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**“BROKEN, I WANT A SERIOUS RELATIONSHIP”:
THE (SELF-)REPRESENTATION OF HETEROSEXUAL MASCULINITIES ON
TINDER IN INDIA**

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Abstract: *This paper will discuss the representation of heterosexual masculinities in online dating applications in India. By taking the example of men’s self-representation on Tinder, the paper talks about how Indian men perform masculinities online. After collecting 120 male daters’ self-introductions (or bios), a thematic analysis was conducted to examine the online representation of masculinities in urban India. The analysis reveals that hegemonic Indian masculinities that operate within the terms of emotional insensitivity and toughness are not extensively present; rather, most male daters tend to display themselves as balanced selves between “emotional sensitivity” and “ideal manhood.” Male daters represent themselves within a range of qualities that are highly valued by women. The paper notes that Tinder provides a space for some men to negotiate (and even challenge) the dominant discourses on hegemonic masculinities by allowing the men to enact sensitivity and vulnerability, traits that are more aligned with women’s needs and perspectives.*

Keywords: *heterosexual, hegemonic, masculinities, dating apps, self-representation*

1. Introduction

Dating apps are avenues for self-presentation and performance of masculinities/femininities. Even though dating apps, especially Tinder, are typically associated with hookups, casual sex, and non-committed relationships, there is specialized literature that indicates how these apps are used for different purposes (beyond hookups). The proliferation of

dating apps in India is an interesting case, given the large population and a distinct kind of Indian masculinity that contrasts with the Western one. Through this study on self-introductions of male Tinder users in two cities of urban India, I examine how male daters navigate, challenge, and negotiate the hegemonic discourses around masculinities in India. This paper draws upon the thematic analysis of 120 Tinder bios of heterosexual men drawn from two cities in India – Lucknow and Delhi. There was no specific reason to choose these cities except for convenience and familiarity since I lived in those cities during the data collection phase, which lasted for three months. Also, I am most familiar with these two cities in India. Lucknow is my hometown, and I spent three years in Delhi while pursuing my undergraduate studies. I have intimate ties with both cities and know the local languages, cultures, and communities well. By analyzing the self-introductions of male daters, the paper complicates the simplistic discourse on online representation as a “reproduction” of masculinities/femininities. Instead, it argues that male online representations and the use of Tinder are contingent on the local culture, the local discourses around ideal masculinities, and women's perceptions of desirable masculinities. However, I want to emphasize that the findings of this study cannot be generalized across India, as each state, city, and even village has its own understanding of hegemonic masculinity that might differ from other parts of India.

Early studies on dating apps gave them different kinds of names, including "social apps," "geospatial networking apps," "location-based apps," and "hookup apps" (Armstrong et al., 2010; Currier, 2013; England et al., 2008; Albury & Byron, 2016). Dating apps have revolutionized dating and meeting new partners, almost monopolizing modern dating. A study by the Pew Research Centre (Anderson et al., 2020) reveals that roughly half (48%) of the adult population between the ages of 18-year-old to 29-year-old in the US have used a dating application to find romantic or sexual partners. Launched in 2012, Tinder has become a modern cultural phenomenon in dating. With over 75 million active users, Tinder connects users within a specific radius by "swiping right." With such a large number of young daters using Tinder, we are witnessing a monopolization of modern dating by smartphone apps like Tinder, which is part of the phenomenon of what José Van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Wall (2018) call “platform societies.” In such societies, the social structures and interactions are largely app-based, and it is hard to imagine certain goods and services without those apps (such as Uber for transportation). Thus, the

monopolization of the dating arena by Tinder has made it impossible to envisage modern dating without this smartphone application.

Studies have suggested that online dating is also becoming increasingly popular in India. For instance, Jha (2019) revealed that India has an average daily swipe rate of 7.5 million, the highest in the world. However, there is a gap in the literature on how Indian dating app users perform masculinities on mobile dating apps. By looking at their bios, this study attempts to fill the gap by examining how heterosexual males in two Indian cities perform masculinities on dating apps (like Tinder) in their bios. I argue that Tinder provides a platform for male daters to enact, challenge, and negotiate traditional/hegemonic notions of masculinity.

