

Dating Today

—There's An App For That

As rapidly as the world of technology turns, so does that of love and matchmaking.

By Shayne Benowitz

"I MET HIM ON TINDER," SAID MY NEW friend, over Fourth of July weekend. She had recently moved to Miami from Los Angeles.

What is Tinder? I asked her.

She explained it to me, and the rest of our group lounging by the pool in South Beach, cell phones clutched in hands, casually scrolling through Instagram or anticipating text messages, each of our carefully curated social networks thrumming in the palms of our hands. Tinder, a geo-specific dating app for your smartphone, is synced to Facebook and allows users to scroll through an endless stream of profile pictures on the fly. A swipe to the right indicates your interest in another user, a swipe to the left and you're onto the next one. The app cuts to the chase by judging potential partners on little more than physical attraction. If two users indicate mutual interest, they're notified and can strike up a conversation and arrange a potential meeting via the app.

A month later, while visiting New York City, I found myself on a rooftop in Williamsburg on a crisp, late summer afternoon sipping craft beer with my brother and sister, and a friend of my brother's who was also on Tinder. My curiosity piqued, I fired away with questions on how he used it. Age 25 and in town temporarily on business, he had only downloaded it a few days earlier and rattled off a handful of conversations, dates and future dates he'd already arranged. In fact, later that afternoon he'd be leaving our

company to meet up with a woman for a few hours. He demonstrated how the app worked and we scrolled through a few photos. "She's cute," he remarked, swiping to the right. "No, no, no," swipes to the left. A picture of three girls at the beach in bikinis appeared. "You have to be careful when the picture's a group of girls," he explained. "You've just gotta hope she's the cute one." Swipe to the right.

Tinder, launched on college campuses in September 2012, has become the most popular and fastest-growing free dating app, with 2.4 billion profile ratings and 21 million matches made in its first seven months, according to its founders. Today, it clocks in at roughly three million new matches per day worldwide. While it's been criticized for being shallow or merely a "hookup" app, its founders argue that it mimics real life by sparking interest based on a first impression. What happens from there is up to you.

Tinder's success is the result of a general shift in attitude about online dating and the pervasiveness of smartphones in our day-to-day lives, according to a recent Pew Center report. The survey found that 59 percent of Americans believe that online dating is a good way to meet people, an increase of 15 percentage points since 2005. Additionally, one in 10 American adults have used dating apps on their phones. Of these online daters, 66 percent have actually gone out on an online date, and 23 percent met their spouse as a result.



DATING & SOCIAL MEDIA

If you sit down over cocktails with a group of friends, chances are everyone will have a different take on navigating today's dating landscape. When it comes to male and female interactions on social media, the eternal question is: What does it all mean? What does it mean when he likes all of your Instagram pictures and Facebook status updates, but isn't calling? Who are the guys she's posing with in those pictures? Why isn't she liking my pictures back? Who's the girl that just commented on his post? Julia Ford-Carther, 29, dating blogger at thethinkingmanspinup.com, urges singles to take a step back. "This is not your main avenue of communication," Ford-Carther cautions. "Get off line. Get back to reality. You shouldn't even be following each other. Don't tweet him, don't like his pictures, don't comment, do not put a picture of the two of you in your profile picture, no selfies of the two of you. It's way too much. There's something to be said for being unavailable and mysterious."

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Fellow dating blogger David Berry (iamdavidberry.com), 29, agrees that you shouldn't broadcast a new relationship on social media. However, the Miami Beach social media professional views these tools as the new gateway for making a connection. He believes it absolutely means something if a member of the opposite sex likes three or four of your Instagram pictures in a row. "People are finding allure in you physically or in your lifestyle and they're communicating that," Berry says. You can test the waters by liking a few pictures back and connecting on Facebook to exchange instant messages. However, Berry cautions, "You have to intentionally shut off at some point and scale back on the social stalking. Give the person a chance. You'll drive yourself nuts making assumptions based on social media."

While the sheer volume of potential partners and the information available about them online can prove overwhelming, Nikki Novo (nikkinovo.com), 31, a motivational speaker, coach and advice columnist from Miami, believes that connecting with people over common interests can be a positive thing. "You don't have to go to the bar to meet someone," she says. You can look on Meetup or your Facebook invitations and attend events of interest.

So what about the old-fashioned notion of getting a phone number and asking a girl out on a date? While Ford-Carther says, "A real man calls. Period," she acknowledges that social media and texting have caught on because it makes the potentially awkward parts of dating a little easier. Berry agrees, "Guys are supposed to assume the stereotypical role of taking charge, but we're nervous when it comes to approaching women we have a real attraction to. Text messaging is an insulation from reality. You can script your words. You can space out the timing of your messages. People actually think that through."



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"You don't have to go to the bar to meet someone," motivational speaker and columnist Nikki Novo says, of the positive aspects of social media.



CONNECTING OFFLINE

While online dating is more socially acceptable and widely used than ever before, 39-year-old dating coach and advice columnist Angela Lutin (essentiallyangela.com) of Boca Raton sees a pushback from technology, especially amongst singles in their 30s and 40s. "They've tried everything and it didn't work," Lutin says. "And now they're saying, I need to go back to what worked for me in my 20s."

These more traditional methods include getting set up by friends and even matchmaking services, like It's Just Lunch or Great Expectations. Berry adds the co-working space as a viable place to look for a partner. And Novo believes that the answer often lies in filling the void for yourself. "There's a personal journey involved," she says, and if you don't have a date on a Saturday night, take up a new hobby or activity that you've always wanted to."

"At the end of the day," says Ford-Carther, "it's going to happen when it's going to happen. You can do everything you want to do, you can get on as many sites as you want, you can Tinder until your thumbs fall off, but he's going to show up when he's going to show up. The best thing you can do is make sure you've got everything right going on in your own life." Pretty solid advice. Now, who's ready to download Tinder? ■