication of weakness and frailty. A narcissistic self is a self in need of “self-affirmation” and dependence on the other. Lasch theory of narcissism springs from the Freudian notion of libidinal investment of the self, breaking the boundaries of the self and the world of objects creating a defense against anxiety and guilt (Lasch, 1979:48f). Lasch points towards the camera as an object used for narcissistic use, such as self-surveillance and self-scrutiny, simply a tool that generates selfhood in relation to the consumption of the images portraying the self (Lasch, 1979:62). For Lasch, survival is a central part of his understanding of modern culture; emotional survival and protection of oneself and ego becomes a worrisome struggle (Lasch, 1979:64). Self-improvement and “self-culture”,

following Lasch's argument, is the training of mind and body to become instrumental in their character, closely linked to the phrase "accumulated capital means progress" (Lasch, 1979:72). There is a will to surpass ancestors in the pursuit of wealth shredding moral meaning and promote the "winning images" – which leads to a focus on personal attributes rather than personal actions (Lasch, 1979:74f). Lasch refers to Martha Wolfenstein's concept 'fun morality' which revolves around the measurements of achievement and how this measuring attitude, previously most pre-dominant at work, now flows through everyday life. Sexual activities are imbedded with notions of "performance" and using the proper "technique". Lasch describes this as anarchy, using Thomas Hobbes phrase "a war of all against all", where personal life is a struggle connected to the social marketplace (Lasch, 1979:82). There are many similarities between Lasch and Bauman; Lasch – just like Bauman – means that consumption becomes the cure to a dull and atomized life (Lasch, 1979:91).

There is a connection between narcissism and depression in psychoanalytical theory, substantial for an emotional understanding of the backlash narcissism can have on an individual level. Psychotherapist Johan Beck-Friis claims that narcissism is a regulatory tool to manage the self, to keep the self whole and complete (Beck-Friis, 2005:88). Beck-Friis further states that depression is constituted when the I creates a bodily and mental I that is cohesive but lack emotional affirmation (Beck-Friis, 2005:97). Psychoanalyst Johan Cullberg claims that the grandiose ego tries to conceal the bad attributes that at any time could be unmasked (Cullberg, 2003:230). Hence, narcissism becomes a membrane overarching the self-creating an illusion of solidity (Beck-Friis, 2005:87). Something that is vital to symbolize in a highly competitive culture. Depression occurs when one becomes consciously aware of the emptiness and the incapacity to feel and not being able to love; this awareness causes the subject emotional pain, depression, self-hatred, and the feeling of being unable to change – bearing many similarities with what we sociologists call self-alienation. This state of mind could be compared to the neurological phenomena of *anesthesia dolorosa*, which literally means painful numbness, in psychoanalytical theory the term is used to describe emotional numbness, a significant trait of depression (Beck-Friis, 2005:101).

4.6 The End of Love

It is impossible to exclude the extensive work on romance and intimacy presented by Eva Illouz. Illouz starts off her book *The End of Love* by asking the question: are we sexually and emotionally free? The quick answer is that we seem to be affected by technology and cultural scripts to guide our behavior (Illouz, 2019:9). Freedom for Illouz is therefore a vast cultural

framework embedded in people's self-definition and relationship to one another (Illouz, 2019:12). The cultural script referred to is, just like the previous theories, neo-liberalism and the anomic state of morality in private life – the same regarding sexual and emotional freedom, the normativity is rooted in economic transactions (Illouz, 2019:13). Freedom and especially choices are, for Illouz, the “major cultural story of modern people.” Choice tells us about how people shape and understand themselves and their subjectivity (Illouz, 2019:19). This economic rationality rooted in sexual choice works in combination with social media to quickly regulate social life. The phenomenon of ignoring other online users show a new type of social conduct (Illouz, 2019:23). Illouz develops the notion of anomic desire as not a depressive or apathetic state rather a hyperactive, restless and using Durkheim's words, “morbid” state. The anomic desire cannot attain only one object of desire but constantly seeks more (Illouz, 2019:29). Certainty for Illouz – inspired by Durkheim - is constituted in rituals creating normative boundaries, reducing obscurity (Illouz, 2019:44). Illouz claims that rituals bring people together, sharpen emotions, and reduce self-awareness. In modernity, there is a shift situated in liberalism and the liquefying of rituals and the institutionalization of freedom, consequently leading to uncertainty and anomie (Illouz, 2019:46). Like Vincent Miller and the critique of mind/body dualism, Illouz describes the body, in the eyes of science, to be reduced and emptied of meaning and personhood. The body becomes a biological drive and “as property of a separate individual” (Illouz, 2019:56). The emotional, matrimonial and sexual has been atomized (Illouz, 2019:57). Consent is thereby closely connected to the epistemology of the body, as the body is an object owned by the subject's will of desire (Illouz, 2019:59). The notion of “casual sex” is closely connected to sex in capitalist modernity and carries a logic of sexuality for its own sake (Illouz, 2019:61). Illouz states that liberated sexuality and gender equality springs from the number of sexual encounters and a sexual detachment from “emotions, moral sentiments, and social norms”. Casual sex has an abstract form - like money - as it becomes interchangeable in orgasmic pleasure (Illouz, 2019:70). Atomized sexuality and casual sex flow in and out of uncertainty, making it hard to define relationships (Illouz, 2019:81). Illouz means that casual sex is situated in masculinity and patriarchal norms where women are caught between rationality and “the atomization of the body”. On the other hand, men accumulate sexual experience, status, and sexual capital by practicing casual sex (Illouz, 2019:86). The widespread practice of casual sex brings with it, as previously mentioned, an uncertainty – where does one draw the lines emotionally between casual sex and an emotional relationship (Illouz, 2019:91). Due to the ‘new rational epistemology’ - explained by Illouz and Miller – the body functions as the truth of a relationship (Illouz, 2019:92). Using Jacques Lacan's notion of

‘negative relations’ – or the empty self, lingering to become filled – Illouz describes, much like Lasch, how people in negative relations want to become desirable in the eyes of the other but can never truly become satisfied (Illouz, 2019:93). With this theoretical foundation, Illouz develops the concept of ontological uncertainty. Illouz describes this ontology founded in the hyper-subjective self, building certainty through consumption of sexual objects – that is hard if not impossible to satisfy – subsequently, the very nature of the self rests on uncertainty (Illouz, 2019:99). Illouz also emphasizes that the individual body as a commodity is often, and has historically, been consumed and institutionalized by men. Online dating apps like Tinder follow this logic of a binary swipe system of fast, yes and no’s; the decision is mainly made through images of bodies – persons become bodies (Illouz, 2019:101). Illouz argues that the value or sexual capital differs from women to men; men have a more durable asset and do not need to worry that their capital decrease with time, rather the opposite. This differs from women and their sexual capital that decrease with time as women grow older – as the sexual and symbolic capital for women is situated in their bodies (Illouz, 2019:135). Mainly focuses on men with a heavy pornographic consumption, Illouz states that the sexual self becomes estranged from the emotional (Illouz, 2019:140). The ontological uncertainty brings with it a risk calculation, asserting risk becomes the prominent factor of online dating, thus deludes the focus of a sexual-emotional “contract” (Illouz, 2019:147). ‘Ghosting’ is another aspect of contemporary dating. The act of merely ignoring the receiver without being stigmatized, losing face, or paying a symbolic cost – plays into the ontological uncertainty (Illouz, 2019:167). Illouz understands trust as closely connected to the “willingness to be vulnerable to another” – the pressure of ontological uncertainty seems to reduce the willingness to be vulnerable (Illouz, 2019:177). Just like in the free market, risk-taking in an uncertain ontology seems to pay off, for Illouz taking the risk (in romantic relation seeking) involves either having a stable capital “social and economic assets” or overcome the fear of uncertainty (Illouz, 2019:180). A final note from Illouz is the distinction between ‘good sexuality’ and ‘bad sexuality’: where the good is constituted in good emotional bonds and the bad in deprived emotional bonds. The one with poor emotional bonds associates their emotions and their relationships in relation to their sexual desire (Illouz, 2019:194).

4.7 The Mirror Stage

Jacques Lacan presents a radical interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis, viewing the ego in polemic to the Anglo-American ego-psychology by claiming that there is no coherent ego/self (Johnston, 2018). Hence, shaking the Cartesian foundation of the Cogito and mind-world

dualism. Lacan's notion of the mirror stage presents a view of the ego as fundamentally narcissistic. The infant creates an ego through a mirror image of the maternal other's 'imago' – ideal. The 'Ideal-I' is, in other words, a reflection of the desire of the maternal other. Consciousness is only possible as the self becomes aware/confronted of the desire of the other (Johnston, 2018). The fragmentation of the infant and the effects following this fragmentation, like anxiety and distress, are feelings one wants to control and reduce by creating a wholeness, a coherent self (Johnston, 2018). This coherent self is nevertheless unachievable; Lacan means that by identifying with the Ideal-I one becomes self-alienated as this is an "inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verification" (Lacan, 2006:78). The ontology of the ego becomes situated in self-objectification as the subject assumes the image and the Ideal-I (Lacan, 2006:76). The I become a representation of what the infant's parents "dreams and wishes" the I successively becomes "the desire of the Other". Adrian Johnston writes about Lacan in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "...his/her body image being always-already overwritten by signifiers flowing from the libidinal economies of other speaking beings.". The mirror stage is present and signified through the other in body gestures and postures (Johnston, 2018).

I will use Lacan to understand rejection in online dating, just like the maternal other creates an imago, a mirror-image which the infant tries to attain the rejection of females on Tinder creates a mirror image of an Ideal-I who would be an object of desire. This imago could be seen as a culturally scripted ideal, situated in the desire of the other. The notion of the Ideal-I also helps us understand the other-directness and the ideal in the Ideal-I as attainable in the logic of consumption, inevitably trying to consume the emptiness and fragmentation of the self – leading to self-alienation. Lacan is a complex theoretician, and my attempt to understand his work is indeed only fragmented. Nevertheless, I intend to use Lacan's notion of the mirror stage as a theoretical vantage point to understand and dissolve the notion of a unified self, central in our cultural understanding of self-fulfillment and self-improvement.

5. Method

5.1 Epistemology

In this thesis I will develop knowledge of how young heterosexual men use Tinder and how their view on romantic relationships and self-esteem is affected by the app. My epistemological position rests on a phenomenological philosophy basing my knowledge in the experiences of my interviewees, the young men. I will use the methodological model of the case study to understand these experiences on Tinder as expressions of social- and technological-acceleration in society. Robert K. Yin describes the case study as a method that tries to illuminate a decision process – why, how, and what consequences the decision process results in (Yin, 2014:15). The case study explores a contemporary phenomenon in-depth in a particular real-world context - in which the case is situated. The boundaries between social phenomena and social context can be quite unclear (Yin, 2014:16). Due to this unclarity, we can use previous research and theoretical propositions to guide the data collection and our analysis (Yin, 2014:17).