2. Tinder(ing): Self-representation and performance of masculinity

The ubiquity of mobile phones and the internet has contributed to the phenomenon of hyperconnectivity, where one does not have to be in the same physical location to meet/interact. According to Brubaker (2022), the wave has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, when everything was forced to move online. Location-based Real-Time Dating (LBRTD) applications like Tinder are a part of that hyperconnectivity wave that led to the hybridization of online and offline spaces (Maliepaard & Lisdonk, 2019). Brubaker (2022) argues that such hyperconnectivity has led to self-objectification and objectification by others as it invites users to indicate interest by swiping right or left just by seeing a photograph. Therefore, these apps afford their users new possibilities to present and “entrepreneur themselves” (Foucault, 2008). Dating apps are avenues of self-representation. Self-introductions or bios on dating profiles play a primary role in self-representation (Ellison et al., 2006; Manning, 2014). However, self-representations are not simply truthful representations of individuals. Instead, they reveal a complex practice where individuals strategically use text to demonstrate sexual desire, gender, personal identity, and belonging to a particular social group (Gómez et al., 2007). According to Goffman (1990), the presentation of self in everyday life involves a series of “sign activities” as individuals create their image based on their social situations. Similarly, self-representation on dating sites involves self-reflexivity and evaluation based on the perspectives of the “desired” other (Davis et al., 2006, p. 468). As such, daters manufacture a “desired self” to attract the “desired” other. This desired self may not be

congruent with their actual self or the dominant (or proper) gendered self they are expected to perform in social situations.

Relying on mobile media, LBTRD apps incentivize users to connect offline quickly. These apps act as a “bridge” to create “real-life” encounters. This spontaneity and availability of LBTRD apps like Tinder have fostered the perception of the app as a hub for hookups, casual relationships, and short-term dating (Sales, 2015). Much literature (especially in the Western context) shows that more male daters use Tinder for hookups and casual relationships, while female daters generally use the app for validation and friendship-seeking (Sumter et al., 2017). However, users negotiate different ways they use the app, as new motivations like traveling and entertainment have also been reported (Gudelunas, 2012). There is also literature on how daters use the apps, their dating practices, and how dating apps advertise themselves depending on national and local cultural practices (Paul et al., 2022). For instance, in non-Western contexts, particularly Japanese and Korean contexts, daters utilize Tinder for matrimony (Wan & Yeung, 2022). Similarly, Indian users are likelier to use dating platforms for socialization and relationship building (Muralidharan et al., 2015). On the other hand, in highly individualistic countries like the United States, daters prefer casual relationships in online dating, while in collectivist countries like Japan and China, daters prefer romantic and committed relationships (Wan, 2018). However, this binary of individualistic vs collectivist is not sufficient to discuss the heterogeneity of dating intentions and self-representations across cultures. Thus, this study will go into some nuances of how cultural expectations of masculinity affect dating motivations and self-representation on dating apps like Tinder.

A study in the Taiwanese context complicates how men represent themselves online on dating apps. Wang (2012), in her study on Taiwanese male daters, argues that dating sites act as “heterotopias” where “the order of daily living sites is mirrored, contested and inverted, and thus their imperfections are compensated for, and their illusory aspects exposed” (p. 496). Made for female audiences only and being quasi-anonymous, dating sites allow Taiwanese male daters to present their “counter-hegemonic selves” (p. 496) that align more with the ideas of appropriate masculinities in women's perspectives. Wang concludes that men perform being the “tender lover” or the “good man” when courting women privately (outside of the male gaze).

Building on Wang's (2012) argument, I discuss the complex ways in which heterosexual Indian male daters perform masculinities online. Tinder allows them to challenge and negotiate traditional gender norms and expectations. At the same time, online dating in India must be looked at within a culture-specific framework and norms/expectations of masculinity in India. The performances of masculinities align more with the gendered expectations in Indian culture rather than the dominant "hookup culture" afforded by the very nature of Tinder. This is in accordance with previous literature on dating motivations in collectivist cultures, like India, where dating app users seek committed romantic relationships rather than casual encounters. It shows that Indian male daters negotiate the technological affordances of Tinder and the cultural expectations of Indian masculinities to represent themselves online on dating apps (Tinder in this case) in a way that subverts the dominant discourse of Tinder as a "hookup app." However, it is to be noted that this study cannot be applied universally throughout a country as huge and diverse as India, so the study is limited to 120 heterosexual male Tinder users, and the conclusions derived are restricted solely to these users. Further research can focus on a multi-city, multi-state longitudinal study that is more representative of male Tinder users in India.

3. Methodology

I collected 165 Tinder self-introductions or bios in this study over three months via convenience sampling. I made a "researcher" profile on the app and did not swipe right to any daters. The profile was merely created for observational purposes and for collecting self-introductions. It should be noted that I did not engage in reciprocal conversations with potential daters; however, sometimes, I received requests/messages on my Instagram profile asking more about the research. In general, I received a positive response about this research, as long as I maintained the anonymity of those daters.

