"It's Just a Lot More Casual": Young Heterosexual Women's Experiences of Using Tinder in New Zealand

By Dr. Panteá Farvid and Kayla Aisher

Abstract: Tinder is a mobile dating app that has recently taken off among young heterosexuals. While attracting great media attention, little scholarly work exists on the topic. In this paper we begin to address this gap by reporting on a small research project that examined five young heterosexual women's experiences of using Tinder in New Zealand. We argue that Tinder was situated within (and reproduced) a contradictory domain imbued elements of both pleasure and danger.

Since its launch in 2013, Tinder has become one of the most widely used mobile dating applications (apps) globally (Lapowsky, 2014). Fifty million people are estimated to use Tinder across 196 countries and the app is particularly popular among young people (Yi, 2015). Due to its huge popularity, Tinder has attracted great media attention (Newall, 2015), focusing on not only Tinder's features, but also debates about its place in society (Dating NZ, n.d.). Tinder is touted as quick and easy to use, providing a fun and entertaining form of communication, as well as an obligation-free platform to meet new people (Newall, 2015). Numerous success stories have also been reported, where people have found the 'love of their life' via Tinder (Scribner, 2014).

Alongside these positive depictions, the app is also depicted as promoting superficiality (by only focusing on physical appearance), being a 'hook up app' that fosters promiscuity (Dating NZ, n.d.), and increasing the spread of sexually transmitted infections (Cohen, 2015). Its use is seen as particularly dangerous for heterosexual women, resulting in reports of being raped (Hume, 2015; Hodges, 2015), being drugged and gang-raped (Leask, 2014), and even death (Vine & Prendeville, 2014). Tinder is often portrayed as a risky app that heterosexual women should treat with caution or avoid completely (De Peak, 2014), rather than focusing on the actions of the men who perpetrated such acts or fostering a broader discussion about the high rates of violence against women. It is quite common for media accounts to position new technologies that enhance women's sexual or spatial mobilities as the cause of sexual risk or violence. But such risks and acts of violence reside in the offline world and are facilitated by gendered power relations that abound in a patriarchal social and cultural context (Gavey, 2005).

Although there has been immense media interest in Tinder, virtually no published research on people's experiences of using the app exists. In this paper, we begin to address this gap by examining the experiences of a small group of young heterosexual women in NZ who use Tinder. We first situate the discourses underpinning contemporary understandings of female heterosexuality, which shape women's dating and intimate experiences with men in contradictory ways. We then explicate what Tinder is and how it works, followed by discussing research on technologically mediated intimacies (Farvid, 2015a) before presenting the project details and our analysis.

Situating Contemporary Western Female Heterosexuality

In her highly influential work, Wendy Holloway (1989) identified three discourses governing contemporary heterosexuality (which produce different subject positions and types of power

for men and women): the *male sexual drive discourse*, the *have/hold discourse*, and the *permissive discourse*. The *male sexual drive* discourse posits that men are driven by a biological necessity to procure and engage in heterosex, and once aroused, must experience sexual release via coitus and orgasm. Within this discourse, women are positioned as passive and responsive to male sexuality, and as distinctly lacking a physical desire for sex.

The *have/hold discourse* draws on traditional and religious ideals to promote a conventional marriage-type heterosexual union. This discourse positions men as sex-driven and women as offering up their sexuality to men in exchange for children and the security of a home life (Hollway, 1989).

Finally, the *permissive discourse* posits that both men and women have a desire for sex and a right to express their sexuality, in any way they please, as long as it is among (consenting) adults and no one gets hurt (Braun, Gavey & McPhillips, 2003). Although this discourse is supposedly gender-blind, it is intersected by other discourses which affect men and women differently. For example, an enduring sexual double standard within society means that women are judged much more harshly for engaging in casual sex or displaying an unfettered or desirous sexuality (Farvid, Braun & Rowney, 2016). Women are also often held responsible for any negative impacts that may come as a result of sexual activity (Beres & Farvid, 2010). Although such discourses have undergone some shifts since Hollway's analysis (as discussed below), they continue to underpin how we understand contemporary male and female heterosexual sexuality.

Over the past two decades, Western ideals of heterosexual femininity and women's sexuality have been shifting. With desirous female sexuality, autonomy and power are celebrated publicly (Evans, Riley & Shankar, 2010). Women are increasingly occupying a more active, agentic, and desirous sexual subjectivity (Farvid, 2014). Still, amidst such positive reworkings, heterosexuality remains a perilous terrain for young women (Beres & Farvid, 2010). In what continues to be a society governed by patriarchal power relations, struggles against sexual assault and gender-based violence remain life-threatening risks for women (Gavey, 2005; Vance, 1984). At the same time as women are encouraged to explore their sexuality and be sexually active, explorative and experienced (Farvid, 2014; Farvid & Braun, 2006) they are warned against, and live in a context where, there are real material risks associated with doing so (Farvid & Braun 2013, 2014). The sociocultural context in which women find themselves continues to involve elements of both pleasure and danger (Farvid & Braun 2013; Vance, 1984). Such contradictions provide the backdrop within which women traverse technologically mediated domains such as Tinder, online dating and mobile dating.

What is Tinder?