This thesis aims to understand typifications as key structural characteristics of how young men experience Tinder and connect these typified experiences with an intersubjective understanding of online dating for young men. My methodological framework rests on a mind-world monism where I view myself as part of the world I study. In this sense, I will understand action and behavior as situated in our social and cultural context, in which I am part of. Through reflexivity, I will try to gain insight into the phenomena of online dating, reflecting on my interviewees and my own experience.

5.2 Interviews

My methodology consists of 15 semi-structured lifeworld interviews focusing on the interviewee's lifeworld, exploring subjective experiences, feelings, and desires on Tinder. The interviewer produces knowledge together with the interviewees; the conversation becomes intersubjective and social where knowledge is constructed inter-relational (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019:35). I have decided to use qualitative interviews as this method was the most suitable in order to gain an in-depth understanding the young males experience on Tinder. Through interviews, we can learn how events affect thoughts and feelings (Weiss, 1994:1). Interviews give the respondents time and opportunity to elaborate and re-answer questions, giving a fuller and richer understanding of their, sometimes, contradictory feelings and experiences. The semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to change the order of the questions; the semi-structured interview also benefits the interviewer as it allows follow-up

questions more extensively than the strictly structured interview (Gani, Rathakrishnan & Krishnasamy 2020:140).

There is a question regarding the validity of the qualitative interview, which has a simple answer, that there is no guarantee that the interviewee will tell the truth (Weiss, 1994:149). In my interviews, I have been moved by the level of honesty from my informants. Many of my interviewees have shared intimate memories and emotional hardships openheartedly. Robert S. Weiss suggests that a good interviewing partnership is the best way to gain an honest conversation. Ultimately, we have to rely on the quality of the interview for validity (Weiss, 1994:150). Beyond this faith, I occasionally re-asked questions at the end of the interview to be sure I had revised coherent and reliability information.

5.3 Sampling

My base sample is made through convenience sampling, where I have selected three key interviewees. This means that I have used my personal network, asking my friends if they know someone who uses Tinder who would like to participate in an interview. From these three key informants, I have snowballed respectively four new interviews to a total number of 15 interviews. In the selection of the three key interviewees, I have tried to gain interviewees with different occupational backgrounds; and there is indeed a balance between students and interviewees working. However, the level of education among the interviewees is generally high; most interviewees have studied at university – but not all. There is ethnic diversity in the sample as almost half of the interviewees had parents born in other countries than Sweden. The interviewees are from either Lund or Malmö in southern Sweden. The sample consists of males between the ages of 18-30 currently living in Sweden. I have decided to interview exclusively heterosexual cis men as I specifically want to understand the male heterosexual experience on Tinder. I have also held the criteria that the interviewee has to have used Tinder within the last year. Many great comparative studies have been made between men and women on Tinder – where Eva Illouz has written brilliant books on the topic - however, the extensive focus on understanding young men's Tinder use in Sweden has not been developed.

Convenience and snowball sampling have been helpful as it has led me to many different informants under a relatively limited amount of time. Robert S. Weiss claims that a convenience sample holds the perk of breaking through groups (Weiss, 1994:25). In my case, I believe the trust gained from referral has made my interviewees more comfortable and open towards me as an interviewer – one interviewee said off tape something along the lines of: “when “she” (my friend who referred the interviewee) told me about your study, I knew you would be

a good guy so I wanted to join and contribute”. I would like to believe that I have gotten informants through convenience sample who would not normally volunteer in an interview study. One negative side of convenience sampling is that the method does not have a suitable basis for generalization (Weiss, 1994:26). However, I suggest that my analysis and theory, regardless of my unrepresentative sample, could be applicable in other contexts – following Weiss thought of ‘theory independent of qualifiers’ (Weiss, 1994:28). This can also be compared to what Yin calls ‘analytical generalization’ that a theoretical construction is believed to be applicable in other situations (Yin, 2014:68).

5.4 Implementation

My interviews have been close to everyday conversations with a relaxed feel to them; I have followed a semi-structured interview guide during the interviews. The interviews were 40-60 minutes long and begins with around 5 min small “get to know each other” talk to create a relaxed interview setting. I have focused greatly on formulating follow-up questions, letting myself be guided by the interviewee and focus on what he wanted to tell me. This semi-structure has opened up a wide variety of accounts of different experiences and different stories. I have a relatively limited experience of Tinder myself, which has been excellent as it has got my informants talking and engaging in the conversation; they were pleased with my "newbie-attitude" and gladly took the role of experts upon themselves. These men are truly the real anthropologists of this research, being knowledgeable on the field of Tinder and bringing me invaluable knowledge. The fact that I am a heterosexual 25-year-old man has most certainly been beneficial when interviewing young men. Often, I got comments like "you know how it is," etc., and most of the time, I have had an easy time understanding these young men. However, due to the subject's sensibility, there have been a few occasions where the interviewees did not want to go into too personal details – something I have the uppermost respect and understanding for. I have tried to approach these very personal emotions with respect and sensitivity, and in some cases, people have been defensive in the beginning of the interview and successively opened up. I have tried to follow up on spontaneity, specific and relevant responses made at the moment; I have also tried to ask the interviewee if my interpretation of their statements is correct, aiming to interpret their statements during the interview. Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann describe the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer as contextual. Kvale & Brinkmann uses Foucault's term ‘technologies of the self’ to understand how the interview can affect/construct the interviewee's subject in different ways (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019:122). The interview subject is not as much being exposed as being

constructed in the interview situation when reflecting upon his Tinder use (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019:123). In accordance to this methodological perspective I have tried to keep my interview questions as neutral as possible. The aspect of the interview as constructed was indeed noticeable; in some interviews, the interviewee wanted to give an account that everything was good, that they did not care about Tinder, but later in the interview, they acknowledged hurt feelings, there was a continuous negotiation between different identities. The interviewees could try to impress me, show that they were successful and unmoved by online dating, or they could discharge all their feelings to me. In all these different scenarios, I have used Lara J. Foley's notion that the interview subjects should be encouraged to explore different questions they find interesting and let these voices be heard (Foley, 2012:306). Knowledge is in the interviews produced in a social interplay between interviewee and interviewer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019:85).

I have been inspired by digital ethnographer Kristian Møller Jørgensen's methodological approach to 'Grand Tour Interviews'. Jørgensen writes that the Grand Tour Interviews "...create opportune situations for the researcher to produce authentic accounts of experience and practice tied to those places." (Jørgensen, 2016:37). The Grand Tour Interviews invites the interviewee to remember how he uses the technology – in our case, Tinder. I have also been inspired by the scroll back method. This method invites the user to show us how he uses the body and navigates in the online environment. This helps us in our endeavor to understand and analyze how meaning and interactions are created on Tinder. The interviewee becomes a co-analysis, where the researcher and the interviewee explore the interviewee's relationship towards the app (Robards, 2017:727). Some interviewees did not want to show their Tinder profiles, while other interviewees shared their screen and showed how they usually swiped and how their profile and conversations looked like. I could also see how they touched, swiped, and moved inside the app. Sometimes the interviewee showed me how they used the app during the interview, and in some cases, I asked them to show me after the interview off the record if they wanted to show me how they swiped and their profile. This helped me feel immersed in the app; it gave me a sense of how the interviewee was using the app. Researcher Laura L. Ellingson states that 90% of communication is made through non-verbal signs, such as the pitch of voice, eye contact, and body movement (Ellingson, 2012:6). Watching my interviewees using Tinder has been a great asset to further my understanding of the usage of the application.

5.5 Coding

After my interviews were done, I transcribed my material, printed them out, and placed the papers on my living room floor. With a marker, I marked excerpts I found substantially interesting – after doing this to all my interviews, I started to write a mind-map where I connected all my marked excerpts to different themes and sub-themes. I mainly searched for what Herbert Bloomer calls ‘sensitizing concepts’, concepts worth problematizing (Blumer, 1954) - using an abductive approach to understand and explain the most likely sociological explanation to these themes using theoretical frameworks and new concepts to create clarity and possible approaches. I was taking theoretical ideas and applying them to specific typified experiences linking these experiences to the larger net of cultural trends – trends understood and developed by other scholars and theoreticians. My theory has developed successively and diachronically with the interviews I conducted – I would argue that choice of theory was made in relation to my empirical findings and has grown organically over time. As a concept’s reoccurred in the interviews - sometimes these concepts were completely new to me, ideas sparked that did not exist before the interview.

5.6 Analysis

When writing this thesis, my biggest challenge has been to pinpoint the line between theory and empirical findings. When I began the collection of data, my interview guild was fairly open, broad, and flexible. I had developed descriptive background questions and my main questions revolved around questions in the likes of: “how do you use/feel/think when using Tinder” (see appendix). I have also asked my interviewees to tell me about a positive and a negative experience; these questions has, in general led me to believe that there is much more negative to be said than positive about Tinder. I would like to say that I have been led to my theory through my interviews. However, it is probably more likely that there has been a constant dialog between theory and empiricism in this thesis. Before I did my interviews, my theoretical framework was based on Erving Goffman’s theory of self-presentation. However, during my interviews, I found out that strategic action and strategic/economic thinking were more prominent than any other topic I had thought of. This led me towards developing theories like Bauman, Illouz, and Miller’s account of Heidegger. At the end of my interviews and when the transcriptions were completed, I implemented Jacques Lacan as I, through my coding, had realized that strategic action was connected to self-esteem and that Lacan connected the notions of cultural narcissism with the individual desire to adapt towards a social Ideal-I. Consequently, my theory selection has been a constant jumping back and forth from empirical findings and theoretical concepts.

