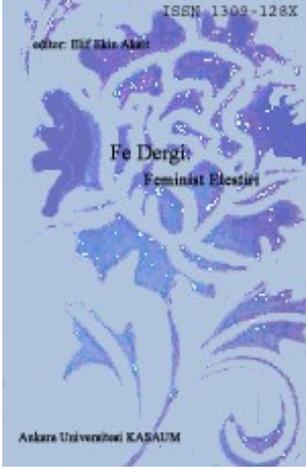


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***Changing Geographies of Intimacy: A Study on Female
Tinder Users in İstanbul***

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Changing Geographies of Intimacy: A Study on Female Tinder Users in İstanbul
Ayla Deniz*

This study discusses the changing geographies of intimacy by focusing on the experiences of female Tinder users in İstanbul. Within the scope of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 women in İstanbul. Based on these interviews, the flows of how women use Tinder have been created and the locations in which the app is used have been identified. The study revealed that women use this mobile application secretly and they do not actively use it in the neighborhoods where they live and work. The way women look for relationships varies considerably and they choose among varying types of relationships. Tinder allows women to rapidly expand their pool of potential partners and eliminate other intermediaries and their social supervision in building relationships. These facts indicate that the geographies of intimacy and the gender relationships within these geographies have started to change for some women.

Keywords: Geographies of intimacy, matchmaking apps, female Tinder users, İstanbul

Mahremiyetin Coğrafyalarının Değişimi: İstanbul'da Tinder Kullanan Kadınlar Hakkında Bir Araştırma

Bu çalışmada, İstanbul'da Tinder kullanan kadınların deneyimleri üzerinden mahremiyet coğrafyalarının değişimi tartışılmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında İstanbul'da 28 kadınla derinlemesine görüşmeler yapıldı. Bunlara dayanarak kadınların Tinder'ı kullanma akışları çizildi ve uygulamanın kullanılma mekânları belirlendi. Çalışma kapsamında anlaşıldı ki kadınlar; uygulamayı kullandıklarını gizliyorlar ve bu nedenle de yaşadıkları ve çalıştıkları semtlerde uygulamayı aktif olarak kullanmıyorlar. Bunun yanında kadınların ilişki arayışları farklılaşıyor ve değişen ilişkilene türleri arasında seçim yapıyorlar. Bunda, Tinder'ın kadınların potansiyel partner havuzunu hızla genişletmeye olanak vermesi ve kişilerarası ilişki kurulumda diğer araçları ve onların sosyal denetimlerini ortadan kaldırması oldukça etkilidir. Bütün bunlar; mahremiyetin coğrafyalarının ve bunun içinde toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkilerinin bazı kadınlar için değişmeye başladığını gösteriyor

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mahremiyetin coğrafyaları, çöpçatanlık uygulamaları, kadın Tinder kullanıcıları, İstanbul

Giriş

'Intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation' (Berlant, 1998).

Nazan entered the cafe in Kadıköy which we had agreed to meet in, and after glancing through some tables, she smiled and walked towards me. When Nazan, one of the new agents of modern Islamism (Göle 1998, 11) with her headscarf and a police officer who has been married for 4 years, sat across me, I started to comprehend how the app could reach such a large mass of people for alternative relationships. After a couple of questions, she held her phone, and I noticed that the app was not on her home screen. She looked at the tables around us in the cafe quickly to check if there was anyone she knew before she opened the app, which meant that she did not want anyone to know that she uses Tinder. Nazan asked me to pull up our chairs closer so that only the two of us could hear our conversation. She said: "I can bring five people here in just half an hour if I want to." Then she opened the app and started sending messages to the men she had been in contact for some time for an immediate meeting in Kadıköy. Within 30 minutes, three men were waiting in front of the designated meeting point, a bank visible from the cafe. Even if the number of men was not five, still it was very impressive. When the men got

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bored, Nazan told one of them to wait a little longer and wrote to the other two men that she would not be able to meet them as something urgent came up. After our meeting, she went on to meet the man who was still waiting and who she was matched the day before. From the cafe window, I watched them slowly walk away. I wondered what made Nazan so cautious of people she already knew, but so bold about someone she had just met. Nazan's experience gives us an opportunity to ponder how the geographies of intimacy and therefore wills of women in building relationships have changed by using an app that integrates a virtual meeting with a physical one.

