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 – 19:15 (GMT +8)
Location: Online (Zoom)

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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.[1] 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 online dating;
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;
4. Take up a responsible mindset when engaging in online dating;
5. Use theories and concepts to analyze online dating and hookup cultures.

COURSE MATERIALS

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

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[1] 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 × 5 = 15 points)

Pick any five meetings (except Meeting 1), post a question regarding the required reading (marked with *) at least four hours before our meeting. The questions should generate in-class discussion and response(s) from your classmates. You can ask questions that relate the readings to your observation, everyday life, or experiences. Mundane questions such as those asking about definitions are seldom inspiring. I may refer to your questions in my lectures. I do not accept late submission. Submit under "Daily Questions" on Blackboard.

Workshops (45 points)

Due to time differences, two pathways of assessments are provided. You declare your option on or before June 30 (our second meeting) via an online survey. Once decided, you cannot switch your route.

A) **Group Presentation Pathway (20 points + 5 points + 10 points × 2 = 45 points)**
   For those who can join real-time: There are four workshops throughout the semester. Workshop I is for preparation. In Workshops II, III, and IV, a group of 3 to 4 students will present on a designated topic in each workshop. The presentation should be 30–40 minutes and end with two to three discussion questions. The presenting group shall lead a 30–40-minutes discussion. The rest of the students will participate as discussants.

   Your grade come from your group presentation (20 points) and your participation (20 points). The 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. You will be asked to evaluate your peers' contribution in your group presentation and evaluations from other students about you will account for another 5 points. Unless for urgent or medical reasons, I do not provide make-up opportunities.

B) **Reflexive Essay Pathway (15 points × 3 = 45 points)**
   For those who cannot join real-time: You will write three 400-to-600-word reflexive essays for Workshops II, III, and IV respectively (15 points per essay and three essays in total). Submit each of your essay to Blackboard before 11:59pm of the Friday of that week (GMT+8). Unless for urgent or medical reasons, I do not accept late submission.

Wrap-up Quiz (40 points)

You will receive the quiz at 7:15pm on July 29 via email and Blackboard. The online and open-book quiz consists of several short questions. The length of each answer is limited to 500 words. This is not a writing game; what are valued are quality answers. Materials from my lectures and from the required readings (marked with *) will appear on the quiz. While you should be able to easily complete the quiz in three hours, I am giving an extended submission deadline—11:59 pm on July 31 (GMT+8). Proper citation is needed in your answers. Unless for urgent or medical reasons, I do not accept late submission.

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/.

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 24 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*. 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
- 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). Sage.

(* denotes the required reading)

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
- (quantitative reasoning required) Taylor, S. H., Hutson, J. A., & Alicea, T. R. (2017). Social consequences of Grindr use: Extending the internet-enhanced self-disclosure hypothesis. *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 6645-6657). https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025775

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
- 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 also look into the idea of affordance.

We will watch "Hang the DJ" in *Black Mirror* (S4Ep4).

Readings:
- * Wu, S., & Trottier, D. (2021). Constructing sexual fields: Chinese gay men's dating practices among pluralized dating apps. *Social Media+ Society*, advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211009014
- (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/pere.12158
- * Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China*. MIT Press. pp. 14–17 of "Introduction"

Meeting 5, July 8 (Thursday) | Workshop I: Hi strangers!

This workshop offers a space for preparation. Familiarize yourself with your TA and your groupmates across the globe. Decide on which topic you want to work at. Exchange contact information with your groupmates. Turn on your camera for better visual communication.

Meeting 6, July 13 (Tuesday) | Psychology of App Users: Uses and motivations

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) Timmermans, E., & De Caluwé, E. (2017). To Tinder or not to Tinder, that's the question: An individual differences perspective to Tinder use and motives. *Personality and Individual Differences, 110*, 74–79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.01.026
- 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

- 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 II: Best app of the world?

In your group, 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, designs, and affordance. Share your design 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 introduces relevant feminist ideas in science and technology studies and discusses both the opportunities and challenges for female app users.

We will watch "Swiped: Hooking Up in the Digital Age", a US documentary.

Readings:
- * Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China.* MIT Press. "Are Dating Apps a Feminist Tool? A technofeminist analysis"
- 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
- 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.

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. We will also discuss what constitutes consent in the digital era.

Readings:
- * 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
- Chan, L. S. (2021). *Politics of dating apps: Gender, sexuality, and emergent publics in urban China.* MIT Press. "Cute is the new manly: Performance of Chinese masculinities"
- 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

In your group, identify 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 12, July 27 (Tuesday) | No Asians, no femmes: Discrimination on online dating and hookups

Discriminatory speeches and behaviors are commonplace in online spaces. Focusing on the gay communities, this lecture discusses their internal discriminations based on race and what apps such as Grindr can do about these negative phenomena.
We will watch "Looking for?", a Taiwanese documentary.

Readings:
- * Ang, M. W., Tan, J. C. K., & Lou, C. (2021). Navigating sexual racism in the sexual field: Compensation for and disavowal of marginality by racial minority Grindr users in Singapore. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmab003
- 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
- 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 apps? Community building of queer 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.* MIT Press. "Building a circle for queer women: Affordance of communal connectivity"
- Duguay, S. (2019). "There's no one new around you": Queer women's experiences of scarcity in geospatial partner-seeking on Tinder. In C. J. Nash & A. Gorman-Murray (Eds.), *The geographies of digital sexuality* (pp. 93-114). Palgrave Macmillan.
- 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

In your group, debate: Sexual pics should be banned completely from dating apps. Try to reach a consensus within your group members. You need to define what sexual pics are and balance the pros and cons of allowing these images to be circulated or sent through dating apps. Share your discussion with the rest of the class.