The study posed an ethical complication since I was not asking for direct informed consent from male daters whose profiles I examined. Even though dating apps may be considered private, daters make their profiles "publicly" available to anyone who signs up for the app. In line with García-Gómez's (2020) ethical and analytical position, I have followed the anonymity procedures. No names or profile pictures were used during the analysis. Other identity markers were removed

so that their anonymity would be guaranteed and they could not be identified. Secondly, in line with the social constructivist orientation, individual online representation is not a direct reflection of the author's profile. Instead, it provides context to "engaging in a relationship talk and tells us something about the cultural norms and possibly to the community of practice norms - in this peer group of people that use these applications, that are attended to or challenged." (García-Gómez, 2020, p. 395). Even dating app users consider dating apps/hookup apps as "risky but desirable" environments, believing that "these apps have no rules" (Byron & Albury, 2018, p. 224). As a result, they deploy various self-care strategies to protect themselves from the ubiquitous social surveillance that generally encompasses social media platforms. When examined in this research context, dating app users already know about surveillance and deploy strategies to counter it; therefore, they are not passive participants in the research process. My participation in the dating site also aligns with the principles of netnography that demand a complete immersion of the researcher in the "field sites." The researcher's active engagement and immersion are the central features of netnography. According to Kozinets and Gretzel (2024), active engagement ranges from non-participation and observation to interaction with others in the digital space. In my research, I stuck to observation, but other studies have involved researchers' interaction with dating site users (Wang, 2012).

The data collection happened between the months of July and October 2022. Out of those 165 profiles I collected, 120 were selected for this study after excluding those with insufficient information or those with excessive personal information that could lead to identification. 58 males from Lucknow and 62 from Delhi. I collected and collated themes and perspectives from the dataset to "identify and characterize discourses" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 129) in this set of textual data. This method is compatible with qualitative social sciences research approaches like thematic analysis, where data is coded into themes to understand underlying discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017). Based on these understandings of data analysis, 120 bios were coded, and a thematic analysis was conducted. After coding, bios with similar keywords were collated into a single theme. For this study, I have restricted myself to analyzing the textual self-introductions, not the images. Even though I acknowledge that images play an essential role in self-representation on dating apps, I did not collect and analyze the pictures of male daters to contain the scope of this paper. For coding, I collected the bios, ages, and hobbies on a spreadsheet and looked for repeated

patterns, words, and phrases to arrive at a particular category. Based on the codes, I categorized the representations of masculinities into six different types: the Tinder guy, the Serious guy, the Hypermasculine guy, the Friend, the Ideal guy, the Hurt guy, and the Funny guy. These categories emerged from coding and thematic analysis. The Tinder guy aligned with the dominant discourses circulating on Tinder: someone engaging in hookups and hyper-sexualization of women daters (Armstrong et al., 2010; Currier, 2013; England et al., 2008). The codes dominant for this category were: sex, casual, hookups, and not looking for anything serious. The Serious guy was looking for a "long-term partner" on Tinder. The codes for this category were: serious relationship, long term partner, lifelong partner, no hookups, etc. The Hypermasculine guy aligned more with the traditional expectations of hegemonic masculinities by expressing himself in terms of power, physical strength, money, and emotional unavailability. I coded the words associated with money, power, alcohol, and real man for this category. The Friend focused on "finding friends" or a "friend for life" on the dating app, tapping into the discourse (prominent in India) that friendship and dating do not have distinct boundaries. The term friend was coded for this category. The Ideal guy is in touch with his feminine side, respects women, and reflects the qualities that modern women seek. Words like cooking, caring, loving, intelligent, open-minded, and pet-lover were coded for this category. The Hurt guy talked about his failed relationship and how women had previously hurt him. I coded words like hurt, pain, frustrated, and broken for this category. Finally, the Funny guy tapped into his humorous side to attract potential partners. I coded terms like stupid, not romantic, weird, sarcasm, etc., for this category. However, it should be noted that these categorizations were not mutually exclusive, i.e., for instance, some male daters manifested both seriousness and idealness. In those cases, I categorized them into the category that aligned the most with their overall self-introductory bio. The distinction between the six types of male dates is only made for analytical purposes. I do not (by any means) argue that heterosexual masculinities performed on Tinder in India are limited to these categories. Rather, this categorization is useful to locate some of the dominant patterns of masculinity that heterosexual males on dating sites perform in the two cities of my data collection.