Tinder is marketed as a social networking app that is typically used as a dating app or for making new friends in new places (Newall, 2015). The app is designed to be quick and easy to use, with a simple platform that is sleek and visually attractive. Using location-aware technology, Tinder links to an individual's Facebook in order to create profiles consisting of a name, age, and photos, with an option of providing a short biographical blurb (Newall, 2015). The requirement to hold a Facebook account, and sign in to Tinder using this account, offers a sense of assurance to users that people on Tinder are being authentic regarding their identity (Duguay, 2016). Facebook is a social networking site that is well known for largely hosting profiles that intersect with users' genuine offline social worlds

(van Manen, 2010). Such claims to 'authenticity' are something that most dating apps or online dating systems lack, setting Tinder apart as a more secure or trustworthy dating app due to the vetting process offered by Facebook. What is on offer with Tinder is an ostensibly authenticated Facebook profile that is used to set up a supposedly anonymous Tinder profile. The intersection of such anonymity with authenticity is what makes Tinder particularly interesting as a dating app platform.

The information required for setting up a Tinder profile is a vastly simplified version of what is typically required in online dating websites (where much greater detail is needed regarding one's identity, lifestyle, hobbies, relational desires, and long-term goals). Unlike online dating, Tinder provides users the function of choosing the geographical range within which they would like to meet people (between 1-161 kilometres), as well as providing parameters regarding age and gender. Once the app is set up, it feeds the user with a photo stream of potential matches, which they can swipe left for "no" and right for "yes". The process is relatively anonymous as potential partners are unaware if a user has rejected them by swiping left. While using the app, if two users like each other, in a game-like fashion, the app 'unlocks' the ability for them to exchange messages (Duguay, 2016). Intimate partner selection is thus fused with gamified mechanics that are designed to keep the user engaged (David & Cambre, 2016). If online chatting goes well, then users typically meet offline in order to assess the prospects of their match and their future friendship, sexual or relational possibilities (Pond & Farvid, 2016).

Technologically Mediated Intimacies: Online Dating

Technologically mediated intimacies refer to contemporary intimate contact, which is made or facilitated by some form of computer-based technology (Farvid, 2015a). One such domain, online dating via the internet, has steadily increased in popularity since it was first introduced in the 1990's (Srithran, Helipern, Wibur & Gawronoski, 2009). Online dating has become not only increasingly socially acceptable, but the fastest growing means for couples to meet (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). It is estimated that one in 10 adults have used online dating in their lifetime (Smith & Dugan, 2013). Reasons given for using online dating are similar to those often given before its inception (e.g., matchmaking or blind dates). These include: reducing loneliness, seeking companionship, emotional support, a soulmate, sex, as well as looking for fun, to ease boredom, to get over a break up, or because it seems like a good way to meet new people (Couch & Laimputtong, 2008; Korenthal, 2013; Lawson & Leck, 2006).

Heterosexual dating has historically involved profoundly gendered manifestations of goals, desires and strategies (see Bailey, 2004). For example, 'treating' (as practiced between the 1920s and 1940s in the U.S.), involved women exchanging their company or sexual activities 'for entertainment expenses' such as late night dinners and dance hall admissions (Clement, 2006, p. 1). These encounters were casual in nature (Peiss, 1989), and reflected the gendered negotiations women and men engaged in over the economic and social value of entertainment, female company, and sex (Clement, 2006). The system of treating introduced a new mode of heterosexual interaction that continues to underpin contemporary systems of dating (Bailey, 2004).

Much like the gendered landscape of heterosexual dating, online dating also appears to be a gendered domain (Lawson & Leck, 2006; Schubert, 2014). Heterosexual women report using online dating in order to seek friendships and serious long-term relationships (Farvid, 2015c;

Korenthal, 2013; Netimperative, 2005; Schubert, 2014), while heterosexual men are more likely to note they are also looking for a 'no strings fling', or seeking dates with a sexual component (Gunter, 2008; Netimperative, 2005). While women wait to be approached by men in online dating sites (Farvid, 2015c), men tend to instigate such contact (Dawn & Farvid, 2012).

Unlike conventional dating, online dating provides women greater access to a larger pool of potential male partners (Korenthal, 2013). The process of choosing a date involves a system of *filtering* (where women cull the least desirable candidates based on physical appearance, occupation and location) and a *screening* system (where background checks or further online contact determine whether a man is worthwhile or safe to meet face-to-face) (Lever, Grov, Royce & Gillespie, 2008; Padgett, 2007). The face-to-face meeting is the ultimate test which then determines if a relationship forged online will continue, in whatever capacity, off-line (Padgett, 2007).

Women report online dating allows them to be more considerate as well as assertive regarding partner selection (Schubert, 2014; Korenthal, 2013). The anonymity online dating provides has also been identified as a positive factor. For instance, if an off-line date (made online) does not work out, men are typically not part of women's daily social or work networks, and this deters unplanned or awkward future meetings (Lawson & Leck, 2006; Schubert, 2014).

Alongside such positive features, a number of risks or difficulties have been identified regarding women's online dating. These include being financially scammed, deception regarding men's characteristics or relational status, being harassed by rejected men, emotional costs, as well as being on the lookout for dangerous or predatory men (AnKee & Yazdanifard, 2015; Couch, Liamputtong & Pitts, 2012; Lawson & Leck, 2006; Padgett, 2007). As Farvid (2015c) notes: "Women's online dating experiences depict a struggle between both the dangers and pains, or pleasures and excitement (Vance, 1984) … of meeting someone to have a long-term relationship with" (p. 8).