5.7 Ethical Concerns

There has been a great interest to participate in my study, and most young men have been eager to tell their stories. I have followed the Swedish ethical guidelines in research on humanities and social science from the Swedish: Vetenskapsrådet. The council presents four rules; information, consent, confidentiality, and that the data is only used for research-related purposes. The rule of information states that the researcher shall inform the informants of the intention of the research. They shall be informed how their answers will be treated in the study and that the participation can be exited at any time (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002:7). The rule of consent states that the researcher needs consent from the interviewee - in my case, this has been received as recorded consent (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002:9). The third rule is confidentiality, that the informants will revise anonymity and that no one will be able to trace their responses to their person (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002:12). I have exited out certain parts out of the transcription that is too detailed and could revile the interviewee's identity. I have also used synonyms and random imaginary names for my interviewees. The last rule is that the information is only used for research-related purposes and not for commercial or non-scientific purposes (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002:14). Beyond this, I have held the general stance to treat all my participates with respect and dignity. I let the interviewees decided how much they want to tell me about their Tinder experiences and when I was asking sensitive questions, I always added, "if you want to tell me about this, you know you don't have to". I have also been clear that the interviewees have the full right to withdraw their interview at any time. I have also translated my excerpts from Swedish to English as the interviews where done in Swedish. This might have affected the excerpts although I have tried to keep the translation as close to the original as possible.

5.8 Pandemic

Due to the ongoing pandemic, some of the interviews had to be done online via discord, zoom, or phone. Interviewing without seeing the interviewee's face has been a little awkward, and these interviews were usually faster than the interviews made face-to-face. Some informants preferred not to use their webcam, some preferred talking through their phone, and some wanted to meet face-to-face. Some things were easier when not having a face-to-face conversation; I could prolong silence giving the interviewee time to reflect without making the situation embarrassing or awkward. I realized that long pauses often gave the interviewee time to add something – it gave them some time to reflect upon something they said and elaborate further.

6. Analysis

6.1 The effects on self-esteem through the use of Tinder

In my interviews, one theme has been particularly prominent: Tinder is an uncertain place for most young men. The uncertainty is mainly rooted in the often-occurring situation of being ignored. Many stories in my interviews are revolving non-verbal rejection; there are too many stories to mention in this pre-chapter. I have used Illouz's notion of ontological uncertainty as a cornerstone to understand my interviews - the idea that the uncertain self builds certainty through the consumption of sexual objects (Illouz, 2019:167). My analysis will surround and reflect upon the online management of this uncertainty. The notion of uncertainty cannot be summarized by one quote; however, most of the excerpts in this analysis show the tension between uncertainty and managing this uncertainty. Hence the notion of ontological uncertainty will flow through and be a reoccurring theme in the analysis. I will approach ontological uncertainty and how this uncertainty is answered with the promise of technological solutions – a promise of rationalization, certainty, and efficiency. The structure of my analysis will begin with a short development of the concept of ontological uncertainty concerning identity and self-hood, followed by different ways of managing this uncertainty through strategies and thereafter I will analyze how these strategies can be viewed as gamified and repertoires of a cultural script connected to social acceleration and a culture of narcissism and consumption; lastly, I will examine how strategies affect young men emotionally. The chapters in this analysis build on each other and are to be understood in relation to one another.

6.1.1 *Others and the Ideal-I*

The development of online dating apps like Tinder has created a new way to engage in romantic interactions. From a first glance, it seems like Tinder has reduced some uncertainties; for example, we know that most of the people using Tinder are singles looking for a romantic relationship. Thus, the explicit rejection one could receive in a face-to-face interaction disappears – dating has probably never been more efficient. However, the efficiency of online dating on Tinder seems to bring a new significant void of uncertainty. On Tinder, the contact with the other user can possibly end at any point, in the initiation phase, or long into the conversation. There is always the probability of being ignored, or what is commonly referred to as being ghosted. Our interviewee Walter gives us an account of his experience of Tinder and being ignored:

#9 Walter

8/10 do not give me a response and the 20% remaining I can chat with... and then I ask them... now this is not an answer how to get a date more like the opposite... I ask them "so what do you do during the day?" and it's a mood-killer... I believe I have got an answer to that question five times in 117 matches...

As mentioned in the introduction, face-to-face rejection may be more painful and concrete. However, what Walter gives witness to is being ignored. The lack of interaction in the rejection seems to bring the imagined and mirrorlike backlash where the ignored has to find or imagine the explanation to the rejection for themselves. Walter tells us: "on Tinder, you need to be confident and dominant... that's not how I have been... I have been insecure, resentful, and judgmental...". Walter seems to turn himself into a self-imagined object, firstly wondering why he fails to attract the other, secondly imagining an Ideal-I, an ideal of himself who would be a version successful in attracting the other. It seems like one's relation towards the Ideal-I is either hating the Ideal-I in envy or loving the Ideal-I trying to adapt towards this being (Lacan, 2006:76). The Ideal-I in Walters case seemed to correspond with inheriting high self-esteem, confidence, and being dominant. Another interviewee, Troy, informs us:

I thought Tinder wouldn't be a problem... but I did not get many matches or answers to my messages, it was a very humbling experience... it made me rethink my value... maybe I'm not good-looking... this situation motivated me to start working out in the gym.

We notice that Troy is "rethinking his value" his motivation to start working out can be seen as a will to fulfill an Ideal-I, a will to conform to bodily norms of masculinity. After this realization and much hard work, Troy returns to Tinder with a well-trained body and newly taken pictures where he poses topless on the beach. Troy's success on the app is immense, and he is in many ways referring to himself as a greater version after his self-improving endeavor. This focus on the body is leading us to believe that the search for the Ideal-I, in Troy's case, was constituted in his body. The instances of Troy and Walter exemplify two different reactions to the experience of being rejected and ignored. In Walter's case, the rejection leads to a feeling of self-hatred and resentment. Troy on the other hand is trying to attain the Ideal-I by objectifying himself and disciplining his body in order to achieve success on the app. Both behaviors seem to be fueled by uncertainty and the feeling of not being good enough or lovable. A feeling

rooted in the unspoken rejection and imagined in terms of an Ideal-I connected to normative: cool confidence and strong masculinity.

Somewhat similar to Walter's attitude and reaction towards being ghosted, the resentment of the other is in contrast to self-hatred, a hatred aimed against the other's desire, the other who fuels the Ideal-I. Most informants claim that they experience themselves to be commutability and exchangeable for someone else. Rick tells me: "it's rigged against guys, it feels like girls have a lot more... it feels like they can pick and choose, guys can't be as selective... at least not if you're not top-hanging fruit...". Resentment and the opinion that Tinder is unfair is a somewhat occurrent attitude among most of the men I have interviewed. Rick feels that he has a disadvantage on Tinder, that girls have it easier. From this point of view, it seems like Rick's value is eviscerated due to the inflation of men and the competition with the "top hanging fruit". This attitude holds some resentment, an undertone that women are shallow for only choosing "the attractive men" and that it is "unfair". In a way, Rick gives the female other a negative ontological status. Another interviewee, Mohamed, states that he also feels exchangeable; he tells me: "it is always the pressure that you have to be interesting, fun and exciting when you chat or talk to someone". Both Rick and Mohamed experience ontological uncertainty as manifested in their exchangeable value. The uncertainty, stress, and anxiety associated with the competitive market of online dating seem immense on Tinder. The competitive aspect on Tinder seems to be one of the fundamental aspects of ontological uncertainty. The Ideal-I is the cultural ideal of male attraction, masculinity and success.

6.2 Strategies on Tinder

This chapter will be dedicated to the strategies on Tinder. Of course, one can adapt to bodily norms and try to mimic the Ideal. Another way to try to achieve an unwavering self is through strategic action. I will use the name ‘swipe economics’ as an umbrella term for the many different ways of referring to and reflecting on swiping habits as economic, rational, and instrumental. Swiping could be viewed as economical since the act of swiping revolves around an economic logic of rational choice and a strategic use seeking to maximize utility. On Tinder, the utility is situated in matches where swiping is the instrumental and limiting tool to contact other users.

6.2.1 *The Investor and the Investments*

Tinder presents the user with many possibilities; the number of people using the app and the different choices in choosing partner are vast. The fast decisions and the many different options of pleasure-seeking on Tinder are in a sense, reducing some anxieties and feelings of loneliness as there is always a new encounter waiting to be found in the app. A common trend in the interviews is how the interviewees relate to their different matches as stocks that one can decide to invest in. An example of the logic of the investment comes from Sean, who tells us:

#15 Sean

I had a date this autumn and I think we had a great time, it clicked and I had a tingling feeling in my stomach. She asked me if I wanted to meet again the following Saturday and of course, I wanted that... after that date, I asked her if she wanted to meet again and she said no, she didn't think we would work... I was a little fragile that following week... but that is also the charm with Tinder, you don't bet too much... it's not a high game... you don't get dumped, and it's not the whole world, you only invested two days of dating... but at the same time, you become hurt... whatever... it's about not investing too much because then you don't get disappointed.

The excerpt from Sean's interview express his reaction to the ontological uncertainty on Tinder. There are two sides to Sean's response; most noticeably, Sean refers to Tinder as an app where he does not have to invest "too much". This phrase carries a promise of certainty, a promise that one will never become bankrupt when micro-investing in potential relationships. However, it is unclear what the investment is constituted in. Sean makes it sound like the amount of time

spent on the date is the actual investment – echoing the phrase "time is money". Nonetheless, Sean seemed to have developed some feelings towards his date and was indeed hurt by the rejection. There is an attitude that by not investing too much, one will not become too disappointed if the interaction would not work out. This is similar to what Bauman calls “surfing the network” and I believe this illustrates how risk-calculating becomes a way to attempt and control uncertainty (Bauman, 2003:34). Nevertheless, to understand the logic of risk-calculating romantic encounters, we have to understand the investment. There is a desire not to be a loser and avoid bad investments because if one would invest and fail, it would be a failed business and a waste of time. The competitive aspect of investing can be viewed as the phenomena of social acceleration, the switch between partners are faster and rejection becomes less painful. Because the stakes are low, one can also invest more in many different people. Nevertheless, as Sean expresses it, there is still a fear of making high investments; in a way, small investments become a protection of the self – providing the user with a safety net with other options. Another interviewee, Eliot, brings forth the notion of social responsibility and high investment. Eliot uses Tinder with the expectation to find a girlfriend, he tells us:

#14 Eliot

It is easy to escape social responsibility when... when you can anonymize the one you're swiping, matching, or writing with... I am guilty myself for doing this... I become irritated... by the reluctance to go on a date, to give me a chance... to rely on, what I believe to be very bad premises to reject me as a person... to judge me without knowing me and to conclude that this is never going to happen... I think everyone loses at this...