4. Data analysis: Enacting, challenging and negotiating hegemonic masculinities

The concept of "hegemonic masculinity" was coined by Connell (1987) to suggest the most desired form of masculinity within a culture. Traditional hegemonic masculinity is manifested through invulnerability, ambition, assertiveness, dominance, and other agential qualities. However, these traits differ across cultures and periods. The ideals of hegemonic masculinity do not always align with the gender roles and expectations in local cultures and smaller populations. Connell argues that there is no single form of masculinity; instead, multiple masculinities vary across cultures, locations, time, and other context-specific factors.

It should be noted that only a fraction of men enact hegemonic masculinities; however, all men are assessed against those standards as they must strive to achieve those ideals. However, most men benefit from the ideals of hegemonic masculinity through complicity. As Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) say, "It [hegemonic masculinity] embodied the currently most honored way of being a man; it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (p. 832). Enacting hegemonic masculinities in heterosexual relationships includes male dominance over women, objectification and sexualization of women, and high (and overly aggressive) sex drive (Kimmel, 2008; Ward et al., 2015). Such masculinity is not just valued amongst peer groups; it is also widely circulated and encouraged through media images.

However, hegemonic masculinity is not a constant, and it gets challenged and negotiated by both men and women. For instance, Meuser (2003) demonstrates how men reject patriarchal relations and focus on a "pragmatic egalitarianism" in romantic relationships. This was a direct response to the changes in women's perceptions of masculinities. Feminist scholars have called for scholars to start looking at how men and women "undo" gender rather than solely focusing on how they "do" gender (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009). George (2006) analyses the discourses of honorable and dishonorable masculinities amongst the working-class population in Mumbai. The study suggests that "masculinities and men's honor are co-constituted through men's actions, private and public, sexual and otherwise, and women's discourses about men's actions" (p. 48). George argues that women's discourses around honorable masculinities and their manifestations lead to the emergence and acceptance of alternative/softer forms of masculinities that contrast with the hypermasculinities marked by female subjugation (George, 1998) and violent behavior (Butalia, 2000). The discourses around honorable masculinities are negotiated and reconstituted

based on women's discourses around them and men's actions (regarding "sexual control" in public and private realms). Such shifting of discourses around masculinities is also evident in online spaces, like dating sites and applications, where men challenge dominant or hegemonic masculinity, and instead, their behavior is shaped by what women consider "ideal" masculinity.

In this section, I analyze the different categories of male daters that I developed after the thematic analysis - the Hypermasculine guy, the Tinder guy, the Funny guy, the Friend, the Hurt guy, the Ideal guy, and the Serious guy. Each subsection will discuss how the male daters enact, challenge, and negotiate the hegemonic notions of masculinity. Alongside this, I also discuss how the implications of Indian culture have affected the kind of masculinity displayed by male daters. While all daters, to some extent, enact hegemonic masculinity, the cultural specificities make those enactments quite different and unique to the Indian context. Each category will also explore to what extent male daters challenge and negotiate hegemonic masculinity.

The Hypermasculine Guy

Out of 120 male daters, only 14 were classified as hypermasculine, demonstrating that it is not the most common form of masculinity exhibited. For instance, a 26-year-old male dater writes:

Typical bad guy with a good soul, we are most likely to connect because you can talk about anything with me (you need to be an interesting person though). PS. I love to take my girl shopping.¹

Substantial cash wealth emerges as an important display of masculine power and agency, which must be expressed within a maturity framework (Osella & Osella, 2004). "Cash is an important sign of success and masculinity: a man is someone with liquidity, not just assets" (ibid, p. 120). The authors also note that an Indian man's value in the dating/marriage market is determined by his earning potential, i.e., he should earn enough to support his wife's and future children's needs.

A 23-year-old dater constructs his hypermasculinity along similar lines of financial status as he writes,

¹ All the quotes are written in their original language; where necessary, an English translation is provided in brackets.

Financially stable guy looking for something like no strings attached/friends with benefits. You will be treated with all respect and care. I won't expect you to jump in bed right away, I'd like to take you out on coffee or dinner dates, movies or shopping and wait for you to get comfortable. All your regular expenses will be on me if we get along well.

This is a prime example of hypermasculinity where women are seen as "gold diggers," expected to be subversive and receive men's gifts. By focusing on being "financially stable" and "covering all expenses," the dater assumes financial responsibility for his partner (that aligns with the cultural expectations of men in India).

