



**THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**  
**INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL (JULY SESSION)**  
**29 JUNE – 2 AUGUST 2021**

**COMM3131 SPECIAL TOPIC IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES I:  
ONLINE DATING AND HOOK-UP CULTURE**

**Time:** Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 16:30 – 19:30 (GMT +8)

**Location:** Online (Zoom)

**Instructor:** Prof. CHAN Lik Sam

School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

**Email:** [samchan@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:samchan@cuhk.edu.hk)

**Teaching Assistant:** TBA

**Email:** TBA

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Grindr, Tinder, Momo—familiar with these smartphone apps? It is estimated, in 2021, that there are 9.7 million online dating users in the United Kingdom; across the Atlantic Ocean, the number is 49 million in the United States; China alone has 81.8 million users.<sup>1</sup> This course provides an interdisciplinary perspective to look into one of the latest and most controversial online cultures—online dating and hookups. Departing from the public health approach that focuses exclusively on sexually transmitted diseases via the use of dating apps, this course examines the communicative, social, and cultural aspects of online dating and hookup cultures. Topics include online relationship development, motivations of app use, app design, gender politics, and queer world-making. Regional cases will be discussed.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course, students should be able to

1. Articulate and explain various theories and concepts related to communication, gender, and sexuality;
2. Understand essential elements in relationship development, particularly in the digital context;
3. Identify the opportunities and challenges dating and hookup apps bring to different groups of users; and
4. Take up a responsible mindset when engaging in online dating and hookup;
5. Use theories and concepts to analyze online dating and hookup cultures.

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

The following materials are required for this course.

- Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Open access)
- Additional required course readings are available on the course's Blackboard.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/outlook/372/156/online-dating/united-kingdom>;  
<https://www.statista.com/outlook/372/109/online-dating/united-states>;  
<https://www.statista.com/outlook/372/117/online-dating/china>

## COURSE FORMAT

The summer semester is characterized by its intensity. The course consists of both lectures and workshops. In lectures, I share materials with you. You can always jump in when you are in doubt or in disagreement. My lectures also rely on your questions (see below). In workshops, you will work in small groups. You start off having group discussions and then share your group's analysis with the class. This is not my course. This is our course.

## COURSE ASSESSMENTS

### Pre-class Questions (3 points × 3 = 9 points)

Pick any three lectures (except the first one), post a question regarding the required reading (marked with \*) at least four hours before our meeting. The questions should generate discussion and response(s) from your classmates. Mundane questions such as those ask about definitions are seldom inspiring. I may refer to your questions in my lectures.

### Workshop Participation or Reflexive Essays (7 points × 3 = 21 points)

Due to time differences, two forms of assessments are provided. You declare your option on or before July 6 (our third meeting)

- A) For those who can join real-time: There are three workshops. You are expected to participate in these workshops actively. Your grade for participation will not only reflect how often you contribute to the discussion but also the degree to which your contributions are constructive and generative of further response(s) from your classmates. Respect your classmates. Defamatory comments against others will negatively impact your class participation grade.
- B) For those who cannot join real-time: You will write a 400-word reflexive essay for each of the workshops (three essays in total). Submit your essay to Blackboard before 11:59pm of the Friday of the week (GMT+8).

### Term Paper (70 points)

The term paper allows you to investigate any phenomenon in online dating and hookup cultures. You decide on a topic. In two of our meetings, you have an opportunity to share your ideas with your classmates and fine-tune your direction. You are not expected to conduct first-hand, primary research for this term paper. This paper must be 2,000–2,400 words (excluding references), typed (Times News Roman, 12 points, double-spaced), and properly-referenced. The deadline is 11:59 pm on August 3 (GMT+8). Submit the paper to Blackboard. Every single day of late submission will result in a deduction of 10 points (out of 70). I do not accept papers after August 5. Optional presentation will be in our last meeting. You get comments from me to enhance the quality of your paper.

## COURSE DESCRIPTOR

- A: Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
- A-: Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
- B+/B/B-: Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, or high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
- C+/C/C-: Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
- D+/D: Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes
- F: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, or failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Numerically, each grade corresponds to the following points:

A	93–100	B-	80–82.9	D+	67–69.9
A-	90–92.9	C+	77–79.9	D	63–66.9
B+	87–89.9	C	73–76.9	D-	60–62.9
B	83–86.9	C-	70–72.9	F	below 60%

## COURSE POLICIES

### Academic Honesty

I have zero tolerance for any academic dishonesty. If you violate this code, you will receive an F for the entire course. Details can be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, you are required to submit a signed declaration to indicate that you are aware of these policies. The declaration, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the VeriGuide system after your upload the soft copy of your assignment to it. A user manual of VeriGuide can be found at:

[https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/documents/VeriGuide\\_Academic\\_Student\\_User\\_Manual\\_CUHK.pdf](https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/documents/VeriGuide_Academic_Student_User_Manual_CUHK.pdf)

I will not grade your final paper without the properly signed declaration. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted to VeriGuide.