In contrast to Sean, Eliot has high expectations of his Tinder matches; Eliot can imagine possible scenarios and daydream about how he and his match become boy- and girlfriend. It is safe to say that Eliot invests more feelings in his Tinder matches. Subsequently, the act of chatting becomes great anxiety for Eliot as he finds the stakes to be high. Eliot does not like to chat in general as he thinks it is hard to find the right words and phrasings to present himself. This pressure makes the chat a stressful moment – holding a perfectionistic undertone. Instead of chatting, Eliot prepares a message with much thought and asks his Tinder matches for a date face-to-face early on to skip the chatting stage. However, these attempts usually do not result in a date. Chatting is an essential aspect of succeeding on Tinder, and an essential way of managing the investment. Many of the interviewees emphasize that one has to write eye-

catching and funny messages to catch the other's attention and interest to succeed. In cases like Eliot's, there seems to be a perfectionistic desire to triumph the competition. The fear and risk that a chat conversation could end at any time make the management of the chat an important regulating tool. However, if one invests too much in a chat, one could end up with hurt feelings. Ali tells us about one such experience on Tinder:

#11 Ali

Yeah, it happens that you write a lot... that you have really good communication... sometimes for a long time... weeks... and when you ask for a date, you get ghosted... and it... (sigh) and because of that it's not fun... I want to meet people in real life... I want to socialize and not chat anonymously with a random person.

What Ali describes is how frail the social connection on Tinder can be. Just like Eliot stated in his excerpt above, there seems to be a lack of trust on Tinder. The technology and communication on Tinder make it easy to block and unlike a person online – which by no means has to be a negative function. However, this creates an uncertainty revolving around ghosting. In order to protect oneself from being ghosted, one can make a risk-calculation of the interaction and treat the interaction as a possible investment. Ivan tells us how being ghosted has affected him:

#5 Ivan

Sometimes you get stuck, like when you see something a little bit more interesting... but then you fall in the trap of getting too serious... like the whole thing is that it's supposed to be fun... so I am doing better lately... but before I could, like, overthink...

Ivan does not want to be “too serious”, leading to disappointment and hurt feelings. He refers to getting interested in a female as falling into a trap. As previously mentioned, there is a notion of resentment towards females as not being trustworthy or too shallow, leading to an “whatever” attitude of and nihilism, leading some users to engage in trolling and revenge on Tinder.

Regardless of the goal, when using Tinder, the feeling of uncertainty is very much present during one's usage of the app. The uncertainty seems to be greater on Tinder as the online platform presenting the user with fast decisions and a vast amount of choices making the

other and the user easily exchangeable. Usually, one does not chat with only one person but instead chats with several people simultaneously, creating a safety net with backup options if one was to be ignored. If we agree with Fromm's notion of loving as an art, we believe that one has to learn to love – to give love (Fromm, 2006:21). The notion of uncertainty in love is nothing new; uncertainty is, according to Fromm, the only thing - except death - we can know as a human condition (Fromm, 2006:8). Love becomes the art of giving without expecting anything back. As we have seen in this chapter, the notion of investment is situated quite opposite of Fromm's notion of love. The only way to create safety is through smart investments and not being gullible, falling into the trap of investing too much. We can sense the notion of resentment towards women and a desire to treat them "the same way" – in some cases, young men have claimed that they have ghosted females as a sort of revenge.

6.2.2 Internalized algorithmic thinking

The architecture of Tinder is rooted in the binary logic of swiping yes or no. The process of swiping holds many different aspects; not only is the swipe used as an instrumental value – the value of a potential match – swiping can also be used to manage the algorithmic value of the visibility online. One interviewee, Ahmed, reflects about algorithms in the following way:

#1 Ahmed:

Sure, to a certain extent, you need to know where to aim, but then Tinder has got algorithms, so if you swipe yes and you get many matches... you will get an advantage, so if you believe she will swipe no on you, might as well swipe no... they're already overwhelmed with attention anyway... Guys who swipe yes on everybody end up at the bottom and matches with the girls at the bottom, and they are usually not the most attractive on the market...

Ahmed refers to the hierarchy of users on Tinder through their swiping/matching ratio; he also expresses his fear of falling to the bottom, subsequently matching with others at the bottom. Ahmed also refers to this hierarchy through the metaphor of market – carrying an economical undertone. There seems to be an almost essential order of attractiveness and success embedded in this line of reasoning – a hierarchal food chain. Success is not only decided by one's attractiveness or the way one represents oneself in a profile, the way one swipes brings with it, conditions of future success. Ahmed does not swipe right on females he finds stunningly beautiful as this could lower his ELO (algorithmic score based on swipe to match rating) and

endanger the future connection with people on the higher percentile of the ELO ladder. To keep a good ELO, Ahmed swipes right on profiles he believes he might have a higher chance of matching with. By swiping strategically, these interviewees believe that they can control and strengthen their attractiveness level on Tinder by managing their ELO score – or at least the users believe they can control their algorithmic score. According to my interviews one allegedly swipes with people who has a similar score. The algorithms on Tinder are under some secrecy, and it is hard to pinpoint exactly how they work and figure out. However, our focus is not to understand the algorithms *per se*; rather, our interest lies in how users – in our case, young men – adapt towards algorithms regardless of their actual existence. Many of the interviewees were, in some sense, aware of the ELO rating as a system calculating attractiveness by looking at the ratio of swipes to matches – it was almost a commonsense knowledge among my interviewees. One of the interviewees Troy, a very successful Tinder user, tells us:

#3 Troy:

Tinder is all about the algorithms and mastering the algorithms and know how to use them to your advantage... 100%... That's why you should use Tinder Gold because... if you swipe and don't get any matches, then your score decrease (...)
Your Tinder card ends up at the bottom of the Tinder card deck, and you become less visible... (...) I got Tinder Gold, and that was a key that opened all the doors for me, because I could skip the process of swiping, which is like the worst there is in the whole Tinder context... to swipe and hope that the person likes you back... it's not a large percentage of the swipes that become matches... so Tinder Gold makes you skip the swiping process

Troy goes one step further than Ahmed. Instead of monitoring the swipes, making a risk analysis of sorts, predicting what would be a probable match before the swipe is done, Troy uses Tinder Gold. Troy explains that Tinder Gold makes you see the people who have been swiping right on you – Troy's stratagem is to only swipe yes on those that swipes yes on him, maximizing his ELO as every swipe becomes a match, in the hope of making his profile more visible. Tinder Gold holds two substantial perks, firstly the premium allegedly uppers the users ELO; secondly, it skips the process of swiping and the anticipation and hope of someone swiping back and the feeling of being rejected or ignored. In one way, Tinder Gold seems to limit the possibilities of endless options by giving the user a set selection of potential matches

– people who has swiped yes on you - thereby soothing the anxieties associated with hope and expectation when swiping.

What I would like to conclude from these excerpts is that the algorithmic consciousness, or what I would like to call *internalized algorithmic thinking*, is a manifestation of Heidegger's notion of enframement – one becomes a captive in technology, subsequently acting through the logic present in the technology. Like the notion of investment, swiping carries a reductionistic conception where swiping becomes a micro-investment on the romantic stock market. The focus on the other seems to be secondary to the algorithmically conscious mind. The notion of enframement helps us to understand how those who master the technology become trapped in the technology. The ontological uncertainty on Tinder seems to produce strategic actors focused on micro-managing the technology – the instrument with which a romantic relationship can be created. The knowledge of algorithms on Tinder was widespread among almost all of my interviewees. However, not everyone acted to adapt and increase their algorithmic score – some interviewees felt repulsed by the algorithms and did not care about their ELO score.

6.2.3 Maximizing the Odds

The stratagem of internalized algorithmic thinking centers on moving up the imagined algorithmic hierarchy on Tinder, seeking to maximize the results on Tinder – by becoming more visible for other users on the app. However, there are other ways of swiping. A maybe less technical swiping strategy is to maximize in number and enabling contact with as many people as possible. This swipe is focusing on maximizing the odds, like the trawl catching fish with a big net. The essential aspect of this type of swiping is the fast decisions and the instrumental view of the other. One of my interviewees, Bruce, swipes in this fashion. He tells me:

#6 Bruce

Oh, I look at the first picture and no more... I don't read the bio... I give it like, one or maybe two seconds and then swipe yes... usually it goes fast...

Bruce uses Tinder primary for one-night stands. The fast decisions on Tinder are shared among the interviewees; not too many overthink before swiping yes or no. When watching some of my interviewees swipe it felt like it was almost a reflex like action, where small comments about the profile were dropped before the swipe to in rapid pace continue to next profile. When it comes to swiping, the decision-making seems to be based on pictures rather than bio, and

although the young men cannot explain what makes them swipe on a person – they claim that attraction is central. Bruce continues:

I meet more people now that I have Tinder than before, this increases the odds that you will find someone... I think it's a good tool...

Bruce's way of reasoning is that the odds to meet someone increase by swiping on many people, and by making fast decisions, one can maximize the range and the time spent on Tinder to gain as many encounters as possible. As previously mentioned, the swipe becomes a tool to maximize encounters – it seems like this tool can be managed in many different ways. If we think about the previous chapter, our informants Troy and Ahmed put down some amount of time to become knowledgeable about the algorithms on Tinder, making a risk calculation on every swipe or pay for the premium version of the app. In the case of Bruce and many others, the swipe is free from algorithmic knowledge and functions more like a mass mail ad. As Turkle and Bauman states, social connections become a number game; in our case, swiping fits into the logic of the number game as almost all respondents want to maximize their odds to find someone – following the logic of *homo economicus* (Bauman, 2003:69). The statement: swiping on Tinder increases "your odds" points towards the promise of technology that, via rationalization, one can control the uncertain. There is a paradox in the two different strategies we have examined. If one strategy is correct, the other is wrong. If the algorithmic thinking results in maximized visibility, the trawl-like stratagem would be counterproductive. Likewise, in the opposite case, the algorithmic thinking would be false and henceforth sub-optimal for maximization. Nevertheless, both strategies immerse the user in the app and becomes time consuming activities.

In this chapter, I have focused on, not necessarily the best way to utilize Tinder, rather that there is, regardless of strategy, an embedded economic aspect ingrained in the act of swiping. However, the odds arguably rise when using Tinder, especially during the covid-pandemic and lockdown restrictions. Conversely, it seems like Tinder rather than creating a sense of connectivity, creates an enhance loneliness where strategic actors who follows the logic of swipe economics and becomes immersed in the time-consuming activity of strategic swiping.