Money and masculinity are interconnected in many various Western and non-Western contexts. Money can signify the continuity of the same masculine ideals of providing and protecting the family (Cornwall, 2003). It is a marker of "successful manhood" (Smith, 2017, p. 125). Money is not just for economic survival but has become tied to social rituals associated with performing 'respectable masculinity.' Such respectable masculinity constructed in terms of money and social status (ultimately connected with generational wealth) is an important marker for groom selection in India. This can be conspicuously seen in the case of "arranged marriages," where the family and relatives choose who you are married to. Money is often the second thing (if not first, after social status) that determines the compatibility between the bride and the groom (and their families). Such mention of money and other markers associated with financial status were common across men who exhibited hegemonic masculinities; for instance, another male dater writes:

I am a business owner. Fav hobbies - dating, chatting, travel and sports bikes, car sexy lover driver, *bht kuch pasnd hai alau ladkiyan dur rhe agr apko dating krna hai toh accept kre* (I like a lot of things, stupid/stupid-looking girls should stay away. Only accept if you want to date)

The discourses of Indian masculinity are quite different from the Western construction of masculinity. Unlike the Western concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is envisaged through sexual promiscuity, Indian hegemonic masculinity should be understood in colonial history. In the colonial context, Indian men were constructed as "hypersexual," a threat to the "virtuous" white woman. The widespread monitoring of Indian male sexuality was justified under the pretext of "white man saving the brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988, p. 297). However, in the

post-colonial imagination of Indian male sexuality, there was a desexualization of the "hypersexual" image, with images of celibacy being celebrated and idealized (Dasgupta & Gokulsing, 2013). Srivastava (2004) highlighted the "necessity of overcoming desire as the irrevocable truth of the Indian male milieu" (p. 15). As such, the Western model of hegemonic masculinity in terms of sexual promiscuity is replaced by "control" of one's sexual desires. Daters categorized as Hypermasculine did not use sexual language; instead, they emphasized monogamous relationships.

The Tinder Guy

Sixteen men fit this category of the Tinder Guy by enacting the hegemonic masculinity afforded by Tinder as a dating app. As noted in the discussion earlier, dating applications in general, and Tinder in particular, have been associated with hookup culture (Sales, 2015), engaging in casual sexual encounters with relative strangers with a carefree attitude and relative non-commitment (Armstrong et al., 2010; Currier, 2013; England et al., 2008). The bios of Tinder Guys focused on the hyper-sexualization of female bodies, objectification of women, and aversion to commitment. Research has suggested that more men seek casual partners on dating apps (Sevi et al., 2018) than women. This aligns with the literature on the rise of "hookup" culture on dating apps, particularly Tinder, which is seen as a hookup app. Male daters wrote this using explicit language that sexualized women's bodies and reflected a lack of commitment.

Tinder is also a site for what Quinn (2002) calls "girl watching," where groups of men sexually objectify women. I call this "digital girl watching," as it exclusively happens in online spaces. Such practices of digital girl watching and collective objectifying may not directly affect the woman being watched or commodified, but these practices perpetuate a particular form of masculinity and heterosexual desire (Quinn, 2002, p. 392). For instance, a 27-year-old writes about female daters viewing his profile: "You make my eyes wet with tears of happiness; I will make you wet with pleasure. It is not a resume to elaborate myself - communication is better to know each other."

These profiles focused on the physical bodies of potential female daters, reinforcing the idea of Tinder as a "hookup" app with the primacy of the "physical." This categorization is less

aligned with Indian masculinities that focus more on control of sexuality, as mentioned in the case of Hypermasculine Guy. The Tinder guy, in contrast, follows the stereotypical associations of masculinity afforded by the app, i.e., for hookups. Out of 120, only 16 men performed this kind of masculinity; it suggests that more men used Tinder for other purposes than hookups, as I will demonstrate in this paper.

The Funny Guy

I classified 14 male daters into the category of the Funny Guy as they use gendered humor in their bios. Gendered humor and ridicule are used as a disciplinary technique to maintain gender hegemony and social order (Abedinifard, 2016). Such humor serves as a policing tool to reinforce the gendered social order. However, humor is not a uniform semiotic device that simply reinforces or subjugates gender hegemony; rather, it is a “polysemic” device (Weaver, 2011) as it is constructed on incongruity, i.e., the motives of humor can be denied (it’s just a joke, excuse).

Meyer (2000) argues that humor can be used to reinforce certain social norms while, sometimes, challenging those dominant norms. Humor allows the maintenance of a safety valve within which social frustrations are expressed, mutual disrespect between participants is tolerated, and social order is maintained (Wilson, 1979). For instance, a 24-year-old says he uses antiphrastic humor to perpetuate the gendered ridicule of women being “insane”: “I am handsome, successful, and fairly happy. Now, if only an insane girl comes along and ruins my life.”

The words “insane girl” perpetuate the common stereotype that women are insane (or, better, “crazy”). Even though the dater classifies himself within the ambit of ideal masculinities, he plays into stereotypical representations of women. But under the guise of humor, he can easily deny his misogyny. Kehily and Nayak (1997) argue that joking allows men to perform and validate hegemonic heterosexual masculinities and marginalize non-hegemonic masculinity. This is because the image of the “joker” perpetuating misogyny or sexism is protected from criticism and reprimand.