'Digital space continues to be a popular venue for meeting new people' (Zhang et al. 2017). Within this space, rising numbers of people of varying ages and backgrounds have been using personalized matchmaking services (Knudson 2017, 641) which provide contact to an array of potential partners (Gewirtz-Meydan and Ayalon 2018; Gibbs et al., 2011). Although 'little is known about who uses mobile social networking apps to initiate new relationships' (Zhang et al. 2017), there is growing academic interest in the users of matchmaking apps and their experiences (Timmermans and Courtois 2018). 'It was understood in these studies that gender and sexuality are at the centre on these apps' (MacLeod and McArthur 2018, 16). For this reason, many studies conducted from a feminist perspective have started to explore the relationship between the dating apps and gender (Gedik and Turgut 2019; Gewirtz-Meydan and Ayalon 2018). More specifically, studies involving the experiences of female users started to emerge (Watson and Stelle 2011) as the rate of female users has been on the rise¹. Matchmaking apps have become a very popular way among women to search for compatible romantic partners freely and to establish intimate relationships (Chan 2018). Although the reasons behind this search vary, it is obvious that there is a relation between the increase in the number of female users and the gendered structure of the mobile app culture (David and Cambre 2016; Mason 2016). In these studies, despite the interest in gender, there is little emphasis on the role of 'space' in shaping the experiences that move from a virtual space into a physical one. Virtual spaces, where women's intimate relationships are shaped, cannot easily be described as public or private. Thus, it can be said that these spaces have the potential to change the traditional geographies of intimacy.

This study focuses on Tinder firstly because of its increasing popularity. The number of the users, which is more than 50 million worldwide, is increasing in Turkey as well. The second reason for selecting Tinder is that it is a location-based app and allows speed dating, which distinguishes it from previous apps. Lastly, it is widely used by women because of the app's 'flirty' interface. However, apart from a few newspaper stories² and academic papers (Gedik and Turgut 2019), little is known about the user habits and the effects of the app on intimate relationships. Therefore, this study discusses the changing geographies of intimacy by focusing on the experiences of female users.

Changing Geographies of Intimacy

Social scientists claim that with the effects of the modernization processes, such as individualization and breaking away from traditions, the context and structure of interpersonal relations have changed (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1991, 1993). Bauman (2017) reveals the degree that the relationships are affected by this new trend. In his work *Liquid Love* (2012), he claims that the sense of insecurity makes the bonds between people more fragile and that conflicting desires sometimes strengthen or weaken relationships. People expect to gain power from relationships without losing power and they desire to be satisfied without being suffocated. Being stuck in this dilemma of insecurity and desire, people consent together to an uncertain future to resolve this dilemma.

Virtual spaces are key in the development of new forms of social relationships as it is easier to maintain communication, discover different intimacies, establish new partnerships and create new geographies of intimacy in these spaces (Bell and Binnie 2000; Gibbs et al. 2011; Valentine 2006; Valentine 2008). The interest in virtual spaces resulted in the development of mobile apps. Among them, the matchmaking apps are valuable to understand the transformation of the intimacy of societies (Barraket and Henry-Waring 2008; Chan 2019; Lindsay and Dempsey 2009) because as Antony Giddens (1993) emphasizes, "today, the changes that affect sexuality are truly and very deeply revolutionary." However, how was privacy first built? How does it shape women's relationships and spaces?

Intimacy, 'intimus' in Latin, means "inmost" or "innermost." However, the intimate is actually public and its spatial context is very important. For this reason, Berlant and Warner (1998, 547) stated that 'private is always mediated by public'. In other words, public and private are inseparable, and thus, public responses and public infrastructures of gender and sexual relationships (although they may be accepted as private) need to be

studied further (Liu 2016). Şenlikoğlu and Zengin (2016) suggest that the question of intimacy and its relation to the everyday domains of life requires further attention. For them, how people, bodies, and objects meet and contact is a critical issue that needs further exploration.