### Communication via Emails

My primary means of getting in touch with you outside of class is through emails. So, check your email regularly. Because I receive a lot of emails every day, please help me identify your email by using [COMM3131] as the subject line. Feel free to send me a follow-up email if you do not hear from me after 48 hours (excluding weekends as I refrain from working over weekends).

### Feedback for Evaluation

You are welcome to give comments and feedback at any time during the class. You can also send me emails.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### Meeting 1, June 29 (Tuesday) | Introduction: How special is online dating?

This lecture introduces the course and its assessments. We look at two traditions of dating app research. We examine how the online world is different from, and similar to, the offline world and why this matters regarding dating and hookups.

Readings:

- \* Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp. 1–10 of "Introduction"
- Heino, R. D., Ellison, N. B., & Gibbs, J. L. (2010). Relationshopping: Investigating the market metaphor in online dating. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(4), 427–447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510361614>
- Ø Walther, J. B. (2011). Theories of computer-mediated communication and interpersonal relations. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed., pp. 443–479). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

(\* denotes the required reading; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> are recommended readings; Ø is a theory piece for ambitious students)

## Meeting 2, June 30 (Wednesday) | “Still up?” Communicating about yourself and your desire

All relationships are a communicative achievement. We look at major theories about self-disclosure and self-presentation in online dating.

### Readings:

- \* Ellison, N. B., Hancock, J. T., & Toma, C. L. (2011). Profile as promise: A framework for conceptualizing veracity in online dating self-presentations. *New Media and Society*, 14(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811410395>
- (quantitative reasoning required) Chan, L. S. (2016). How sociocultural context matters in self-presentation: A comparison of U.S. and Chinese profiles on Jack'd, a mobile dating app for men who have sex with men. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 6040–6059. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/5829>
- Ø Walther, J. B. (2009). Social information processing theory: Impressions and relationship development online. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 391–404). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

## July 1 (Thursday) | Public holiday in Hong Kong – no meeting

## Meeting 3, July 6 (Tuesday) | “What are you looking for, really?” Managing uncertainty online

Successful relationship development depends on a mutually agreed intent. We look at ways in which online daters make sure others are on the same page. But, as we know, our desire can change at any second. Does this mean we can never ascertain what someone really wants?

### Readings:

- \* (quantitative reasoning required) Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Lai, C.-H. (2011). First comes love, then comes Google: An investigation of uncertainty reduction strategies and self-disclosure in online dating. *Communication Research*, 38(1), 70–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210377091>
- (quantitative reasoning required) Corriero, E. F., & Tong, S. T. (2016). Managing uncertainty in mobile dating applications: Goals, concerns of use, and information seeking in Grindr. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 4(1), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157915614872>
- Ø Afifi, W. A., & Matsunaga, M. (2009). Uncertainty management theories: Three approaches to a multifarious process. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 117–132). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

## Meeting 4, July 7 (Wednesday) | Swiping versus screening: Design of dating apps

In this lecture, we take a psychological perspective and a constructivist perspective to look at the relationship between design and users. We examine swiping, see-and-screen, and algorithmic-based matching designs.

We will watch “Hang the DJ” in *Black Mirror* (S4Ep4) together.

### Readings:

- \* (quantitative reasoning required) Tong, S. T., Hancock, J. T., & Slatcher, R. B. (2016). Online dating system design and relational decision making: Choice, algorithms, and control. *Personal Relationships*, 23(4), 645–662. <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12158>

- Pruchniewska, U. (2020). "I Like That It's My Choice a Couple Different Times": Gender, affordances, and user experience on Bumble dating. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 2422–2439. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12657>
- Ø Winner, L. (1980). Do artifacts have politics? *Daedalus*, 109(1), 121-136. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024652>

### Meeting 5, July 8 (Thursday) | Workshop 1: Best app of the world?

In small groups, come up with a design of an ideal app—what is "ideal" is defined by you. In your design process, integrate literature of online communication and politics of design. Share your design with the rest of the class.

### Meeting 6, July 13 (Tuesday) | "There's an app for everything": Uses, motivations, and consequences

We are smart. We use dating apps for non-dating purposes. We also use non-dating apps for dating purposes. A dominant social scientific theory that dating and hookup app scholars have been using is uses and gratifications. This lecture discusses the usefulness and the limitations of this theory. We also look into several cases for technology adoption and abandonment.

#### Readings:

- \* Gudelunas, D. (2012). There's an app for that: The uses and gratifications of online social networks for gay men. *Sexuality & Culture*, 16(4), 347–365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-012-9127-4>
- (quantitative reasoning required) Chan, L. S. (2020). Multiple uses and anti-purposefulness on Momo, a Chinese dating/social app. *Information, Communication and Society*, 23(10), 1515–1530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1586977>
- Ø Rubin, A. M. (2002). The uses-and-gratifications perspective of media effects. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 525–548). New Jersey: LEA.