Cliché line describing my height and personality quotes about traveling to show I have wanderlust, motivational line I read three years ago to show that I have a high paying job, cheesy attempt to tell I am part

time musician, unnecessary mention of my dog to show that I am an animal lover, funny pick up line to make you laugh, something to show off my intellect. Choose 1 when swipe right: a cheesy pickup line, an insult joke, both

This male dater jokes about how most males represent themselves online and what women expect online profiles to look like. The implication of such a bio is two-fold: first, the dater tries to undermine the effort of other potential male daters who write elaborative/descriptive bios which women prefer; secondly, he also makes fun of women who like those bios of daters putting an effort into making their profile. He ridicules women who look at those qualities (like a good job, animal lover, intelligence, funny, music, etc.), thus portraying them as "shallow" for doing that. This, again, plays into the same gendered stereotype that online women daters are "gold diggers." The funny guy reinforces and perpetuates similar stereotypical views about women (like being shallow or crazy) by using humor. Therefore, the dater also performs some kind of hegemonic masculinity but under the visage of being the "Funny guy".

Bilingual creativity is an interesting element of Indian humor that stands out in memes, stand-up comedies, and other forms of communication (Sarkar & Siraj, 2022). Language switching between Hindi and English is quite common in India, with most Indians in urban areas having some level of proficiency in English. Thus, a lot of bios collected consisted of a combination of Hindi and English, oftentimes switching to Hindi to make it humorous. Certain specific commonly used Hindi words and phrases were also used. For instance, one dater writes - "*bakchodi mei sukoon hai, gf milne ka scope hai*" ("baseless gossips are fun, is there any scope to find a girlfriend here").

Similarly, another dater uses the words, "*ao bitching kre*" ("Let's bitch together"). *Aao bitching kre* is a commonly used phrase amongst friends in India, which refers to an invitation for a chill hangout and talking about other people. Both these daters invoke humor to reproduce the stereotype of women as gossipers. Language creativity is a unique part of Indian humor and performances of masculinity.

The Friend

Most male daters (25) fell into the Friend category, looking for meaningful friendships (some were open to relationships transitioning from friendships). Unlike its Western counterparts,

the dating sites boom happened very late in India. Instead, social media messenger services like Orkut, Facebook, and Hi5 were booming in India, where people sought romantic and sexual connections (not directly linked to marriage) (Das, 2019). These platforms offered theme-based chat rooms for fostering love and "friendship" connections. Many Indian chat rooms (like Fropper.com) advertise themselves as "friendship" platforms, but the subtext is that friendships may transform into relationships (Chakraborty, 2012). This kind of blurred boundary between friendship and romantic relationships still exists while conceptualizing heterosexual relationships in India. Many male daters claim in their self-introductions that "they are looking for a friend" rather than a partner/girlfriend. For instance, a 32-year-old male dater writes: "Life without adventure is pizza without cheese. Friendship marks a life more deeply than love. Love degenerates into obsession; friendship is never anything but sharing."

This sentiment of looking for friendship reverberated across multiple profiles where daters explicitly mention looking for "friends" or "friendship." For instance, another 23-year-old male dater writes: "Here to make new friends, have interesting conversations, enjoy new company, talk about me, listen about you, have a good laugh and maybe have beer POV: hit different if you want."

It should also be noted that the term "friendship" in the Indian context has many different connotations and extends beyond the Western framework of friendship, where there is a sharp and clear contrast with dating. In the Indian framework, "friendship" is often mixed with casual relationships, flirting, and romance. By using the ambiguous term "friend," male daters navigate the Indian dating market, which allows them greater access to female socialization or "friendships". So, even though the purpose might be plainly hookup, the self-representation as "friend" gives them a certain level of respectability.