6.2.4 *The Libidinal Investment of the Ego*

The Freudian notion of ‘the libidinal investment of the self’ presented by Christopher Lasch in his outlook on the culture of narcissism is comparable to the term "other-directedness" presented by Sherry Turkle. Our focus so far has been concerning managing the swipe instrumentally as a way of either entering a social hierarchy within Tinder – enabling high qualitative matches in the future via algorithmic thinking - or simply maximizing the odds of meeting someone by swiping on many different users. In this sub-chapter, we will investigate the connection of the use of the strategic swipe to the value of a match. We will regard this value as situated in the other-directedness, or as the libidinal investment of the self – as the self becomes stable, as we explained in the chapter of the Ideal-I, by affirmation. I will suggest that Tinder is centered around creating self-esteem through becoming a commodity or an object of desire. One interviewee, Sean tells us:

#15 Sean

Because I rarely use all my swipes, I think I might as well swipe right on most people even if I know her or if I know we won't get along or if she is not good-looking... sometimes I swipe right anyway because it can always lead to an ego-boost.

Sean is swiping right on females he believes he "won't get along" with; he does this because it might lead to a match, an ‘ego-boost’. There is no regard for the person on the other end; Sean is subsequently mirroring the behavior, he among many young men, find frustrating – gaining a match that does not respond. The notion of the ego-boost is a common topic in the interviews, and there seems to be a common view that matches carry some value as they at least can give the self a flattering boost. Some men, like our interviewee Lee, use Tinder only as an ego-booster; he tells us: "... for me Tinder is a confidence booster on your phone, you swipe a little if you find someone attractive...". In Lee's case, he did not want to put down the work or time in chat online. Now he uses Tinder as a social media where he gets self-confirmation by gaining matches similar to likes on Facebook or Instagram. Lee has had bad dating experiences on Tinder, and now he uses the app only for self-conformation.

Swiping on other users becomes an, other-directed activity, swiping also becomes the tool for ego-boosting, the "other" is useful if she swipes back, confirming an attraction. If this user is interested in the match does not necessarily matter, she becomes statistics, one of many who have shown interest. One informant, Troy, described his success on Tinder as a way

to gain default self-esteem: "One positive thing was all the acknowledgment after I was done with Tinder, I had a default self-esteem, that if I activated Tinder again, it would work out fine...". When Troy started using Tinder, he had to reevaluate his self-worth as his profile did not gain much attention, he did not gain many matches or dates, which made him question his attractiveness and self-worth. In Troy's case, he read up on how Tinder's algorithms worked, he paid for Tinder gold and started to work out – after a few years, Troy nearly perfected the art of swiping. If we think about Troy's situation, we understand that his self-worth and self-esteem is rooted in other-directedness, others viewing him as an object of desire.

In chapter 6.1.1, we examined Walter and Eliot; these two interviewees expressed anxiety and ego-loss when one was unsuccessful on Tinder. Their reaction to the Ideal-I was self-hatred and resentment. Giving the female other a negative ontological status or blaming the self for not reaching the perfection of the Ideal-I. In a narcissistic culture, self-esteem is a disposable income, something that can be weakened if someone ghosts or reject you; it can also be accumulated by receiving matches or romantic encounters. For many young men, levels of self-esteem do not seem to hold a constant value - as gold does in our economy - instead, self-worth is a fluctuating currency with a value dependent on how much others are willing to invest. Some individuals disregard success on Tinder as a source of authority or self-worth. However, there is an understanding among young men that success on Tinder relates with attractiveness, success, and the value of the self. Hence the self becomes embedded with the competitive task of gaining a high success rate on Tinder as this in many ways can be perceived as an app that assesses success and sexual status. An interviewee, Rick, expresses his experience with the comparative elements of Tinder:

...because it becomes a stressful thing, to go in and answer and compare matches and likes with your buddy and like, damn, he's got double the matches I have on my profile, I have to become more approachable...

It is easy to compare results and success on Tinder; Rick compares his success to his friend, which articulates the social complexity of online dating and the relativity of success. Rick seems to base some of his self-esteem on matches and likes, comparing his attention from others with his friends. There is a panopticon-like notion of the prisoners surveilling each other in this competitiveness. While Rick and his friend are far from prisoners, their competition-like relation stresses and motivates the other to perform and consume more time in the app. In our

case, Rick becomes stressed as he does not want to fall behind his friend in success, making him want to become more "approachable". In a way, the libidinal investment of the self becomes a quantitative value where one accumulates matches and attention from others – others viewing the self as a “sexual object”– to compare this with other men. This comparison could be viewed as a masculine coded sexual capital, the self-value as interrelated to the ideal of being masculine – as being able to attract females. Self-esteem viewed in this way becomes a subject-oriented and indeed hyper-cultural phenomenon. To attain a high degree of success on Tinder, one must work hard and spend time in the app and develop a market driven personality. In a way, the subject has to try to reach the Ideal-I, mirroring the social and cultural norms of attracting female attention and utilizing online strategies, managing swipes, matches, and chats as online investments.

6.3 The Gamified Tinder

The journalist Neil Strauss's book *The Game* (2006) is somewhat of a cult classic where Strauss gives insight into the world of male seduction and pick-up artistry. The "art" of seducing is nothing new and a widespread cultural phenomenon in history. However, with Tinder, many aspects of the seduction game have changed, and Tinder has created new ways of interacting online. The technology on Tinder has created a new arena and new ways to present oneself purely through pictures and text. Swiping/choosing a potential match carries the similarity of playing a game. In this chapter, I will approach Tinder as a cultural scripted and gamified application. I will encapsulate our previous notions of swipe economics, maximizing the odds and investing by viewing Tinder as a gamified application. The dynamics on the Tinder game can arguably be viewed as what Illouz calls a 'negative emotional bond' – the notion that the self is empty and becomes filled by the affirmation of the other - and the nihilism following enframing – the adamant focus on technology and the use of the other as an instrument to fill the self. The hyper-subjective activity of playing the Tinder game revolves around using others as instruments for self-affirmation. Playing the Tinder game becomes the adaptation of the logic of *homo economicus*. The libidinal investment of the self stands as the cornerstone of the culture of narcissism; the desire to reach the Ideal-I becomes the core purpose of the game. The Ideal-I becomes possible through other-directedness. The affirmation gained through strategic actions fills the empty cogito "self" – holding fundamental existential anxiety – and makes the game an instrumental hunt for validation. We subscribe to Bauman's argument that self-love in an anomic society is constituted in being worthy of love, worthy in the sense that others desire you (Bauman, 2003:80). To love one's self, one has to consume and be consumed by the other. Turkle means that this other-directedness and a pressure to perform inevitably transform and reduce the interaction to the easier controlled numbers game (Turkle, 2011:280). Lasch enforces this theoretical framework, stating that the self rests on the others consumption of one's profile pictures – and that this self is fundamentally narcissistic (Lasch, 1979:62).

6.3.1 Playing the game

In many ways, the economic logic of swipe economics reduces the interaction with the other to a means of utility – the other becomes an instrument for the solidity of the self, through a match or casual sex - the other's desire becomes the subject's libidinal investment. The logic of swipe economics seems to transform Tinder into a game-like activity where the goal on Tinder is closely connected to maximization and accumulate sexual encounters and matches – essentially winning the game. The player becomes immersed in the "game" as a competitive tool of

comparing sexual capital among other men. This investment-like game creates a one-dimensional investor, focusing on mastering the logic and becoming successful on the app – hence playing the game becomes a mean on its own. One respondent, Rick, tells us:

#7 Rick

Swiping is more to pass the time, like playing a game... its more if you get a match... then I will try to write something to everyone I have matched with just because why not, she has shown some interest so I write "what's up" or maybe comment her profile...

We notice that Rick uses Tinder as a way to pass the time. Many of my interviewees mention how they spend much time engaging in routine swiping – there seems to be a moreish aspect to the swipe. Swiping becomes a pastime activity like scrolling through the Facebook or Instagram feed. While this activity in many ways seem to be depleted of purpose, one is by routine swiping staying updated on the app. Routine swiping becomes a way to stay in the race while at the same time not playing with high stake. Tinder becomes a time-consuming activity both in managing matches, chatting and in the time spent on swiping. One interviewee, Ali, tells us: "... They succeed... it is addictive (...) I swipe when I'm bored and when I have a minute to spare, on the toilet or the bus". Ali is only one of many interviewees who thinks that Tinder is addictive. The total amount of time spent online managing, strategizing, or just routine swiping on Tinder becomes a time-consuming and, in many ways, a docile activity. The rules or success of the game becomes a purpose or an end in itself. Rick tells us that he writes with everyone he matches with because "why not" – I interpret this phrase as a will to maximizing the odds and not fall behind in the game. Rick seems interested in forming a relationship but does not want to be seen as someone who cares about Tinder or puts down much time on the app. He uses the app as a marketplace, and he is there in case something happens. The gamified Tinder becomes a hyper-subjective application where swiping becomes a pass-time activity and entertainment with a value of its own, while at the same time being a marketplace where one has to work to keep one's advertisement visible and competitive. In another interview, Troy tells us about his attitude on Tinder:

#3 Troy

Like to have an attitude... towards Tinder, you have to be realistic, to not let shit get you down because... because you will get rejected a lot... to be honest, it's

like you're playing a game... like you're playing a character and you need to optimize this character in the game, you need to buy gear and create a history that makes it great, to create a distance towards yourself, this is the way I used the app in the end, to get as much as possible, just maximize, maximize, maximize...

Troy views Tinder as a gamified activity, playing a game; we notice that Troy has an attitude to "...not let shit get you down...", because if you took things personally, you would not be able to continue using the app. The immediate answer to this risk of emotional backlash is to create distance towards the other, barricading and building a façade. The façade is constituted of what Troy calls gear, commodities, artifacts that attracts the other – you create your history through consumption – and in a way, Troy is also making himself into a commodity. As presented in theory section 4.2, Turkle's states that a profile on social media functions as a natural Rorschach, that the profile becomes a manifestation of one's desires and dreams understood through the presentation of the self, mirroring the societal expectations and norms (Turkle, 2011:212). Using Turkle, we can connect the notion of winning the Tinder game to the libidinal investment of the self – winning by being desired by the other. If the Ideal-I is the I/self that attracts the female other, Tinder poses a profit calculator and forum to maximize romantic encounters and matches. Viewed from this vantage point, we can interpret Troy as creating solidity of the self through consumption and maximization of encounters. It seems like the logic of swipe economics, and the strategies connected to the gamified Tinder spills off in face-to-face interactions. I interpret Troy's adaptation towards the Tinder game as an absorption of the logic of swipe economy, making efficiency and rationalization the pre-premises to the romantic encounter. Another interviewee sharing Troy's experience is Bruce:

#6 Bruce

I think it's a little like being a salesman, that I sell the product "me" and I think about closing the deal... that everything points towards a date and that I put myself in the role of selling the product Bruce and then you get to meet the product... that I almost put myself outside... that's (laughter) how I use Tinder.