Technologically Mediated Intimacies: Dating Apps

Online dating has recently been supplemented by many mobile dating apps (e.g., LOVOO, SKOUT, Blendr, Tinder, Zoosk) which are proving to be highly popular among heterosexual women (Yantis, 2011). The existent literature on dating apps has largely focused on Grindr, which was released in 2009, and is marketed at men who have sex with men. This research has either been quantitative and primarily focused on sexually transmitted infections (e.g., Rendina et al., 2013; Su et al., 2015) or qualitative and interested in the social, relational or subjective aspects of Grindr use (e.g., Blackwell, Birnholtz & Abbott, 2014; Brubaker, Ananny, & Crawford, 2014).

Qualitative work has noted that Grindr redefines the boundaries between physical location and online space – producing a layering of space and place that is unique to location-aware dating apps (Blackwell et al., 2014). Such 'layering' refers to how users can be chatting online, while also potentially being at the same bar, club, or other public location as the person they are chatting to. Users report enjoying being able to use the app while travelling to meet people from the same sexual community. While some men use it exclusively for obtaining sex, others use it to chat with other men and explore their sexual identity

(Blackwell et al., 2014). Although some men value Grindr as a useful platform for meeting new people, for making friends, and procuring relationships or casual sex, others noted that the app objectified men and was distracting as well as time-consuming (Brubaker et al., 2014). Some men also reported frustrations regarding difficulties discerning whether users were genuine or merely using the app for curiosity and entertainment (Blackwell et al., 2014). Although there is limited research on men's use of Grindr, research on heterosexuals' uses of dating apps is scarce. A few studies have started examining the app's design and architecture (David & Cambre, 2016; Duguay, 2016), but there is a dearth of research exploring people's subjective experiences of using the app (Pond & Farvid, 2016). To begin addressing this gap, we present data from a small project on young heterosexual women's experiences of Tinder use in New Zealand. We explore how young women's Tinder use evoked and disrupted dominant constructions of heterosexual femininity. We also interrogate whether Tinder created more opportunities for the women to explore their sexuality, if it intensified the spectre of risk, as touted by the media, or whether there where elements of both possibilities. Overall, we seek to critically make sense of women's Tinder use, in the contemporary sociocultural context.

Method

Recruitment and Participants

Participants who took part in this study were five heterosexual women aged 20-25 (M=22.8), recruited through advertisements and word of mouth looking for women who used Tinder and resided in the Auckland area. The participants were: one Indian woman, one South African woman, and three Pākehā women (non-Māori New Zealanders of European decent). Three of the participants worked in the health sector, one worked with youth, and one participant was an undergraduate student. The length of time women had spent on Tinder varied from three months to two years. Ethical approval for the project was sought and gained form the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed by the second author using a semi-structured style. The interviewer was of a similar age to the participants (23 years of age) and Pākehā. The interview questions were open-ended and asked about the practical process of using Tinder and women's firsthand experiences of chatting to and meeting men on Tinder. Interviews ranged from 30 to 53 minutes, were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim (producing 111 pages of data). Transcripts were anonymized before analysis, with all identifying information removed or altered (all names are pseudonyms).

Data Analysis

This project is situated within a critical realist epistemological approach which acknowledges that an independent reality may exist beyond our understanding of it (Houston, 2001), but posits that social and institutional structures impact what we conceive as reality (McEvoy & Richards, 2006). Critical realism allows for an in-depth and critical examination of social phenomena, while allowing the researcher to make claims about the real life effects of research outcomes (Easton, 2010). Located within this framework, an inductive thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012) from a critical

feminist perspective (Farvid & Braun, 2013, 2014). TA allows researchers to make sense of a large set of textual data, establishing patterns and links across that dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive TA means that the data itself was used to derive the structure of the analysis (rather than fitting the data into pre-determined categories). Although the data was largely analysed at a semantic (or surface) level, looking at the explicit language and meanings conveyed by the women, it went beyond that to examine the cultural ideologies or discourses that informed the talk. TA is a recursive process that involved: familiarization with the data through repeated reading; identifying initial codes of interest within the dataset; searching for themes and organising the codes into themes; reviewing the themes; defining and naming the themes; and finally, producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytic process was carried out by the second author, in full consultation with the first author.

Results and Discussion

Tinder was described by the women as new and novel, as well as a contradictory and contested site of varied uses. Four themes were identified that reflect this tension: *Tinder as a new landscape, Tinder as a multipurpose tool, Tinder as a risky domain* and *new technology, old norms?* We discuss these below.

Tinder as a New Landscape

Tinder was portrayed as a relatively ambiguous interface that was vastly different to other forms of online communication:

> *Bella:It's a really interesting app, it's very different, like it's nothing, it's not like a chat room or anything -- like any weird sort of online dating site (KA: uh huh)…it's very like (pause) good for our generation, 'cause it's the sort of, it's on the sort of um software … that we use daily like on phone apps, so yeah I liked that about it. That was something that interested me in Tinder (Age: 20)*

Bella contrasts "weird" online dating to "interesting" Tinder. Primarily due to its mobile software technology, Tinder was seen as an app suited to Bella's generation. Tinder was also contrasted with online dating in terms of purpose and usability:

> *Sarah: I've never used internet dating before, so I don't really know the ins-and-outs of it, so I feel like it's more for serious relationships and like this is my star sign (laughing) and this is my future goals. (Age: 25)*

> *KA: What do you see as the benefits of Tinder?*
> *Brooke: Um I think it's sort of like, I don't know I guess it's kind of quick and easy (laughter) like it's not like internet dating where obviously you have to be like sitting down at a compute.r (Age: 23)*

Here, Tinder is portrayed as quick, easy and simple to use, in contrast to online dating which is more thorough and labour intensive. The mobility offered by Tinder was also depicted as beneficial – as users do not need to be "sitting down at a computer" as is stereotypical of conventional computer use. Unlike PC-based online dating, Tinder can be used 'on the go' and is not seen as geared towards only finding serious relationships. Thus, it is considered by users to be more casual and less complicated. The women also spoke of online dating as

carrying more social stigma than Tinder. Online dating was portrayed as for "desperate and "older" people, whereas Tinder was talked about as "new", "cool", "modern" and for younger people (Sarah).