All cultures have rules for regulating intimacy; however, methods and mechanisms of regulation vary (Bilgin 2003). In the 19th century, the Ottoman society experienced some changes that accelerated the transformation of intimacy. One of these changes was the increased visibility of women in public space and participation of social life, which met with the reaction of various groups and women became the subject of political debates (Göle 1996). The control of women's bodily movements, especially in the Islamic contexts of the Middle East, constitutes a multilayered process of building privacy, heterosexuality, and intimacy (Şenlikoğlu 2016).

This study discusses the changes in geographies of intimacy through the usage of a matchmaking app, which is one of the best platforms that stages liquid love. Such apps decrease the effect of social elements and geographical isolation that limit social interaction. Once again, dating apps allow meeting in a private space instead of a physical meeting in a social space. For this reason, they result in the dismantling of classical spatial divisions and the relationships which are shaped by them.

About the Research Process

When I was planning this project, I wanted to compare the experiences of male and female Tinder users in Istanbul and Ankara. Since I have lived in Ankara for many years, I know many people there, and when I used the app to reach potential participants, I encountered someone I knew. Then, I realized that explaining that I was using the app for research purposes to someone I know was more difficult than explaining it to a stranger. This familiarity created performance anxiety in people I met for interviews, and they were not open and comfortable with me. For this reason, I decided to focus only on Istanbul, the city with the highest number of Tinder users in Turkey. Moreover, the male users I was matched with did not believe that I wanted to meet them only for research purposes. Even when they agreed to meet, I did not receive the sincere answers I expected because they were trying to go on a date with me. Therefore, I decided to focus only on female Tinder users.

I used Tinder myself in order to reach the participants. I created male and female accounts and I added the details of my research and the participant invitation letter in my profile because the app only allows profile filtering based on three options: The first one is 'gender preferences' (only men, only women or all). Since matchmaking occurs only if the other party is willing, I sometimes selected 'women' and sometimes 'both' as gender preferences on both of my accounts. The second filter of the app is age. Studies indicate that most of the users are between 25-34³ and that the app is used mostly by young adults (Newett et al., 2017, 1). However, in studies on dating practices in some countries, it is suggested that all age groups using these apps should be taken into account (Watson and Stelle 2011, 274). For this reason, in order to have access to all age groups, I used the minimum and maximum age limits of 18-100 years. The third filter that the app offers is the "geographical distance." The app accesses the location of its users by default and lists potential partners near them within a maximum of 160 kilometers.

In this study, I used the interview method, which is widely used as a qualitative research technique that does neither reduce women's experiences to numbers nor homogenizes them (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002, 154-155). Furthermore, the interview method is useful in empathizing with women and creates a more equitable setting by being aware of the power relations embedded in the research process (McDowell 1992; Paerregaard 2002). I conducted 28 semi-structured in-depth interviews in four different time periods between February 2019 and August 2019. I had approximately one-hour face-to-face interviews with each participant. Thanks to these interviews, I created a flow about how women's experiences are shaped through all the stages from creating a profile to having a meeting. While sharing my findings, I chose to share what the women said in the interviews directly because as Creswell (2007) says, 'quotations from interviewees serve to illustrate the results and give voice to the participants in the research'.

Participants

As can be seen in Table 1, the participants were between the ages of 19-45. Any older women could not be reached as it is rare for their age group to use the app. Older participants explained this situation with technological illiteracy and conservatism. Although most of the participants have undergraduate degrees, some of them are high school graduates and some have graduate degrees. The ages and educational backgrounds of the participants are also in line with the profile of Turkish Tinder users.⁴

The participants had a variety of occupations and jobs. Some participants were unemployed, while some had high-income jobs. Most of the participants were either students or civil servants. As is the case with their jobs, their relationship status also varied considerably. Some participants were married, some were single but had partner(s), and some were single without partners. Almost all districts of İstanbul were included although I do not claim that the app usage of participants change according to the districts they live in. I used this information only to show the spatial diversity of the users. Finally, all the participants stated that they were heterosexual.⁵