The notion of consumption becomes prominent in this excerpt. Bruce views himself as a salesman trying to sell the commodified self; in a way, he tries to increase his value through both being consumed and consuming. The notion of putting one's self "outside" is just like Troy's desire to create distancing towards the other. It seems like the gamified Tinder enframes

the user via swipe economics to a strategic plan of action resulting in exploitation and the instrumental use of the other to maximize the "numbers game". By following strategic actions that will utilize and maximize matches, dates, public exposure, and success on Tinder, the user also reduces the focus on the other as a tool for filling the self with meaning and value. Success in a narcissistic culture is the absolute affirmation from the other, being admired, famous and popular. This success becomes the one omnipotent measure of transcending the Ideal-I. Strategic action and playing the game of Tinder becomes the way to close in on Ideal-I, and winning the game. Nevertheless, in immersing one's self in the Tinder game, we seem to, in many ways, lose our authentic connection to the other's and to our other possible selves.

6.3.2 Mirroring the Cultural script

A common phrase in the interviews was the sentence that one did not want to be "too serious". Sounding like a catchphrase from the Batman villain The Joker, the phrase does indeed have a nihilistic ring to it mirroring an anomic culture. Although many different Tinder users have different goals, the "whatever" attitude seems to be the casual way to swipe and chat. A typical response from the interviewees was that Tinder is an app where one should not have high expectations on a match. When playing the game of Tinder, users seem to incorporate a "whatever" attitude to protect the self against hurt feelings, creating a distance between the other's and the self. The rules or strategies of the game Tinder are fundamentally rooted in swipe economics and consequently the boosting of one's self-esteem through libidinal investments of the self. Using Heidegger's theorem of enframement, I want to connect the hyper-subjectivity act of playing – being the playing subject – to the nihilistic action of treating the other as a separate substantive object of consumption and investment. The disembodiment or distancing when playing the Tinder game seems to be connected to a masculine ideal of strength and coolness – being rational and not being too emotional. The Ideal-I is seen as the imagined version of the I who can attract the other – on Tinder, the Ideal-I is the I who can accumulate the sexual desire of the other. In the interviews, the projected Ideal-I seems to correspond to this masculine ideal. Some interviewees believe that by following the masculine script, one can become an object of desire among women. Self-improvement seems to correspond to the adaptation to the Ideal-I, an ideal rooted in cool masculinity. The "whatever" attitude commonly stated by the interviewees seems to be connected to masculinity and becomes the barrier necessary to withhold the façade of the masculine self. This whatever-attitude reinforces the nihilistic conduct on Tinder by exploiting and using the other as a tool to safeguard and reinforce the self – consequently acting towards self-fulfillment as a zero-sum

game. Tinder becomes a trustless institution where self-esteem is absorbed from the other. This online environment fills romantic relationships with a distrust and creates a narcissistic culture.

The competitive context on Tinder and the “market” metaphorical expressions as well as swipe economical rationale expressed by the interviewees seems to suggest that Tinder mimics our capitalistic society and our market economy. Navigating on the online dating market becomes a state of trial and error where the one who adapts and finds strategies to succeed on the app – following the rules of the open market, one becomes successful, earning one spot in the social hierarchy. Success is only measurable through the number of likes/matches or romantic interactions. The guidelines in this online context become a trial and error of roleplaying, giving the user a false sense of control and improvement. Trying, playing, and changing pictures, and re-writing the description on Tinder to be more successful constitutes the very reflection of the Lacanian mirror stage. The stage where one narcissistically adapts towards the other’s desire (Ideal) in order to reach the cohesive self. One could relate towards the Ideal-I as either trying to transcend this I or resigning to self-hatred, resentment, and depression or disregard the ideal in total – albeit, one already needs a strong self-esteem to do this. One interviewee Frey was the only interviewee who did not adapt towards strategies on Tinder. Frey was aware of the logic on Tinder but did not want to subscribe to it as those actions would be contradictory to his moral and beliefs. The definition of the self on Tinder is made via attributes rather than based on an inner feeling of value and moral – like in Frey’s case. These attributes and artifacts become commodities of consumption signifying social and economic status. The creation of the self, rests on the consumer, and the free competitive market sets the value of the self. Inner reflexivity, acceptance, and emotional awareness are switched for an anomic desire to fill inner emptiness by consuming.

In this subchapter, I have tried to develop our understanding of the Ideal-I as a cultural script applicable to frail and uncertain selves. When a young man questions his self-worth – when he is unsuccessful on Tinder - the masculine script can work as an ideal, a normative state of being that will generate status and acceptance. By this ideal, there is a belief that one will become whole and solid through consumption of artifacts, self-disciplined bodies and a “whatever” state of mind to be able to be a player. Solidity of the self is completed by strategic consumption of the other, the feminine, and being consumed as a self-commodified object.

6.3.3 *Being and Tinder*

As already stated, the strife towards the Ideal-I is a quite costly journey. Tinder becomes the medium through which one can interact with the other, but as I have hoped to show, the architecture of Tinder, the fast decisions, the binary swipe of yes or no, swipe economics, and the question of investing creates a context of enframement. In a way Tinder structures our experiences. Heidegger's notion of enframement is central to our understanding of Tinder. The behavior and decision process on Tinder revolves around utilizing the instrument of Tinder and this I believe is the main point. Tinder is an instrument; however, what we believe can be utilized in a rational choice-like manner seems to exclude the same thing we may desire. Controlling 'nature' via technology seems to reduce the very same nature to the rules set by the cultural-technological context. Form enframement springs nihilism and the technological reduction of the other as a means to the end. The instrumental use on Tinder becomes the instrumental use of the other as a tool to receive an ego boost and achieving a solid self. Technology subsequently succeeds the interaction and becomes a rationale of its own. One interviewee Mike tells me:

#10 Mike

...I didn't want to put a lot of time on Tinder, I am here if something appears, but it's not really as I just: "Oh she looks pretty cute but her picture was a little weird" I don't care about that, really it's more like getting everyone done, just swipe through all, get the quota done (...)

Mike tells us Tinder can be quite a time-consuming activity and the phrase "get the quota done" makes me think about Mike's Tinder use as a mechanic chore. Mike also said that "I am here if something appears," which I believe stages a 'metaphysical presence' the subject centered being in the technological context. The focus is firstly on mastering the technology, secondly interacting with the other. "To be out there" also implies that Tinder holds some oligopoly over the online dating market – especially during the pandemic. Philip explains his Tinder use during the pandemic:

#11 Philip

It's nice to swipe a little... but... they succeed at making it addictive... of course... it's perfect for bored singles, especially under these times, I mean under corona... you can't really meet people in other ways...

Maybe now more than ever, online dating apps like Tinder hold a larger oligopoly as people do not tend to meet in bars and clubs due to lockdown and social distancing. Many interviewees started to use Tinder at the beginning of the summer as the nightclubs and bars became partly closed. One reason why one would adapt to the rationale of Tinder would be that the app becomes the mainstream way to meet or engage in romantic encounters. One interviewee, Mohamed, says:

#12 Mohamed

Tinder makes it easier, the barrier disappears, usually, if you're flirting with someone in a bar, you don't know if a person is single or looking for someone but if you match on Tinder you know there is some interest, you don't need to go through the explicit rejection.

As we already have concluded, there is a feeling of safety while using Tinder. Tinder speeds up and accelerates the romantic encounters; it dissolves accidents – be these mistakes or accidental romantic encounters. However, the interaction in the bar, bearing with it some uncertainty, also brings with it a presence of actually being geographically at the same place and initiate in face-to-face interaction. The loss of face-to-face interaction seems to create a distance justifying the objectification of the other. In this chapter, I have argued that Tinder as a platform creates a metaphysical presence of hyper-subjectivity and enframement.

6.4 Emotions on Tinder

“Nor are they ignorant or inexperienced. Often, we could say the very opposite. They have ‘devoured’ everything, both ‘culture and people,’ and they have had such a surfeit that it has exhausted them.”

— Walter Benjamin, *Experience and Poverty*

In this chapter, I will explore emotions on Tinder; using our prior knowledge and understanding of Tinder as a gamified and enframed app. Erich Fromm’s theory of love suggest that young men need to learn the art of loving and giving without receiving. However, it seems to be hard to develop this art on Tinder – the art of loving seems to be replaced with the art of swiping. Calculation and predictability of the uncertain is at the heart of our theoretical term enframing; the technological logic – the management and the rationale of swipe economics - locks our being in a self-centered game of maximizing the calculable. The following sub-chapters will show how different ways of using the app can lead to emotional ambiguity, desensitization, and self-alienation. Walter Benjamin's quote points us in the right direction; it is not the lack of experience that makes us exhausted. It is the overwhelming and never-ending options and alternatives in combination with a will to control these options that make us numb and docile.

6.4.1 *De-sensitized*

“In my life, I had known suffering, oppression, anxiety; I had never known boredom. I could see no objection to the endless, imbecile repetition of sameness.”

— Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*

In the light of the previous chapters, we believe that the gamified and strategic action reduces the perceived value of the other to whether she can give validity and pleasure. The hunt for value on Tinder creates a scenario where the subject (the young man) creates distance from the other to maintain emotional solidity, not investing too much, while at the same time maximizing the value of the interaction. Tinder becomes the scene in which the performance of the self is played out. Troy explains:

#3 Troy

... a reasonable person would not meet many girls at the same time, but more like one at a time, but then you expose yourself to the possibility of getting rejected if

you don't have a safety net, so to speak, but at the same time you are slipping down to the Tinder darkness... by dating more people at the same time you are reducing their value like 1/5 depending on how many your meeting... so... yeah mainly I was the one who abused it... uhm, every girl I met I didn't think "whoa" what a wonderful person but... more like how can I have sex with you... it became a game I played... It was a game for me... uhm, which maybe is not the best attitude to have, I got that after a while... after the bottomless abyss that occurred after a one night stand and after you completed your goal, I felt, "why do I feel so fucking miserable now" (laughter)... and it was damn nice people as well, but you didn't realize that until later, it was many nice people but because of the attitude you thought whatever if they are nice or not... whatever... it was just a number game... it was just like "okay next one" (laughter)...