The Hurt Guy

The Hurt Guy reveals his vulnerable side and his role in previous relationships. He writes about his frustrations and bad luck with love. He describes his feelings, exposes his weaknesses and fragility, and even completely subverts/reverses the mainstream gendered expectations/discourses. Only nine male daters fell into this category. For instance, a 37-year-old dater reveals his experiences of being judged and bullied in his bio:

I know it's a dating app, but I am just here to talk to new people without being judged. I hope that's okay. I really hope that I do not come across any bullies, I have enough in real life. I don't have any ego issues, in fact I am the opposite of that. I am a feminism supporter and in fact relate to many aspects of it

Kennedy (2006) argues that the Internet may provide a relaxing atmosphere due to the feeling of being relatively anonymous, making it easier for individuals to disclose their private thoughts and feelings. Also, since they know their male acquaintances can't be there, male daters feel more comfortable exposing their vulnerable side. Whitty (2008) suggests that male daters can present their true selves on dating applications without fearing being judged by their male peers/acquaintances. Similarly, Wang (2012) notes that "unfavored, discouraged, or repressed in front of male others are unashamedly performed in this space" (p. 495). Such quasi-anonymity allowed men to sometimes represent themselves more "truly" instead of enacting macho masculinity. The dater can confess that he is a "feminism supporter" and "relate[s] to it" even though feminism is seen as a Western concept in India that radicalizes Indian women; this shows that Tinder has the potential to provide a semi-relaxing and relatively anonymous environment where people can talk about their true selves. They can talk about their experiences in a more vulnerable manner; for instance, a 24-year-old writes: "I noticed. I tried to listen to my heartbeat but I couldn't. Let's go for a long walk and talk about our lives, mountains, beaches and how great this city is..."

This dater talks vulnerably about his broken heart; however, he does not disclose what broke his heart. It could be a betrayal or lack of love which made the dater vulnerable/hurt. Again, as mentioned before, like all different categories of daters, even Hurt guys might perform hegemonic masculinity at some point. But the expression of vulnerability and sensitivity in the bios allows them to challenge and renegotiate the standards of hegemonic masculinity at the same time.

The Ideal Guy

Ideal guys present themselves in terms of sensitivity, emotional availability, and absence of violent behavior (ideals that are more valued by women in the modern day). In their research on Men's Actions to Stop Violence Against Women (a movement in Uttar Pradesh, India), Mogford,

Irby, and Das (2015) demonstrate how men challenge and reimagine hegemonic masculinities. The goal of the action group is to stop violence against women by "strengthening the emotional aspect of men, sensitizing them towards women's feelings, making them responsible in sexual relationships, and replacing their overbearing masculinity with an alternate concept of 'being a man'" (Mogford, Irby & Das, 2015, p. 75). The authors demonstrate that men activists' primary motivation to change their behavior (and call out other men for their violent behavior) is their relationships with the women closest to them (in most cases, their wives). Such studies suggest a shift towards modern gender roles where men emphasize their sensitivity, emotional availability, and empathy. I categorize 21 male daters as Ideal Guys as they manifest emotional sensibilities and focus on what their potential partner will like. For instance, a 25-year-old male dater writes:

Tired of finding the perfect match, take a break here. Talk to me about your life, I'll listen. Win me over by your wit or maybe some coffee would do too. You already have my heart if your meme game is strong. Up for a kitchen date, I'll cook, will also play some guitar and sing for you. Also, I am your guy if you love bike rides. Swipe right, I might do the same.

In India (and most other places worldwide), cooking at home is still considered a woman's job (Lupton, 2000). However, many young men now cook more than men ever did in the past (Neuman et al., 2017). There has been plenty of research on men's experiences with professional cooking (especially on TV) and non-domestic environments (Hollows, 2003). Often, men conceptualize their cooking as a leisurely exercise, art, or performance (which is done infrequently) rather than feminine domestic work involving mundane daily cooking (Parasecoli, 2008). Szabo (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 men with significant cooking responsibilities to examine their cooking practices and perceptions of masculinities. These men differentiated themselves from "macho men" (hegemonic masculinities) who expected women to cook. Interestingly, these participants talked about their cooking skills as being impressive for women. In other words, they still played into the hegemonic masculinity of seduction, romantic and sexual, through their cooking (instead of money/power/status). For some, cooking even compensated for a lack/absence of more macho masculinity. These men even hinted at a desire for greater "recognition" for their uniqueness and departure from macho masculinities. Szabo demonstrated how men and women perceived men who cook at home as a "good catch" (p. 233). Such

constructions of masculinities re-position "macho masculinity" as the norm, while sensitive masculinities are something unique for which men should be praised. Many daters wrote about their cooking skills to construct an ideal self, for instance: "Nefarious but not notorious, passionate about cooking, cook 366 nonveg and 164 veg dishes, wants to talk and explore lots of cuisines and people. Topics like universe, business, Forbes, epics, food, etc. Talk to me to know who I am."

In these bios, cooking embodies an attractive quality that women want and reveals alternative masculinities that focus on individuality, charm, and romance. As such, by embracing and valuing traditionally feminine attributes like cooking, men challenge the structures of macho masculinities and construct new masculinities. However, it should be understood that men have minimal expectations to be involved in cooking at home; therefore, men expect extra recognition for their alternative performance of masculinity. This also makes it clear that separating hegemonic and sensitive/alternative masculinities is complicated (Wetherell & Edley, 1999) as they are not binaries. Some male daters expect more "credit," "respect," and potentially sexual and romantic relationships from women for exhibiting such sensitive masculinities.