No	Name	Age	Education	Job/Occupation	Relationship Status
1	Meral	23	Bachelor	Student	Single/No partner
2	Aylin	27	Bachelor	Nurse	Single/Have Partner (s)
3	Ezgi	33	Master	Dentist	Single/No partner
4	Ece	25	Bachelor	Graphic Designer	Single/No partner
5	Merve	41	High-School Graduate	Advertiser	Single/No partner
6	Nisa	34	Bachelor	Lawyer	Single/Have Partner (s)
7	Hacer	28	Bachelor	Private Security Guard	Single/No partner
8	Mehtap	31	Master	Financial Advisor	Single/No partner
9	Beliz	37	Bachelor	Business Manager	Single/No partner
10	Nilay	19	Bachelor	Student	Single/No partner
11	Yeliz	29	Two-Year Graduate	Jewellery Designer	Single/No partner
12	Demet	44	Doctorate	Academician	Married
13	Eda	34	Two-Year Graduate	Civil Servant	Married
14	Halise	41	Master	Doctor	Single/No partner
15	Hanife	35	Bachelor	Police	Married
16	Selma	22	Bachelor	Student	Single/Have Partner (s)
17	Hasret	27	Two-Year Graduate	Salesperson	Single/Have Partner (s)
18	Melahat	34	Bachelor	Salesperson	Married
19	Ayşen	35	High-School Graduate	Unemployed	Single/Have Partner (s)
20	Yıldız	45	High-School Graduate	Unemployed	Married
21	Filiz	40	Master	Architect	Single/Have Partner (s)
22	Beren	36	Bachelor	Advertiser	Single/Have Partner (s)
23	Gül	24	Bachelor	Student	Single/No partner
24	İlke	29	High-School Graduate	Business Manager	Single/No partner
25	Nazan	35	Bachelor	Police	Married
26	Sevil	25	Bachelor	Banker	Single/No partner
27	Serap	40	Master	Teacher	Single/Have Partner (s)
28	Ash	32	Bachelor	Architect	Married

Table 1. List of Participants

How Do Women Use Tinder?

Profile Creation and Self-Presentation

The first step of using the dating apps is profile creation and self-presentation. Studies have shown that both profile photographs and the way people present themselves affect their matchups (de Vries 2010). When asked how the participants created their user profiles, it was realized that there was a link between the motivation of using the app, the target group and the profile created. Sevil, one of the participants, explains the strategy she uses for the section where she shares her personal information:

“Some women share a lot of information in their descriptions. I think Turkish men do not read those descriptions, but foreign men do. That’s why, those who wish to meet foreign men should write in English in their profile about the things they like etc. I also do that because I wish to meet European men” (Sevil, 25).

Sevil’s words include the methods she uses in order to expand her pool of potential partners. There is no indication that she felt the need to present herself as someone she is not while she was trying to do that. On the other hand, Sevil considers a profile in English to be sufficient for communicating with European men. Unlike Sevil, many women have built their profiles on learned stereotypes. One of these women, Yıldız, says:

“For example, someone looking for sexual intercourse puts on close-up photos of themselves with low cut dresses to highlight their sexuality... On the other hand, someone looking for a regular relationship is different. They dress more conservatively... They share more details about themselves.” (Yıldız, 45)

This statement of Yıldız indicates that even in the virtual world, which allows you to be the person you want to be and redefine yourself as you wish (Turkle 1995), the effects of body politics are still very strong. In a way, women are convinced that various desires are presented in pictures posted in profiles. Accordingly, a woman with headscarf cannot be expected to be looking for a one night stand or conversely, a woman with a low-cut dress cannot be expected to anticipate a long-term relationship. These comments made by the women are nurtured by the idea that they should shape their bodies in accordance with social expectations. Massey (1994) maintains that women in urban spaces turn into objects of the gaze. However, virtual spaces have the power to change this status of women, as everyone using the app occupies the positions of both the spectacle and the spectator.