Tinder was talked about as not only socially acceptable, but its use was encouraged within the women's peer groups:

> Cassie: I was always like to my friends like guys how are you meeting people it's so unfair and they're like just get Tinder! (Age: 21)
> Sarah: Like my friend and her boyfriend were like yeah you have to do this and they like sat down and made my profile for me. (Age: 25)

Observing others' success with online dating has been reported to encourage women to try it (Korenthal, 2013), something we identified in relation to Tinder. Furthermore, rather than being a hidden activity carried out in solitude (like online dating), Tinder use was something that the participants talked about, and used, with friends. The social nature of Tinder positioned it subtly as less 'creepy' than other online activities that people may engage in, alone and at home. Tinder users are thus positioned differently than traditional PC users – as more social rather than some kind of 'computer geek' or lonely web surfer.

Tinder was also seen as an extension of other popular social media platforms:

> Bella: It's accepted, it's a completely accepted thing, it's just as accepted as like Facebook or Snapchat. (Age: 20)

In comparing Tinder to Facebook and Snapchat, Bella bolsters its acceptability, aligning it with popular social media apps, rather than conventional online dating or other match-making technology. Tinder thus occupied a unique hybrid status, as both social networking tool and dating app. Such dual functioning produced a precarious user landscape, where the social norms of Tinder were not clearly established and women reportedly engaged in guesswork to decode men's profiles in order to decipher their intentions:

> Cassie: It's kind of like what are you in it for? Like do you just want like a casual root? Or do you want like to hang out? Or do you want, you know, to have like a relationship? So I guess there's kind of, like I find it's a bit different [from a conventional date] 'cause on a Tinder date you try and suss them out like, but if you're on a date you just, I don't know, you just kind of be yourself and um get to know them normally. (Age: 21)

Cassie contrasts Tinder dates with conventional dates, where the norms or social scripts are well-established. The purpose of Tinder and the intentions of its users were not always clear, and the app could be used to instigate various relational ties (e.g., friendship, casual sex, committed/romantic relationships). Tinder itself, advertises the interface as a platform that promotes forming friendships, relationships and "everything in between" (Tinder.com), but the app does not provide categories regarding what users are seeking which creates uncertainty.

Due to such ambiguity, the app was also seen as a lot more casual and obligation-free than conventional dating:

KA: What are the benefits of Tinder?

Sarah:Umm mainly that you don't, there's no obligation to like talk to them after like if I end something I don't have to worry about seeing them or running into them or having to maintain some sort of friendship if I don't want to…or if I <u>do</u> want to then I can there's no like pressure, there's just yeah, it's just a lot more casual. (Age: 25)

Tinder allowed women greater anonymity, involved less obligations and a 'cleaner break' if they were not interested in someone. This was both digitally (women could un-match a match), or following face-to-face meetings. Men on Tinder were not usually connected to the woman's daily lives or social networks, which the women reported appreciating (Korenthal, 2013). Meeting via conventional means involved responsibilities or pressures from which Tinder, to some degree, was free.

Tinder as a Multipurpose Tool

The women largely spoke of Tinder favourably, reporting it was a useful tool in a variety of ways. Tinder was often talked about as helping women move on from past relationships:

> Annie: *I <u>personally</u> was just looking to see what all the fuss was about and this is going to sound really bad but I had just broken up with a boy who um was a bit nasty* (KA: *uh huh*) *and it was kind of like not revenge, because he didn't know I was doing it, but like for like satisfaction within myself (laughing)…like oh yeah other guys do find me attractive you know? 'Cause you're kind of mourning the like loss of a relationship and it's that you know there are other men who find me attractive and…just kind of [a] reassurance and that you still got it.* (Age: 25)

Research has previously documented the use of technology for meeting people, after the dissolution of a relationship (Couch & Laimputtong, 2008; Lawson & Leck, 2006). In our interviews, male attention on Tinder (after a break up) was a valued short-term distraction that resulted in feelings of desirability for women. This positive affect ties into the broader sociocultural context where women's heterosexual desirability (to men) is bolstered as one of the most important aspects of their feminine identity (Gill, 2009).