The Serious Guy

I have categorized 21 male daters as the Serious Guys since they specifically mention wanting a partner/long-term relationship in their bio. Even though Tinder is marketed and often perceived as a hookup app, many couples meet online. As mentioned in the discussion earlier, dating app users in India use these apps for socialization and relationship-building purposes. Muralidharan et al. (2015) argue that Indians exhibit a collectivist culture where the goals of social media and dating apps are used for socialization and making long-term sustainable connections. Similar studies in other Asian countries that exhibit collectivist culture have shown that daters from those countries seek long-term committed relationships through dating apps rather than hookups or casual relationships (Kale & Spence, 2009; Paul et. al, 2022).

Interestingly, Rosenfeld (2017) demonstrates that couples who meet online transitioned to marriage almost twice as fast as couples who met offline. Rosenfeld argues that people who meet online (through dating websites and apps) go through a choice-intensive process. This also means that the Internet (or better dating applications) often draws the most marriage-ready individuals,

and individuals can self-select their partner based on their intentions. Most dating platforms, including Tinder, allow users to specify their intentions, from casual, short-term, and long-term relationships to marriage. For instance, this male dater writes explicitly what he wants in his bio: “Not looking for anything serious, owns a couple of cats, just a wife and a couple of kids, and a couple of more cats if we are able to afford a penthouse in Lucknow.”

There are intersections between the category of the serious guy and the ideal guy. But I have made two categories: the serious guy makes his intention of wanting a relationship/marriage explicit in his self-introduction, while the ideal guy does not. Cultural and local factors also play a significant role in this performance of masculinity. It is also important to note that while most male daters represent themselves in terms of more sensitive masculinities (in terms of vulnerability, friendliness, and openness rather than traditional “macho” man), they might not agree with those ideals and perform a different kind of masculinity in real life. The contradiction between online representation and gendered performance in real life is outside the scope of this paper.

5. Conclusion

The analysis reveals that hegemonic masculinities in terms of lack of emotional sensitivity and toughness are not extensively performed; instead, most male Indian daters display themselves as a balance between "emotional sensitivity" and "ideal manhood." While some men still conform to the traditional definitions of Indian heterosexual masculinities, Tinder provides a space for most male daters to negotiate (and even challenge) the dominant discourses on masculinities by allowing men to enact "sensitive" masculinities that are more aligned to women's needs and perspectives. By examining the performances of hegemonic and “sensitive” masculinities, the study contributes to the literature on how social media applications have become spaces for "doing" and "undoing" gender.

My study challenges some recent literature in the field that has demonstrated that dating sites are discursive platforms where men "do gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), as men emphasize stereotypically gendered behavior like "sexual objectification" and "emotional detachment" (Hanson, 2021). Instead, I have shown that online dating applications offer heterosexual men a platform to "undo" gender and negotiate gendered expectations as they subvert

traditional social norms of masculinity by performing more "sensitive" forms of masculinity that are deemed more desirable by women. Building on the existing literature on dating apps and the representation of masculinities, I have suggested that most male daters construct their online image based on what women perceive as desirable masculinity. I have argued that male daters perform their masculinities by locating themselves between hegemonic and sensitive masculinities. The fact that more male daters challenge hegemonic masculinities than simply adhering to the traditional norms demonstrates that men's performance of masculinities is shifting with respect to women's construction of desirable/appropriate masculinities.

Contrary to the Western contexts, the paper also shows how many male daters are looking for a long-term relationship/marriage on Tinder, which is infamously known as the "hookup app." This finding is in accordance with the Indian culture that epitomizes marriage and Indian masculinity that envisages masculinity within the context of marital monogamous relationships. This finding re-emphasizes Connell's (1987) argument that there is no monolithic hegemonic masculinity; instead, it varies with temporal, locational, and cultural differences. Hegemonic masculinity is constantly challenged, pivoted, and re-pivoted. It is not a fixed entity frozen in space and time. As such, I argue that the masculine culture facilitated by Tinder (described as Tinder masculinity above) does not overpower the local masculinities that operate in urban India, which is imagined in terms of long-term committed monogamous relationships. It is also to be noted that these data (and conclusion) are not representative of all Indian masculinities; rather, I restrict my argument to the two cities of sampling in urban India. Further literature could draw on how masculinities in rural India operate within the context of rising dating app usage by young adults.

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