Some studies have shown that the tendencies of women who do not conform to gender roles are considered to be more attractive and interesting by men (Chappetta and Barth 2016). However, most participants think the opposite. Liking a man and trying to communicate with him are enough to distinguish them from the others. This behavior is already out of the traditional gender roles. However, they think that men expect them to conform to these roles to continue to communicate and they decide on how to present themselves based on men’s expectations.

Moreover, the recent increase in the number of sex workers who use the app in order to find clients also causes some women to update their photos. Additionally, a lot of men who use the app started adding remarks on their personal information sections such as *“I am not a good candidate for sex workers”* etc. Because of the possibility of being considered as a sex worker based on low cut or fantasy dresses, such profile pictures decrease matches. Therefore, women started to use photos showing them wearing relatively conservative dresses. Again, within this group, women who were looking for a one night stand started writing specific sentences on their personal information sections such as *“with mutual respect”* and *“add me if you care about privacy and hygiene”*.

How women create their profiles and present themselves is also affected by their civil status and ages. For instance, while married women use photos which do not clearly show their faces in order not to encounter someone they know, young, single or divorced women often prefer close-up photos. Many participants emphasized that the divorced women are preferred the most. This explains why many women write ‘divorced’ instead of ‘single’ or ‘married’ in their personal information sections. İlke explains the reason behind this with the following words:

“I mean, someone who is married has a husband, she has a family. (...) Nobody wants to take that risk... On the other hand, single women can be virgins... Sometimes even married or single women write ‘divorced’ so that they get more matches’ (İlke, 29).

With the exception of few young and single women, female users give little information about themselves and mention almost no professional or educational information which would make it easier to track them down. Women choose to remain in control of their intimate geographies to avoid becoming a victim of the app. Another security check is inspecting the social media accounts of the matches. If the men they like do not have social media accounts that can verify their identity or if they do not wish to share these accounts, then women do not meet them. For this reason, many male users already have information regarding their social media accounts on their personal information section which is not the case for female profiles.

From Swipe to Match

After creating a profile, women begin to explore potential partners. If a woman likes a man, she swipes his profile picture right or taps the like/super like buttons. Since there is no direct interaction during this stage, it is vital for a profile to make a good first impression. Studies have indicated that this liking and matching-up stage reflects cultural norms (Feliciano Robnett and Komaie 2009; Mok 1999). For example, a study conducted in Sweden revealed that the Swedish female users prefer Arabic men less compared to Swedish or Greek men (Jakobsson and Lindholm 2014). Again, the study by McGrath et al. (2016, 1937) shows that “(White) female respondents were less willing to date Asians, Hispanics, and individuals who were some ‘other’ race compared to male respondents.” A similar tendency is observed in this study. However, their swiping choices change depending on their motivation of using the app. If someone is looking for a one night stand, then they try to match with people from different cultures, ethnicities or races. Merve, who has been using the app actively for the last four years, says:

“This is my social world! If I am looking for someone to spend the night with... well, then I usually look for African or Kurdish people. They are really good in bed. İstanbul is a heaven in this respect!... You cannot find such diversity in other cities” (Merve, 41).

Merve's statements show that preferences in the choice of a partner for sexual intercourse are a way of understanding whether the majority regards the minority as equal (Fryer 2007). It also reveals the racial desire for minorities (Mason 2016). Merve's fantasies about these disadvantaged groups in Turkey show how limited her contact with them has been and how their fragility turns them into objects of desire.⁶ While it is usually more common for women to be the focus of such racialized sexual desire, female users' Tinder practices reveal that men of disadvantaged ethnic groups are also being turned into objects of desire. Again, the fact that women limit their contact with these men to short term sexual relationship shows that some of the participants want to keep a social distance between them and these ethnic groups. Unlike Merve, Mehtap emphasized that she is a Turkish nationalist and even as a fantasy, she would not ever consider matching up with a Kurdish man:

“How can I open up my privacy to a traitor! As a Turkish woman, I won't lie down under a Kurd. I think by sleeping with Turkish girls, Kurdish men are trying to take revenge from the Turks anyway... They also don't know protection. I think most of them have diseases.’ (Mehtap, 31).

