A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN: QUEER CHRISTIANS & DATING APPS

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Introduction

Dating apps pose particular challenges for queer Christians, reproducing oppressions and experiences of dispossession in the context of seeking intimate relationships. Queer Christians using dating apps complicates an already sensitive combination of social and cultural commitments, values, and beliefs. Dating apps position themselves in the dating market in a variety of ways, however all function to help people meet other people for dates. Some apps are known for facilitating hookups or catering to queer populations, others are used more broadly and aim to facilitate long-term relationships. Dating apps, along with other social media sites, independently create and control the categories users interact with (Bivens & Haimson, 2016). On dating apps, users expect the app interface to enable them to represent their unique identities. However, dating apps are often designed with dominant populations in mind and end up excluding those who do not fit the model of their ideal user (Duguay, 2017). Dating apps produce and control categories that are contingent and contribute to cultural knowledge about what identities are dateable, reachable, and even possible. Gender, sexuality, and relationship categories are contested and unruly, as are religious identities, even though they appear stable when offered as radio buttons or checkboxes on a clickable menu of options.

Queer Christian Technocultural Discourses

This paper explores the ways gender, sexual, and relationship diversities (GSRD) intersect with religious identities and are discursively constructed in the context of using dating apps. I use Brock's (2018) Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as a methodological toolkit that views dating apps as cultural representations and social structures that interact with identity work. Technoculture (Dinerstein, 2006) is a matrix that positions white, middle-class, straight men as the norm to which others are compared. CTDA examines technology artifacts, beliefs about technology, and users in-situ. I analyzed fifteen semi-structured initial interviews with queer Christian dating app users. Nine of the interviewees opted-in to follow up with a self-study of their dating app usage. The nine self-study participants used their notes as the basis for elicitation interviews. I also used the dating apps the participants in this study used. I signed up for

and completed user profiles using an abbreviated technical walkthrough (Light, Burgess, & Duguay, 2018) of the dating apps mentioned in interviews. I interpret and discuss discourses of representing non-dominant identities in technocultural spaces after conducting qualitative discourse analysis of user interviews along with dating app walkthroughs.

In this paper, I discuss ways queer Christians navigate the presumed discontinuity of being LGBTQ+ and Christian, choosing to embrace what seems a contradictory identity. Queer Christians are often deprived of community in both religious and queer spaces and experience feelings of oppression and dispossession. In academic queer studies, narratives of those who are religious (they) hating those who are queer (us) abound and build the foundation of the inverse (Puar, 2014). Regimes of truth governing queer conceptions of an us (queer) vs. them (religious) are built around lived experiences of material harm done to queer people in the name of religion. In the context of this study, the religious (them) are primarily involved with conservative, fundamentalist, evangelical Christianity, which is the background of most of the participants in this study, as well as the dominant expression (and stereotype) of Christianity in the U.S. today.

Participants expressed the importance of making both their queer and Christian identities visible and reachable on their dating app profiles. Queer Christians who want to date other queer Christians are in a very thin dating market and believe dating apps will help them find people to date. However, Christian dating apps assume users are cisgender and straight or gay, limiting usability by queer Christians who are non-binary or bisexual or both. Dating apps that target queer users offer limited or no filterable options for religious identification. Dating apps that do offer religion as a structured profile element, do not offer the nuanced and expansive religious categories found on Christian-based or Christian-targeted apps. Further, filtering for religion often requires payment for premium services. I discuss the ways technoculture informs the creation and implementation of dating app identity categories and matchmaking methods and how queer Christians often do not fit the categories available to them. Dating apps rely on structured profile elements and questionnaires to construct knowledge about users and offer that knowledge to help users find "the one," their match made in heaven.

Conclusion
This paper makes an empirical contribution to information and internet studies, as it explicitly interrogates the technocultural aspects of queer identity work among a multiply oppressed group of users. In this work, I privilege the perspectives of queer Christians, contributing to a broader understanding of marginalized Christians in North America. By advancing our understanding of the ways technological solutions to diversity and inclusion are experienced among a multiply marginalized population, we gain insight into how dating app interfaces and identity categories shape users and shape worlds. Ultimately, my analysis reveals how queer Christians know and express gender and religious identities on dating apps but dating apps do not allow for this complexity to be easily visible or searchable. Queer Christians wrestle with dominant narratives, deviate from social scripts, and resist condemnation to a life without hope for loving partnerships. Dating apps offer fine-grained means of seeking and finding a match made in heaven while simultaneously constructing a hellhole of exclusionary, discriminatory, and oppressive binary categories. Still, queer Christians depend on

dating apps, both to do queer identity work and to help them seek and find their match made in heaven.

References
References should be formatted the same as the body, with a double space between entries. Any standard style guide (APA, Chicago, etc.) is acceptable as long as it is consistent throughout the submission.

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