Tinder comes with the promises of safety, efficiency, and flexibility; however, the strategic usage of the app reduces the other to an object of consumption. Troy mentions that he did not feel that he could keep a steady focus on his dates; they were reduced to 1/5. Their value was reduced to sex. Nevertheless, sex for Troy made him feel miserable and emptier than before. Troy also express an inner conflict; the "whatever" attitude made him de-sensitized towards his actions; this attitude made him disregard the fact that many of the girls he met were "damn nice people". We can view Troy as having an anomic desire, a desire without limit, and because there is no limit, the desire can never be satisfied (Illouz, 2019:29). The desire to accumulate romantic encounters creates a de-sensitization and de-mystifies the encounter as it becomes predictable and mechanical. The element of chance is excluded from the interaction; from the first swipe, Troy more or less knows his goal. The date becomes nothing more than a step towards maximizing oneself as desirable – in a way, the interaction on the app sets the foundation for the face-to-face interaction. Mohamed tells us a similar story:

#12 Mohamed

The thing is, it becomes a date in the masses... its boring to go on a Tinder date or any other date for that matter... it's like a recruitment interview but instead of a job you maybe get sex... the once you meet more serious and maybe go on a few more dates, then you will see what happens, in some cases you just talk, meet and sometimes you get the... profit (laughter)... I don't really have a positive story... It's like a date, but you know the other is interested...

Mohamed gives an account of his mechanical and monotone dates on Tinder and compares these dates with job interviews. The only difference is that instead of a job, the interview results in sex. There is tiredness in Mohamed's voice, and he seems to be uninterested in the encounter, the profit he refers to is sex, the goal of the interaction. Mohamed tells us that he feels like most of the conversations are similar to one another, and I get a feeling that Mohamed is somewhat restless and bored. I interpret Mohamed's dating as instrumental, being disinterested in the interaction. Instead of giving and sharing, the interaction revolves around gaining profit from the other in sexual encounters. The sexual encounter is closely connected to self-worth and the feeling of being a part and accepted in a social and cultural context.

The two excerpts from Troy and Mohamed make us believe that the focus on success on Tinder as the accumulation of encounters might de-mystify and de-sensitize the users on Tinder. There is a focus on receiving and profiting on the app. It seems like the men who use Tinder accordingly are tiered and feel that every encounter is the same, becoming emotionally numb – and skewer their ability to love in a Frommian sense. The interaction becomes de-mystified and reduced; just like the blinders on a horse, the application seems to immerse the user into this profit calculating state of being. It is not the absents of encounters and pleasure that makes you numb; it's the overstimulation and the restlessness and desire without boundary that creates alienation. The existential anxiety is answered with a technological promise of control. However, it seems like this control reduces the will to share our existential experiences and find communion in the shared absurdity of being a human.

6.4.2 Emotional Dissonance and Self-Alienation

"It's quite an undertaking to start loving somebody. You have to have energy, generosity, blindness. There is even a moment right at the start where you have to jump across an abyss: if you think about it, you don't do it."

— Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

One occurrent theme in the interviews is what I will call emotional dissonance and self-alienation. The emotional dissonance is often expressed when one reflects upon the way one has acted online on Tinder and how these actions contradict emotions and moral sentiments. The anxiety that follows from this ambiguity and dualism is the anxiety of not being able to make a choice. The dissonance seems to be manifested as guilt and shame revealed as nervous

laughter, self-contradiction, or a joke carrying disgust towards oneself. The emotional dissonance seems to be constituted between emotions of “doing the thing that feels right” and the economic/rationalistic logic on Tinder as “doing what everyone else does” and “not being played but being a player”. One is playing the Tinder game (maximizing and micromanaging interactions), but on the other hand, one feels that this behavior is wrong, nihilistic, and superficial. We can compare this dissonance with the consumption of porn. The efficiency, excitement, and stimuli seem to bypass the moral sentiments and leave the porn consumer feeling guiltily and empty after the consumption. There are many differences between porn and Tinder usage. However, I find the comparison valuable concerning the concept of emotional dissonance. Walter tells us how swiping can both be a motivating hopeful activity while at the same time being an activity he despises:

#9 Walter

Swiping means expectations... that's something I have been thinking about... I can feel meaninglessness when I'm swiping... I can feel disgusted towards myself and other females in the pictures... but, but I can motivate swiping through the expectation of a future relationship...

In Walter's case, he longs for a relationship; the expectation of meeting someone keeps him using the app while at the same time it feels like a meaningless and shallow activity. In Walter's case, the expectation seems to be the bypassing factor when swiping, the expectations of finding a romantic interaction. However, this expectation collides with the feeling that swiping is a shallow way to choose a potential romantic partner. The expectation and the pictures immerse the user in fantasies of intimacy and participating in a meaningful interaction – however, the Tinder context accelerates social encounters. The expectation and fantasies become the driving force; simultaneously, Tinder is a picture-oriented mirrored reality where the subject gets to play and try to get matches via a binary swiping system. This context alone seems to change the premises for the date, the behavior, and the strategies on the app. The interviews' imagination and desire revolve around filling the empty self with affirmation – or finding someone perfect, mirroring everything one is not. As we have shown, the desire to transcend the Ideal-I becomes the never-ending consumption of the other, as a libidinal investment of the self – the void of emptiness becomes impossible to fill. Hence one interaction is not enough interactions becomes statistics climbing up a never-ending ordinal scale of numbers. The emotional dissonance appears when strategic actions of maximizing the Tinder value are set

against one's desire to be emotionally present one's desire to be open and show vulnerability. Successful or unsuccessful, the Tinder experience of young men seems to revolve around affirmation, an acceptance which premises are made in the online competitive context of Tinder. The anxiety and alienation appear to be situated in the split self that, on the one hand, wants to be authentic and, on the other hand, wants to be accepted and affirmed. Another example of emotional dissonance is Bruce:

#6 Bruce

It's not fun to swipe, I don't know you feel a little... maybe pathetic (laughter) I don't know... uhm, it's like, I told myself not to get Tinder, and then during the summer I got it, so it was a little... I don't know, it's hard to find the words, but yeah... (...) It feels wrong towards myself... like, uhm, it's so common for people to date online, almost everyone does... it's not wrong itself, but it feels wrong to me against myself...

Bruce uses the word pathetic and also that he thinks he does wrong against himself. In Bruce's case, the notion of emotional dissonance is, just like Walter, the conflict of the emotional self and the role Bruce plays as a salesman selling the product "Bruce" (see excerpt by Bruce page 41). Feeling pathetic and lonely when swiping are prevalent responses in the interviews. These feelings all reflect the awareness of entering an inauthentic being and self. I interpret Bruce's phrase: "it feels wrong to me against myself", as an example of self-alienation.

Another interviewee Eliot uses Tinder to find a girlfriend. Eliot experiences the loss of self-esteem when using Tinder: "sometimes when I have high self-esteem, I can log in to the app, but that is a good way to kill your self-esteem immediately...". Eliot wonders if he should start to use the app more strategically or just stop using the app. When interviewing Eliot, he tried to be as honest on the app as possible, and sometimes he got emotionally invested in conversations. When he got ignored, he felt hurt – ugly and that there was something wrong with him. Eliot tells us:

#14 Eliot

I got this sort of INCEL thought... when you start thinking that these persons owe you something, which they don't, of course... I don't really know the right thing to say... the thing I mean and feel is that they just like everyone else responsible for some kind of... uhm, to behave nicely towards other people even if they are

strangers, even if they use Tinder for different reasons maybe you should... (sigh) it's a duty to take some social responsibility on the other side... (...) Other people should probably understand that some people can become emotionally invested, even if they maybe shouldn't... Maybe you're not supposed to get emotionally invested in a stranger... but still people should... have thought about the possibility... and maybe felt a duty to treat others nice...

What Eliot articulates is the emotional damage he experiences when opening up emotionally and getting ignored. Eliot realizes that it might be un-strategic to open up and become emotionally attached to people he does not know; he also realizes that the context does not promote his use of the app. Eliot experiences the emotional dissonance just as our other interviewees. Still, in this case, Eliot stays true to his authentic self and does not try to protect himself behind a façade. However, this inflicts him with emotional damage. He often reverts to feelings of low self-worth, saying he is ugly and socially incompetent – Eliot creates self-hatred and hatred against the females ignoring him online. Eliot refers to the INCEL movement, which stands for involuntary celibate. The movement was created on internet forums where young men discussed the difficulty of meeting heterosexual females. The movement has been prominent for its hatred against women and several terror attacks. Although Eliot by no means is an INCEL extremist, he has developed a slight resentment towards women, and this resentment seems to be situated solely on his experience on Tinder.

The quote from Jean-Paul Sartre's book *Nausea* showcases the difficulty of falling in love. Sartre uses the word blindness, a word that I believe captures the conflicting spirit of enframment quite well. Sartre writes: "if you think about it, you don't do it" Sartre's point seems to be that if you think about love in terms of something rational, you would probably not fall in love. An app that creates tools for control, a 360-degree scope of potential partners, whereas a hook up can be a few messages away and the user has complete control of managing the app, which seems to exit out blindness. The question becomes how one can achieve blindness in this context. It seems complicated and irrational: "why would I put all my eggs in the same basket, if I could spread them out evenly and improve my odds". The leap of faith seems to be connected to a naivety – a naivety of trust and humanity. The emotional distance becomes lingering on the edge of a cliff. Emotional dissonance is the fundamental split of feeling and control of fear and hope. I hope to show in this chapter the un-emotional regime of Tinder and how this regime de-sensitizes the Tinder interaction, making the meeting with the other emotionally numb. The excerpts express the emptiness and mechanical way of interacting on

Tinder and the feeling of the anomic desire that tries to fill the emptiness by consuming without boundaries – this activity de-sensitizes the user. The emotional consequences of trying to satisfy the anomic desire become a feeling of being emptier than before. As we saw in the excerpt from Eliot, the attempt to be open on Tinder resulted in Eliot's case with resentment and a will to adapt and strategies towards Tinder. And as we concluded from Troy's and Mohamed's excerpts, that strategic actions lead to a situation not necessarily too different from the one Eliot, for the moment, is experiencing.

6.4.3 Narcissism and Depression

“It is in our relations with other people that we gain a sense of ourselves; it's that, pretty much, that makes relations with other people unbearable.”

— Michel Houellebecq, Platform

The other-directedness on Tinder constitutes an example of cultural narcissism. The notion of narcissism deepens our understanding of the inter-relational aspect of social life online and offline. By focusing on narcissism as a theoretical and socio-emotional notion, we can understand individualism in terms of frailty and uncertainty. We can also understand identity as a cultural phenomenon where the subject seeks collectivity. We live in a mirrored reality, whereas our phones are the reflected surface and the perceptual forum for culture and interaction. Johan Beck-Friis claims that narcissism is a regulatory tool to manage the self, to keep the self whole and complete. And further that depression is constituted when the I creates a bodily and mental I that is cohesive but lack emotional affirmation (Beck-Friis, 2005:97).