Linked to this desirability, others noted that Tinder provided them with a quick ego boost:

> Cassie: *It was kind of, it was a bit of a confidence boost when you first get like, your first match. (Age: 21)*
> Bella: *It's good for someone who has just been broken up with or has broken up with someone and is looking for like confidence boost. (Age: 20)*

The women also reported using the app to seek a variety of relational and sexual unions:

> *KA: Ok, um what kind of relationships have you sought?*
> *Sarah: (laughter) They've been sexual most of them (laughing) yeah. (Age: 25)*

> *KA: What kind of relationships have you sought on Tinder? Sexual, or relationships or just casual, friends-*

Annie: (overlapping) All of the above, all of them yeah, I've come across all of them. (Age: 25)

Bella: I wasn't looking, I was looking for a sort of um, not a relationship relationship, like I wasn't looking for anything serious (KA: uh huh) but I was looking for something that was more than just like a hook up or something like that. I wanted to have like, obviously you can build a friendship with someone (KA: uh huh) that's a little bit more than a friendship but not quite a relationship so you've got the, like you care for each other and you can sleep together. (Age: 20)

The above extracts demonstrate the diversity of responses regarding the types of relationships women procured on Tinder. The women did not typically use Tinder to find longer-term romantic relationships (even if some Tinder matches eventually became boyfriends). Women's lack of focus on committed relationships contrasts with the online dating literature (e.g., Gunter, 2008; Schubert, 2014). Tinder was a multipurpose tool that facilitated various relational or sexual possibilities, many of which were navigated on a case-by-case basis. Tinder offered women a platform to experiment with casual sex and other in-between-relationship scenarios (like the one Bella articulates above). The quick and easy interface offered by Tinder, coupled with anonymity and access to otherwise unknown men, provided women the opportunity to explore multiple sexual and relational ties. In this way, traditional discourses of passive and responsive femininity were disrupted as the women openly described multiple desires and the purposeful pursuit of those (Byers, 1996; Farvid, 2014).

Tinder as a Risky Domain

Alongside its usefulness, and akin to previous online dating research (AnKee & Yazdanifard, 2015; Couch et al., 2012; Lawson & Leck, 2006), the women talked about Tinder as a risky domain. The notion of risk was invoked in two ways. Firstly, all women relayed (always) being on the lookout for any potential signs of danger and taking measures to make sure they did not put themselves in harm's way. Secondly, risk was apparent in stories where things had gone wrong or the women felt they could be in danger.

An awareness of danger was a ubiquitous part of using Tinder for the women:

Bella: *I personally have never [been deceived] and none of my friends have ever been fooled or anything on Tinder, we have all just been really careful so we're all just, meet someone at a public place and like we'll meet them, meet up with them more than once in a public place before we actually you know go home with them or go to a more like private place. (Age: 20)*

Brooke: *I don't use it for just sex (laughing) (KA:right) I think for a girl that could be quite risky because there's so many unknowns. I guess like you don't know the person, you don't know if you invite them to your house then suddenly they know where you live or if you go to their house you're kind of like putting yourself in the middle of a complete you know strange'rs house where you literally have no idea what could happen. (Age: 23)*

These extracts outline the potential dangers and spectre of risk the women considered. In a social context that places the burden of keeping safe on female victims, the women discussed various screening processes they employed in order to reduce the chances of encountering risk. For example, women reported accessing men's other social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat) to do 'detective work'. This involved analysing men's photos, friends list and posts, to determine if a man was safe to meet in person. This is a new kind of background checking (Padgett, 2007) that the women engaged in, in order to feel safer meeting men in person.

The reported risk of using Tinder 'on the ground' involved: deception, disappointment and men behaving badly. Deception was a common risk spoken about by the women and included being deceived about someone's appearance:

> *Annie:* <u>But</u> *he looked* <u>nothing</u> *like his pictures… in his pictures he like had hats on and sunglasses on in all of them and he looked like quite like attractive, and then, but I actually after the date went back and like looked through his profile again and I was like, kind of like oh you cheeky bugger (outbreath) 'cause he had done it quite strategically (Age: 25)*

In an online forum, users are able to provide a *curated* image of themselves that does not always reflect physical reality (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). At times, men did not live up to the women's expectations:

> *Cassie: I met up with this guy and he seemed really nice and he was really attractive … Well, I thought he was and um we were texting heaps and we like, he seemed really funny over text and then I met him and he was just not what I expected. He was shorter than what I thought he was and he was uglier and he just like wasn't as funny and I was just like not into it at all! (Age: 20)*

The incongruence between conjured images did not always match the reality women encountered when meeting men in person. An individual's linguistic tone, expressions, mannerisms and body language are not always conveyed well over online textual communication (Couch et al., 2012) and the women noted that at times the reality was much more disappointing than the fantasy created via online contact.

Another risk was encountering abusive or aggressive men, particularly in response to the women's rejection. For example, below, Brooke described an experience where a man from another city came to visit her (in her home). Once they met in person, she indicated to him that she was no longer interested, to which he reacted badly:

> *Brooke: I could tell that he was angry, um, I mean, I guess, he didn't show any like physical aggression to me or anything like that, it was just more verbal like kind -- it was just sort of like passive aggressive like trying not to be close to me and giving me the silent treatment for ages and then when he finally did say something he was quite like I don't know abrupt about it and just like well I think you're kind of a bitch for doing this. (Age: 23)*

Similarly, Sarah describes a scenario where a man she had been chatting to on Tinder reacted negatively to her disinterest in meeting him in person:

> *Sarah: Yeah took it really badly, so I guess it's like, he was just like 'what the fuck'? And I gave him the old boyfriend excuse and he was like 'it's never going to work out with you two' and sent like these really agro like, (laughter) three <u>long</u> messages and like, it was like I had never met the guy and it was just, like it was really weird. (Age: 25)*

Sarah also noted that at times men would not take "no for an answer" and were "hard to shake off". Below, Bella describes another man who was outright sexist and threatening:

> *Bella: There was this one guy on Tinder who I think my friend had also matched with on Tinder and he was just like such a pig, like just the things he would say like, um, I think to my friend he actually referred to raping her or something. (Age: 20)*

These accounts are quite telling regarding the dating terrain that heterosexual women negotiate – a domain where men may act entitled to have access to the women they desire and lash out in a variety of ways if women reject such advances (Gavey, 2005). Some women relayed stories where, in hindsight, they felt they may have put themselves at risk:

> Sarah: *Yeah, the people I have met up with, I try to meet in public places and like during the day or like somewhere where there's, where you can get away if you need to kind of thing* (KA: *yup*), *like in like a bar so I can like drive away ... but the first person I met I was, it was at their place cause we couldn't decide on where to go so we just meet up at his place and then yeah which was a bit silly in hindsight, but it yeah worked out ok (laughing). (Age: 25)*

> Cassie: *We were like chatting: he was like, oh come over, I'll make you dinner and I was like <u>woah,</u> like I am not going to your house on the first date! You are crazy. I was like [let's] get a drink first, um, so we met for a drink and then we left and he's like I have weed in my car do you want to get high and I was like oh, ok (laughter), so we went to his car and like he rolled this joint in his car and we walked along my road* (KA: *yup*) *and we just walked up and down the road like smoking this joint and then he came back to mine. (Age: 20)*

These extracts demonstrate the tenuous way women talked about how they negotiated meeting strangers off Tinder. In a sociocultural context where victim-blaming and sexual double-standards abound (Farvid et al., 2016), the responsibility of keeping safe from men's violence is usually placed on individual women rather than challenging the gendered and patriarchal power relations that produce sexuality as such a fraught site for women. This framing was something the women 'took on', and reproduced, throughout their narratives; rather than something they challenged or reflected critically on.

These accounts highlight the complex and contradictory ways actions and personhood played out in relation to Tinder use. The realm of desire, pleasure, identity and human interaction is complex, creating fraught and (at times) what seemed like questionable choices by the women (that luckily did not end badly). What is striking in such accounts is the way in which women (anxiously) traversed the thorny domain of young female heterosexuality, which continues to be fraught as a site of both pleasure *and* danger for them (Farvid & Braun, 2014; Vance, 1984),

New Technology, Old Norms

Even though Tinder was talked about as a new technological landscape where the women could explore diverse sexual and relational desires, traditional gendered norms at times permeated the accounts. One striking moment of this was that once a match was made, the women remained passive and men were expected to initiate the conversation:

> Sarah: *If you match someone I just don't talk to people unless they talk to me first. (Age: 25)*
> Cassie: *I'm just kind of swiping through and I get a match and, I don't do much about it I just like kind of wait (Age: 21)*

So although women could actively "like" the men they desired, once they were liked back, they waited for the men to make the first move. Annie explicates why this may be the case:

> Annie: *I think there's just like an expectation for it to be that you know like the guys are meant to do the hard work ... you know it's kind of like the new age thing of Tinder but there's still the old school train of thought like the guy should make the first move (KA: yeah) so it's kind of tradition with new technology put together ... I would kind of be like if they want to talk to me they will talk to me kind of thing and it would be like if I was really desperate and bored that I would start conversation, like if I was really scraping the barrel (laughter). (Age: 25)*

Similar to previous research on casual sex (Farvid & Braun, 2014) and online dating (Farvid, 2015c), women created desirable profiles, chose who they liked, but stopped short of *initiating* contact with men. The traditional gender norm of men as initiator and women as passive and responsive to his sexual advances was evident within these accounts (Byers, 1996; Gagnon, 1990). There was a fine line between being pleasingly assertive, versus aggressive (that is, unfeminine), or desperate; a tightrope of appropriate femininity (Farvid & Braun, 2006) that the women worked hard to master.

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented the complex and contradictory ways five young heterosexual women traversed technologically mediated intimacies via Tinder. Based on our analysis, we argue that women's Tinder use needs to be understood as situated within a broader context where dating and sexual relationships are exciting, fun, pleasurable, as well as fraught, risky and even dangerous (Farvid & Braun, 2013; Vance, 1984). Although Tinder offered a new and novel technological domain where women could have access to a wider pool of men and explore their sexuality, the app also re/produced some traditional discourses of gendered heterosexuality. We argue that Tinder may offer more opportunities, but does not necessarily create more risks, albeit ostensibly amplifying risks that already exist in the dating world for young women. The dangers talked about by the women are not invented by Tinder, new technology, or the internet; even if negotiations online may facilitate or enable such outcomes. In addition, one important way that discussions around such risks need to be reframed is to focus on the perpetrators rather than the victims of abuse, threats or assaults, as well as the patriarchal sociocultural context which allows such manifestations of gendered power.

Tinder occupied a distinctive place in heterosexual women's sociability. It was a unique social networking/online dating hybrid that was navigated with great tact. Further research is needed to examine the process, applications and implications of Tinder use across different geographical sites and intersectional axes (age, gender, sexual orientation), in order to make better sense of such new modes of technologically mediated intimacies.

Farvid, P. & Aisher, K. (2016). "It's Just a Lot More Casual": Young Heterosexual Women's Experiences of Using Tinder in New Zealand. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, 10.*

References

AnKee, A., & Yazdanifard, R. (2015). The review of the ugly truth and negative aspects of online dating. *Global Journal Management and Business Research, 15*(4), 1-7.