Mehtap's statements illustrate how women's practices related to their sexualities are affected by national politics. These two different approaches (mentioned by Merve and Mehtap) to Kurdish men show two sides of nationalism: The humiliated group is either an object of fantasy, or is seen as an inferior who cannot be a suitable husband. In both cases they are not seen as equal and are objectified. It should be noted that the relationship between ethnicity and gender should always be handled together.

One of the participants, Yeliz, explains how her own choices are shaped by ethnicity:

“I can't introduce a foreigner to my family. That's why, I always swipe the foreigners left on our matches. I only tap if there is a Turkish man that I like” (Yeliz, 29).

Yeliz's words signal that if the relationship is regarded as temporary, then the app can turn into a place for fantasies. When the app is used for regular relationships, women tend to choose partners who are similar to them and who are deemed more suitable by their families and the society. This situation is similar to their choice of partners in real world while they are not using the app.

No matter which social class they are from, women tend to establish relationships with men of particular professions such as police officers, pilots and doctors. This explains why men add information about their professions to their profiles. Additionally, some of the women stated that they are more willing to match up with university students as they believe that they will not harm them. Some women (such as Filiz and Hanife) also mentioned that symbols of a man's wealth such as cars, expensive watches, photos taken in foreign countries etc. affect their preferences. This also explains why men's profiles are full of these elements.

From Chat to Meeting

In the app, when the likes are mutual, the chat feature becomes active. The chat feature has critical importance because it is the phase where the initial conversation before the face-to-face meeting is established. At this stage, both parties ask questions to each other and try to receive detailed information. According to the participants, the chat stage is when women start telling what they expect from a certain match, understand whether they can trust the other person and start getting to know him. If a man wants to skip this stage quickly and meet as soon as possible, women generally tend to develop a feeling of dislike towards that man. Beliz explains this transition from chatting to meeting as follows:

"I have probably gone out with around 20 men. But, the number of men I have chatted is higher.. I mean, he needs to convince me to meet in a calm manner. I like it if he doesn't rush into it." (Beliz, 37).

The number of men Beliz has met is higher than most women. This data is important because the society expects women to establish intimate relationships with few people and hide their relationships. However, some women meet more men by using the app and do not hesitate to express it openly. Beliz and other participants want to choose their first meeting place. This choice makes them feel more secure. For their first meetings, women usually prefer daytime and cafes that are far from their homes and workplaces. If there is going to be a sexual intercourse, initially hotels are preferred. However, even when the intent is a one night stand, a cafe is chosen as the first meeting place and if agreed upon, the couple moves on to a hotel room.

Women's choice of location depends on two factors. The first is the cost. Women consider the cost of being in a location as well as the taxi fare in case of an emergency. The second factor is the safety of the location. They choose a safe place where they will not encounter anyone they personally know. Women are held responsible when they are subjected to violence if the location they are at is deemed inappropriate (Valentine 1989). Women constantly develop new strategies to be in control of this new geography of intimacy. One of these strategies has been formulated by the participants from conservative districts such as Eyüp and Üsküdar. These participants are under continuous surveillance of their neighbors (Lordoğlu 2018). They mentioned that surveillance decreases during the month of Ramadan and thus, they go out each day to meet men, saying they are going to mosques in other neighborhoods to pray. In addition, they get harassed less in this period, so they choose to meet people during that time.

Another factor which affects the meeting locations is women's civil status. Eda explains her choice of location as follows:

"I am also married. Since I can't take the man to my home, I take him to a hotel. If I start to trust him in time, I may also go to his house, but there is no way that I let him come to mine" (Eda, 34).

