

## Chapter 19

# Introduction

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As digital technologies continue to develop, so too does our reliance on them as ways to communicate and connect with each other. This engagement through technology has become central to many of our social and dating lives, providing us with a way to digitally express intimacy to another person through chat and imagery. Within this context, the creation of a range of applications and websites that seek to bring people together have become more common and a socially acceptable way to seek out connection, intimacy, sex, romance, and companionship. As Ari Waldman reflects in his chapter, for more marginalized populations, digital dating applications have also provided an outlet for “expressions of sexual and romantic freedom after decades of marginalization.” However, such services have also been used to perpetrate harm, including image-based sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, among other abusive behaviors.

In this section, we bring together three chapters that examine the lived experiences of those who have been subjected to abusive behaviors on, or facilitated by, dating applications, as well as considering the socio-cultural norms, values, and practices that perpetuate a rape culture within these intimate settings.


In his chapter, Chris Dietzel provides voices to men who have sex with men (MSM), exploring their understandings and experiences of rape culture through the use of dating applications like Grindr. In doing so, he explores how a rape culture manifests in key ways in-application interactions, for example, unwanted sexual messages and imagery, and in-person encounters, for example, sexual assault. Elena Cama similarly considers how socio-cultural and sexual norms that reflect a rape culture underpin dating applications, and her chapter considers the ways in which this may facilitate, normalize, and excuse sexual harms. In particular, Cama reflects on how this may play out in the context of the normalization of male sexual aggression and female passivity, as well as the myths, victim-blaming, and policing of women’s behavior that both minimizes and excuses men’s violence.

The research on technology-facilitated violence and abuse both within and beyond the dating applications context has largely focused on the experiences of

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cisgender women perpetrated by cisgender men. As Cama explains in her chapter, this results in the privileging of white, able-bodied, middle class women's experiences, and the erasing and silencing of the violence experiences of those whose victimization "is multilayered on the basis of a combination of factors, including gender, sexuality, race, and/or disability." In his chapter, Waldman similarly describes how the pressures and norms surrounding digital dating pose unique and risky experiences including "privacy invasions, exploitation, extortion, and harassment" for marginalized populations, particularly for women and sexual minorities.

In this section, we recognize this gap in knowledge and respond to it by seeking to explore the experiences of people with diverse gender and sexual identities in using dating applications and experiencing sexual harms to consider how these may differ from heteronormative experiences. As Cama claims, "by 'queering' understandings of dating app usage ... we may be able to more meaningfully explore how these discourses feature in and are potentially differently mobilized and navigated in non-heterosexual dating cultures." This is particularly important as Waldman discusses the evidence of the frequent use of such applications among the sexually and gender diverse communities, comparative to heterosexual users.

The chapters in this section also provide an insight into the ways that gender and sexually diverse people face similar experiences to other marginalized groups, where there are powerful discourses, rape myths, and stereotypes that act to silence and discredit experiences of sexual harm. The impacts of which, Dietzel observes, "reduce people to sexual objects."

Further to considering the role of rape culture, Waldman explores how dating applications, particularly those that are designed for gay and bisexual men, socially construct and build in norms that create pressures on users both to share intimate and private information, for example, sexual imagery or descriptions, or as Dietzel found, to participate in sexual activity creating a murky or gray interaction, where the acts are unwanted, but are not defined as either consensual or nonconsensual. As Jadyn (32-year-old black, gay, male) a participant in Dietzel's study reflected of the MSM dating application culture, "it's a sort of social obligation gun-being-held-to-my-head and I feel like I'm doing something that I don't actually want to do."