Bailey, B. (2004). From front porch to back seat: A history of the date. *Magazine of History, 18*(4), 23-26.

Beres, M., & Farvid, P. (2010). Sexual ethics and young women's accounts of heterosexual casual sex. *Sexualities, 13*(3), 378-393. doi:10.1177/1363460709363136

Blackwell, J., Birholtz, J., & Abbott, C. (2014). Seeing and being seen: Co-situation and impression formation using Grindr, a location-aware gay dating app. *New Media and Society,* 1-20. doi: 10.1177/1461444814521595

Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3.* 77-101.

Braun, V., Gavey, N., & McPhillips, K. (2003). The "fair deal"? Unpacking accounts of reciprocity in heterosex. *Sexualities, 6*(2), 237-261.

Brubaker, J. R., Ananny, M., & Crawford, K. (2014). Departing glances: A sociotechnical account of 'leaving' Grindr. *New Media & Society.* doi:10.1177/1461444814542311

Byers, E. S. (1996). How well does the traditional sexual script explain sexual coercion? Review of a program of research. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality, 8,* 7–25.

Clement, E. A. (2006). *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945.* Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Cohen, E. (2015). *Tinder, social media blamed for spike in STDs.* Retrieved January 20, 2016 from http://money.cnn.com/video/news/2015/09/29/tinder-social-media-std-rise.cnnmoney/index.html

Couch, D., Liamputtong, P., & Pitts, M. (2012). What are the real and perceived risks of online dating? Perspectives from online daters. *Health, Risk & Society, 14*(7-8), 697-714. doi: 10.1080/13698575.2012.720964

Dating NZ. (n.d.). *Tinder app review.* Retrieved July 6, 2015, from http://www.datingnz.net.nz/site-reviews/tinder-app/

David, G., & Cambre, C. (2016). Screened Intimacies: Tinder and the Swipe Logic. *Social Media + Society, 2*(2). doi:10.1177/2056305116641976.

Dawn, D., & Farvid, P. (2012). "Trawling for a girlfriend" Heterosexual men's experiences on online dating in Aotearoa New Zealand. *In the 10th Dangerous Consumptions Colloquium.* Auckland, New Zealand.

De Peak, S, (2014). Warning after Tinder date rape. Retrieved January 20, 2016 from http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/australia/62303684/warning-after-tinder-date-rape
Duguay, S. (2016). Dressing up Tinderella: Interrogating authenticity claims on the mobile dating app Tinder. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-17. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2016.1168471

Easton, G. (2010). Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial Marketing Management, 39*, 118-128. doi:10.1016/indmarman.2008.06.004

Evans, A., Riley, S., & Shankar, A. (2010). Technologies of sexiness: Theorizing women's engagement in the sexualization of culture. *Feminism & Psychology, 20*(1), 114-131. doi:10.1177/0959353509351854

Farvid, P. (2015a). Cyber Intimacies. In N. Naples (Ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*. Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Farvid, P. (2015b). Heterosexuality. In C. Richards & M. J. Barker (Eds.), *The Palgrave Book of the Psychology of Sexuality and Gender* (pp.92-108). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Farvid. P. (2015c). Mediated intimacies and the re/fashioning of contemporary heterogender. *Gender and Diversity Research Group Seminar: Sexualities*. AUT University. Auckland, New Zealand

Farvid, P. (2014). "Oh it was good sex!": Heterosexual women's (counter)narratives of desire and pleasure in casual sex, In S. McKenzie-Mohr and M. Lefrance (Eds.) *Women Voicing Resistance: Discursive and Narrative Explorations* (pp. 121-140). Hove: Routledge

Farvid, P., & Braun, V. (2006). 'Most of us guys are raring to go anytime, anyplace, anywhere': Male and female sexuality in Cleo and Cosmo. *Sex Roles, 55*(5-6), 295-310.

Farvid, P., & Braun, V. (2014). The "Sassy Woman" and the "Performing Man": Heterosexual casual sex advice and the (re)constitution of gendered subjectivities. *Feminist Media Studies, 14*(1), 118-134. doi:10.1080/14680777.2012.724027

Farvid, P. & Braun, V. (2013). Casual sex as not a natural act and other regimes of truth about heterosexuality, *Feminism & Psychology, 23*(3), 359-378. doi: 10.1177/0959353513480018

Farvid, P., Braun, V., & Rowney, C. (2016). 'No girl wants to be called a slut!': Women, heterosexual casual sex and the sexual double standard, *The Journal of Gender Studies*. Published online: 21 Mar 2016. doi: 10.1080/09589236.2016.1150818.

Gagnon, J. H. (1990). The explicit and implicit use of the scripting perspective in sex research. *Annual Review of Sex Research, 1*, 1–43.

Gavey, N. (2005). *Just sex?: The cultural scaffolding of rape*. London: Routledge.

Gill, R. (2009). Supersexualise me! Advertising and 'the midriffs'. In F. Attwood (Ed.), *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Culture* (pp. 93-109). London: I. B. Taurus.

Gunter, B. (2008). Internet dating: A British Survey. *Aslib Journal of Information Management, 60*(2), 88-98. doi: 10.1108/00012530810862437

Hodges, Q. (2015). *Former LSU student indicted in alleged 'Tinder rape' of Baton Rouge woman.* Retrieved January 20, 2016, from http://www.nola.com/crime/baton-rouge/index.ssf/2015/01/former_lsu_student_indicted_in.html

Holloway, W. (1989). *Subjectivity and method in psychology: Gender, meaning and science.* London: Sage.