Even if the motivation behind using the app and getting matches is different at first, it may change after the first meeting. Starting from the first stage until the last stage, the pool of potential partners gets narrower due to various eliminations. After the first meeting, the relation might go in three different ways: A one night stand, a casual sexual relationship and a relationship. The most preferred relationship type among them is the one night stand. It is followed by relationship and casual sexual relationship. While studies in different countries show that men are more interested in sexual experiences when compared to women (Solis and Wong 2018), this study reveals that sexuality plays a big role in the practices of women despite the claims to the contrary. This is also an

example of Anthony Giddens's (1993) conceptualization of 'plastic sexuality', a term he uses for sexual intercourse outside of reproductive needs. He says that plastic sexuality is the result of the economic and social independence of women and it can be shaped according to individual erotic needs and wants. In a sense, it can be said that there is an escape from reproductive sexuality and intense emotional relationships. The information shared by women participating in this study supports this argument. Women often decide on the future of the relationship after the very first meeting. Selma, one of the youngest participants of the study, describes this situation as follows:

“Women decide based on first impression (...) If I understand that I won't be in a relationship, then I don't meet him again. If I want someone new, I can easily find one by using the app. I think casual sexual relationship is riskier than a one night stand.” (Selma, 22).

Selma's sentences show how virtual environment leads to fast consumed relationships (Chambers 2013). However, the virtual geography of desire brings freedom as well as risks to women such as sexual harassment and financial exploitation. On the other hand, they find the opportunity to expand their social networks to meet friends or romantic partners; they improve their skills to establish fast relationships and gain more experience in relationships (Vandeweerd et al. 2016):

“There always used to be intermediaries or we would go to social meetings. That's why, it was hard to have an access to sexual relationships and we exaggerated this thing. Nowadays, many people don't care about virginity... I solved my sexuality problem with this app. I became a master of sex, not its slave.” (Serap, 40).

Supporting Serap's statement, Sprecher (2009) expresses that these apps encourage people to be open to new relationships and to allow unexpected intimate relationships to flourish. This process of imagining other life possibilities leads to new desires, both bodily and material (McCullough et al. 2014). Women also increase their knowledge of the city and social life as a result of these meetings and activities.

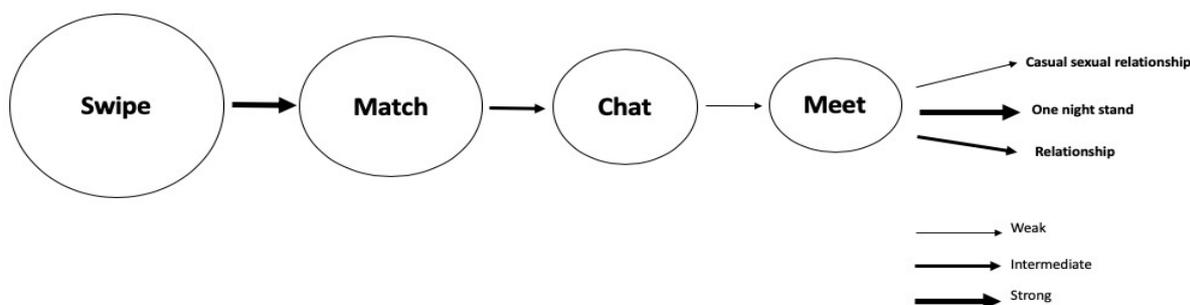


Figure 1. Use of the Application and relationship types

Where Do Women Use Tinder?

In its standard package, Tinder shows its members the candidates who are close to their current location. There are studies which point out that this feature is rather useful as it increases the chances of meeting potential matches (Chan 2019; Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). However, if a woman is using the app secretly, she may be afraid of disclosure. As a matter of fact, Solis and Wong (2018) state that the risk of being exposed to friends, professional networks and society affects how people use the dating apps. When the participants were asked about the locations where they use the app, they generally said the locations are the neighborhoods where they, their family or their friends do not live. Two of the participants, Halise and Ayşen, commented on this issue:

“Most of the people around a woman don't know that she uses Tinder. Imagine getting caught! Even if you are single, your reputation would be tarnished. But if it is a man, even if he is married, people wouldn't care. That's why, I don't use the app at the hospital I work or in the neighborhood I live.”

(Halise, 41).