### Meeting 7, July 14 (Wednesday) | Nature of intimacy

Transiting to a more critical appreciation of dating and hookup app cultures, in this lecture we look at how sociologists theorize intimacy in the age of network society.

#### Readings:

- \* (quantitative reasoning required) Chan, L. S. (2018). Ambivalence in networked intimacy: Observations from gay men using mobile dating apps. *New Media and Society*, 20(7), 2566–2581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817727156>
- (quantitative reasoning required) Hobbs, M., Owen, S., & Gerber, L. (2017). Liquid love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(2), 271–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/144078331666271>
- Ø Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love & eroticism in modern societies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. "Love, Commitment and the Pure Relationship"

**Meeting 8, July 15 (Thursday) | Workshop 2: *Bridgeton* versus dating apps**

In small groups, identifies the characteristics of the courtship practice as manifested in *Bridgeton* (or of your grandparents' generation) and compare these characteristics with a relationship happening on a dating app. Discuss if dating apps are fundamentally changing the fabrics of intimacy. Share your analysis with the rest of the class.

**Meeting 9, July 20 (Tuesday) | Are dating apps a feminist tool?**

Gender theorists and feminists often vision that new technologies have the potential to disrupt gender hierarchy. This lecture discusses both the opportunities and challenges for female app users.

Readings:

- \* Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. "Are Dating Apps a Feminist Tool? A technofeminist analysis"
- Cabañes, J. V. A., & Collantes, C. F. (2020). Dating apps as digital flyovers: Mobile media and global intimacies in a postcolonial city. In J. V. A. Cabañes & C. S. Uy-Tioco (Eds.), *Mobile media and social intimacies in Asia: Reconfiguring local ties and enacting global relationships* (pp. 97–114). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer.
- Ø Wajcman, J. (2007). From women and technology to gendered technoscience. *Information, Communication and Society*, 10(3), 287–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180701409770>

**Meeting 10, July 21 (Wednesday) | Unwanted dick pic: Manifestation of toxic masculinity**

It is not an exaggeration to say that dating app culture is a dick-pic culture. Albeit the feminist potential of dating and hookup apps, they have become a site for displaying toxic masculinity. This lecture looks into various manifestations of masculinities.

Readings:

- \* Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. "Cute is the new manly: Performance of Chinese masculinities"
- Paasonen, S., Light, B., & Jarrett, K. (2019). The dick pic: Harassment, curation, and desire. *Social Media+ Society*, 5(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119826126>
- Ø Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

We will spend some time discussing ideas of your term paper. Ask yourself or your classmates: What issue interest you? What do you believe about the issue? What do you want to argue? What do you want to say?

**Meeting 11, July 22 (Thursday) | Workshop 3: Online etiquette**

Your younger siblings start exploring the wonderful world of online dating and hookup cultures. What will you advise them? In small groups, decide on the three most important online dating and hookup etiquettes. Why are these three the most important? Share your analysis with the rest of the class.

### Meeting 12, July 27 (Tuesday) | “No fats, femmes, or Asians”: Dark sides of dating app culture

Discriminatory speeches and behaviors are commonplace in online spaces. Focusing on the gay communities, this lecture discusses their internal discriminations and what apps such as Grindr can do about these negative phenomena.

We will watch “Looking for?”, a Taiwanese documentary, together.

#### Readings:

- \* Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. “Cycles of uninstalling and reinstalling: Contradictory affects in gay app use”
- Conner, C. T. (2019). The gay gayze: Expressions of inequality on Grindr. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 60(3), 397–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2018.1533394>
- Ø Bedi, S. (2015). Sexual racism: Intimacy as a matter of justice. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(4), 998– 1011. <https://doi.org/10.1086/682749>

### Meeting 13, July 28 (Wednesday) | Do we still need Grindr? Community building of gay and lesbian apps

Interactions on dating and hookup apps are not confined to dyadic relationships. This lecture considers the role of dating and hookup apps in the reinforcement and demise of urban queer communities.

#### Readings:

- \* Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. “Building a circle for queer women: Affordance of communal connectivity”
- Baudinette, T. (2019). Gay dating applications and the production/reinforcement of queer space in Tokyo. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 33(1), 93–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2018.1539467>
- Ø Berlant, L., & Warner, M. (1998). Sex in public. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2), 547–566. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448884>

We will spend some time discussing ideas of your term paper. Ask yourself or your classmates: What is your evidence? Where will you find your evidence? What is the logic behind your argument and evidence?

### Meeting 14, July 29 (Thursday) | Wrap-up and optional term paper presentation

You can volunteer to do a 5-minute presentation of your term paper. My immediate comments will help you strengthen your paper.