Houston, S. (2001). Beyond social constructionism: Critical realism and social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 31*(6), 845-861. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/31.6.845

Hume, M. (2015). *Police probe two Tinder date attacks in Christchurch.* Retrieved October 20, 2015, from http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/72625132/police-probe-two-tinder-date-attacks-in-christchurch

Jackson, S. (1999). *Heterosexuality in Question.* London: Sage.

Korenthal, L. (2013). *A phenomenological exploration to understanding women's experiences with online dating* (Doctor of Psychology Dissertation). Alder School of Professional Psychology, Chicago.

Lapowsky, I. (2014). *Tinder may not be worth $5 billion but it may be more valuable than you think.* Retrieved July 5, 2015, from http://www.wired.com/2014/04/tinder-valuation/

Lawson, H., & Leck, K. (2006). Dynamics of Internet dating. *Social Science Computer Review, 24*(2), 189-208. doi: 0.1177/0894439305283402

Leask, A. (2014). *Kiwi woman gang-raped in Sydney after she met man on dating app Tinder.* Retrieved August 23, 2015, from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11339326.

Lever, J., Grov, C., Royce, T., & Gillespie, J. (2008). Searching for love in all the "write" places: Exploring internet personals use by sexual orientation, gender and age. *International Journal of Sexual Health, 20*(4), 233-246. doi: 10.1080/19317610802411532

McEvoy, P., Richards, D., (2006). A critical realist rationale for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 11*(1), 66–7.

Netimperative (2005). *Internet now third most popular way to get a date.* Retrieved June 5, 2015, from http://datingtipsandnews.blogspot.co.nz/2005/08/internet-now-third-most-popular-way-to.html

Farvid, P. & Aisher, K. (2016). "It's Just a Lot More Casual": Young Heterosexual Women's Experiences of Using Tinder in New Zealand. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, 10*.

Newall, S. (2015). *Tinder the dating app everyone's talking about*. Retrieved September 30, 2015, from http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/blogs/543941/tinder-the-online-dating-app-that-everyone-s-talking-about.html

Padgett, P. (2007). Personal safety and sexual safety for women using online personal ads. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy, 4* (2), 27-37.

Peiss, K. (1989). *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Pond, T. & Farvid, P. (2016). "I do like women!": Young bisexual women's experiences of using Tinder in Auckland, NZ. *Women's Studies Association Conference*. Auckland, NZ.

Quiroz, P. (2013). From finding the perfect love online to satellite dating and 'loving the one your near': A look at Grindr, Skout, Plenty of Fish, Meet Moi, Zoosk and Assisted Serendipity. *Human and Society, 37*(2), 181-185.

Rendina, J., Jimenez, R., Grov, C., Ventuneac, A., & Parson, J. (2013). Patterns of lifetime and recent HIV testing among men who have sex with men in New York City who use Grindr. *Aids and Behavior, 18*(1), 41-49.

Richardson, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Theorising Heterosexuality.* Bukingham: Open University Press.

Rose, N. (1996). *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenfeld, M., & Thomas, R. (2012). Searching for a mate: The rise of the Internet as a social intermediary. *American Sociological Review, 77*(4), 523-547.

Schubert, K. (2014). *Internet dating and doing gender: An analysis of women's experiences dating online* (Doctor of Philosiphy Dissertation). University of Florida, America.

Scribner, H. (2014). *5 Tinder stories that will make you believe in love all over again*. Retrieved July 6, 2015, from http://national.deseretnews.com/article/1999/5-tinder-success-stories-that-will-make-you-believe-in-love-all-over-again.html

Smith, A., & Duggan, M. (2013). *Online dating and relationships.* Retrieved August 20, 2015, from http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/10/21/online-dating-relationships/

Sritharan, R., Helipern, K., Wilbur, C.J., & Gawronski, G. (2009). I think I like you: Spontaneous and deliberate evaluations of potential romantic partners in an online dating context. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*(6), 1062-1077. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.703

Su, J., Holt, J., Payne, R., Gates, K., Ewing, A., & Ryder, N. (2015). Effectiveness of using Grindr to increase syphilis testing among men who have sex with men in Darwin, Australia. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 39*(3), 293-294. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12342

van Manen, M. (2010). The Pedagogy of Momus Technologies: Facebook, Privacy, and Online Intimacy. *Qualitative Health Research, 20*(8), 1023-1032. doi:10.1177/1049732310364990

Vance, C. S. (1984). Pleasure and danger: Toward a politics of sexuality. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 1-27). Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Vine, P., & Prendeville, P. (2014). *Australia balcony death highlights Tinder risks*. Retrieved July 6, 2015, from http://www.3news.co.nz/tvshows/3rd-degree/australia-balcony-death-highlights-tinder-risks-2014101520#axzz3PV6GP3NR

Yantis, J. (2011). *With improving technology and decreasing stigma, online dating appears nowhere near saturation.* Retrieved August 20, 2015, from http://archive.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/business/articles/20110213online-dating-technology-decreasing-stigma.html#ixzz3UnhnW4cJ

Yi, D. (2015). *Tinder's hookups skyrocketed 300% at Coachella's first weekend.* Retrieved July 5, 2015, from http://mashable.com/2015/04/15/coachella-tinder-usage-sky-rockets/