“I first started using the app at home, and suddenly I saw the profile page of the hairdresser near my house... I immediately cancelled the match, but still, whenever I pass by his shop, he gives me funny looks” (Ayşen, 35).

These opinions of the participants prove that the locations for using the app are not random for female users. The public opinion that the app is for sexual relations plays a big role in this. While men’s sexual practices are approved, those of women are certainly not. Therefore, it can be assumed that men are able to use the app in a wider range of locations than women. In this respect, the sexist regime, which limits the existence of women in public space, limits them in the virtual place. On the other hand, the tendency of using the app in one’s own neighborhood is not the same for every district. For instance, participants who live in Kadıköy and Beşiktaş use the app also in their own district, whereas participants who live in Esenyurt and Bağcılar are careful not to even open the app in their districts. Therefore, by referencing Lordoğlu’s (2018) study, it is possible to say that while a neighborhood acts as a circle of safety for the women who can use the app, those who cannot use it suffer from the moral protectionism of their neighborhoods.

Nevertheless, it is evident that some women use the app in the places where they often go for business or touristic purposes and some even plan short holidays for this reason only. One of these women, Demet, tells how she uses the app on holiday:

“Actually, Tinder improved my confidence a lot. I started going on vacations by myself. Not only I find someone to spend time with in the places I go, I also get to explore the place with a local” (Demet, 44).

The participant’s expressions coincide with Leurs and Hardy’s (2019) finding that thanks to Tinder, a new concept of holiday is emerging which could fittingly be named as “Tinder tourism”. Yet, it should not be forgotten that not all women have the same chances of mobility.

The choice of location depends on the targeted matches. For instance, those who want to be matched up with foreign men use the app in the touristic spots and some women visit these spots for this purpose. One of the participants, Gül (24), travels from her house in Kartal to the touristic Historical Peninsula every weekend.

Conclusion

This study examines female Tinder users’ intimate geographies in İstanbul. Based on their diverse experiences, it is possible to reach conclusions on *users, relationships and places*. First of all, when we consider the *users*, it can be said that a wide variety of women from different ages and occupations use the app. The number of users with a job is higher. The reason behind this might be that working women are freer in choosing partners. Also, it is clear that being in a relationship is not regarded as an obstacle in seeking a new partner. Women in relationships adopt different strategies. They prefer one-night stands, which also indicates the changes in the ways women practice sexuality. Keeping the app as well as their relationships as a secret, not meeting people for a second time, and not sharing detailed information about their lives are among the strategies of survival that women adopt in this new geography of intimacy.

Even though the location that the app creates allows various matchups, the participants are highly selective about whom they want to meet. For this reason, the users make use of their socio-spatial knowledge while using the app. All these findings reveal that socio-spatiality and traditional gender regime are very effective in shaping the new geographies of intimacy. However, women’s experiences and strategies indicate that this new geography has the power to change all as it entails many opportunities for empowerment.

¹For more information: <https://muchneeded.com/tinder-statistics/> Last Access: 19 August 2019

²A Turkish person's trial with Tinder, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/hayat/turk-un-tinder-la-imtihan-29819303>; Here's the reality of Tinder in Turkey, <https://www.posta.com.tr/yazarlar/mehmet-coskundeniz/iste-turkiye-de-tinder-gercegi-1241747>; Tinder: The lonely, the insecure and the victims of conservatism, <https://journos.com.tr/tinder-yalnizlik-muhafazakarlik> (Last access: 20 September 2019)

³Source: <https://muchneeded.com/tinder-statistics/> Last access: 19 August 2019

⁴Tinder visitors' profiles in Turkey, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/iste-tinder-in-turkiye-ziyaretci-profil-818967> (21 September 2019)

⁵On the other hand, it is a fact that individuals with other sexual orientations and other gender identities also use the app intensively.

⁶Tinder is not the only platform where desire towards disadvantaged groups is being reflected on. In fact, with the refugee crisis, especially after 2015, there was a boom in the number of searches and downloads of refugee porn on porn websites such as Pornhub and Xhamster. For more information: <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2018-05/sexisms-refugeeporn-refugees-pornography-germany-analysis>

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