Beck-Friis calls narcissism the mother of depression (Beck-Friis, 2005:96). There are, of course, individual factors that affect the circumstances of these young men's behavior and emotions on Tinder, but what I have tried to focus on is the shared experiences and feelings on Tinder. The notion of numbness and the painful feeling of emptiness, expressed by many informants, referred to by Beck-Friis as *anesthesia dolorosa*: emotional numbness. This numbness springs from the conscious awareness of not being able to love, this awareness causes the subject emotional pain, depression, self-hatred, and the feeling of being unable to change (Beck-Friis, 2005:101). Hence if the narcissist becomes aware of his/her own's weakness and inability, the world crumbles. Status and social success are often misinterpreted as mental health in our culture; popularity, being affirmed becomes the vice, making individuals strive for the Ideal-I to fill the emptiness and gaining acceptance. However, as we have discussed, the emptiness seems to grow stronger when striving for the Ideal-I, something that might lead to

depression. The feeling of impotence and inability to love seems to be closely connected to the technological and social acceleration immanent in the usage of Tinder. Although one can use the app in many ways and can avoid a strategic usage, the shared experience from my interviewees pointed towards the enframed logic, nihilism and the enhanced narcissistic self-identification through consumption of the other as a libidinal investment of the self.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to provide an answer to the following research question: *How does Tinder affect young men's attitudes toward romantic relationships and love?* I have divided this overarching question into three sub-questions involving (1) effects on self-esteem, (2) the development of strategies and (3) the different feelings experienced when using Tinder. In my analysis, I have made concepts, theories and questions intertwine in order for them to build upon each other, hereby creating an interconnected whole. The answers to the sub-questions presented in the following should therefore be regarded in relation to one another and not as independent categories.

How can we understand the effects on self-esteem through the use of Tinder?

Central to the understanding of the effects on self-esteem is the experienced uncertainty on Tinder and the adaptation to the Ideal-I. The Ideal-I can be understood as a version of the self, living life to the fullest, a self that is capable of attracting the female other. For Tinder users, Tinder becomes the arena in which the Ideal-I is constructed through the biography and pictures on the Tinder profiles and in the interactions between Tinder users. The Ideal-I is constructed in relation to the imagined desires of the other on Tinder. In the interviews, the ideas of bodily perfection, coolness and confidence were regarded as the most prominent features of the Ideal-I – attributes that could also be considered classical traits of male-coded attractiveness.

The notion of narcissism is closely connected to the Ideal-I. The self or ego is fundamentally narcissistic according to Jacques Lacan (see 4.7), and for the interviewees, the Ideal-I is the idea of a cohesive self, attained through becoming an object of the female others desire – however Lacan argues that the state of the Ideal-I is impossible to attain. Tinder as a competitive app creates experiences of uncertainties when individuals after gaining contact with another user at any time could be ignored and replaced by someone “better”. This fast process of selecting and replacing gives rise to what Eva Illouz refers to as ontological uncertainty. This special form of uncertainty creates instability within the self because the self and the qualities attached to it is now being regarded as relative to the competing qualities, and selves. The use of Tinder stimulates a culture of narcissism where self-esteem is attained through attention of the other, and the Ideal-I is the shape in which one can accumulate the other's desire. In the interviews the young men relate towards the Ideal-I in different ways, one way is to strive towards the Ideal-I when using the app, the user can try to adapt towards the Ideal-I that is the bodily norms and attitudes imagined as what will attraction of the female other. In the interviews the failure to attract the other and the unsuccess to live up towards the high standards

on Tinder lead the Tinder users to feel resentment towards females for being shallow, or fall into self-hatred, resenting the self for not being able to reach the Ideal-I.

How do young men strategize on Tinder?

The ontological uncertainty on Tinder manifested in the often-occurring act of ghosting - ignoring other users – seems to turn young men into strategic and utility-maximizing actors on Tinder. Accepting the logic of swipe economics, young men treat romantic interactions as online investments, regulating the stakes of the interaction never to surpass the point of being at risk of receiving emotional damage. If one invests with “high stakes” – and thus becomes emotionally attached - the rejection may damage the self and may, in the long run, lead to feelings of resentment towards the self or anger towards the female gender. The rejection subsequently leads to the feeling that “there is something wrong with me” or ascribing the female other with negative ontological status. In most cases, the stability of the self was dependent on the amount of calculable success achieved on the app, the countable affirmation from the other. Hence, success on Tinder becomes a numbers game, where success on the app is calculated through the number of matches or romantic encounters enabled as a result of using the app. The existential dread and anxiety associated with uncertainty are reduced by the gamification and the steady flow of simultaneous connections with many different users. This, however, risks a reduction of the ability to make leaps of faith in romantic relationships or to partake in what Fromm calls the art of loving – the art of giving without expecting something back. Tinder seems instead to promote the “winning image” and “fun morality” – leading towards a focus on personal attributes rather than a person’s actions. Tinder becomes a way to live faster, consume and experience more at an all accelerating speed – echoing the phrase: “time is money”. Tinder comes with the promise that one can live two lives within a single lifespan by efficiently controlling interactions. The gamified Tinder revolves around rational choice strategies to maximize matches and dates by mastering the Tinder technology. The interviewees view Tinder as a game, and the user/player creates distance towards the other where the mastering of the game become an end in itself. In this game, young men objectify themselves as objects of consumption; they simultaneously play the controlling roles as consumers as well as the product.

How do young men feel when using and interacting on Tinder?

When playing and strategizing in the Tinder game, one adapts towards strategies that numb the emotional interaction and reduce the other to a means for self-affirmation, leading to un-

emotional, narcissistic, and mechanical interaction. The game and the act of winning the game becomes a fundamentally self-alienating activity that creates emotional dissonance between, on the one hand, partaking in the Tinder game, and on the other hand interacting with others with authentic emotional presence. There are also cases where playing the game on Tinder becomes a docile activity to pass the time. This activity can be said to contain addictive elements where the user spends much time swiping to stay connected and remain visible as an object on the Tinder market – while at the same time viewing this activity as meaningless. Playing the Tinder game enframes the user into the technology; the reductionistic logic on Tinder creates situations where young men who succeed on Tinder become de-sensitized towards their feelings and the feelings of others. On the other hand, failure to attract the other becomes a spiral of self-hatred, apathy, and in the worst case, depression. A failure on the app could also lead towards resentment of the other and INCEL-like thoughts of feeling that one is inclined to attention and sex and that females are the problem or simply trolling and ghosting the other in vengeance. These emotions and acts are carried past the online context out to the “real” world. In addition to these negative feelings, young men are not developing their art and capacity to love. They are immersed with the art of swiping and consuming while at the same time trying to transcend an Ideal-I, empty of moral purposes, only as a means to gain attention from the other. This is leading to a narcissistic and consumeristic view of love.

8. Discussion

New communication technologies, such as Tinder, have become increasingly important parts of our social life, especially during the covid-19 pandemic, a time of social distancing. There are undoubtedly positive aspects of online dating and new technological mediums. This thesis has focused on and resulted in a critical analysis of Tinder, but that is not to say that one cannot find love on Tinder or that the app does not create new opportunities in this regard. New technologies do create new opportunities, but they also bring forth new challenges. Hartmut Rosa's theoretical idea of 'social acceleration' – the ever-increasing speed and efficiency in social life - is a theoretical notion that has been our entry point when examining Tinder. The rapid changes in social life seem to create new anxieties and launch individuals into an uncertain state of being. These anxieties interplay with Salecl's idea of the glorification of rational choice in our modern culture. The pressure of making the right choice and not miss out on any pleasure becomes the goal for the individual rational actor. One should control life to maximize pleasure and minimize pain through self-help or new "smart" technologies and algorithms. Technologies as Tinder appear with the promise of efficiency and control; however, the structure and uncertainty on Tinder seem to derail individuals from intimacy into an economic logic of gaming and investing. Tinder is successively making its users immersed in the Tinder game where players (in my case, young men) follow the rules and logic of the game - rules that lead to narcissism, nihilism, and commodification. The users are, in a way, becoming captives in the technology. It is also worth noticing that Tinder profits from users being immersed in the Tinder game. Strategic conduct on the app is time-consuming and makes the user spend much time on the app, generating ad revenue.

Concerning the previous research, I notice that while Hobbs, Owen & Gerber (2017) argue that romantic ideals are still present in online dating, these ideals are, at least in my interviews, seldom acted upon. While most interviewees agreed that they would like to have a girlfriend, their decision process on Tinder often ended in strategic acting where exclusiveness and the focus on only one person became a high risk. A risk most of my interviews did not dare to take even when the opportunity was given. I want to add the possibility that while a romantic ideal can be held, the actions on the dating app can be quite contradictory towards this ideal.

I would encourage scholars and fellow students to continue the research on Tinder and primarily focus on the thematic of narcissism and internalized algorithmic thinking. Does the shaping of identity 'change' with new technologies? My thesis has extensively studied the group of young cis men; however, I believe much could be gained if we investigated the same phenomena in the female population and the LGBTQIA+ population. I also believe much could

be gained by examining the phenomena of online dating through other methodological models, like survey studies, to generate a generalizable result. I believe sociological research in the group of young men can help us understand the emotional regimes of young men and further our understanding of male frustration, the anti-feminist and INCEL-movements, groups fueled by resentment towards women.

In this thesis, through my interviews, I have created an analytical framework that could be used to understand the young male experience of Tinder. I fear that our battle with the hydra of uncertainty only will increase our loneliness the more we try to control and battle it. Maybe the best advice is to let go of the certain and leap in blindness into the unknown, but in order for this to happen, we need a social setting that promotes the art of giving rather than viewing love as yet another bad investment.

9. Appendix

Interview Guide

Before the interview I had a small chat where I asked questions of age and occupation:

Interview starts, informant gives recorded verbal consent:

- What made you start using Tinder?
- How has Tinder worked during the covid-19 pandemic?
- Why do you use Tinder?
- How often do you use Tinder?
- Can you describe your profile, pictures and bio?
- What did you think when you created your bio, did you get any help?
- If you were to give me help me with my Tinder profile what would you do?
- How do you swipe on Tinder?
- How does it feel when you swipe?
- Could you tell me about the process from swiping to chatting and to a date?
- How does it feel when you get a match?
- How do you chat with people who you have matched with?
- Can you tell me about a good Tinder experience?
- Can you tell me about a bad Tinder experience?
- Do you get annoyed of other Tinder users? If so why?
- Would you like to add something?

In addition to these questions I asked free follow-up questions, that vary from interview to interview.

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