

“YOU’RE REALLY CUTE FOR A BLACK GUY” – A MIXED METHODS
APPROACH TO SEXUAL RACISM ON GAY DATING APPLICATIONS

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In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
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Master of Arts

In

Human Sexuality Studies

by

Nathan Patrick O’Brien

San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read "You're really cute for a Black guy." – A Mixed Methods approach to sexual racism on gay dating applications by Nathan Patrick O'Brien, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Human Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University.



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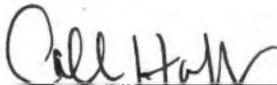
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**“YOU’RE REALLY CUTE FOR A BLACK GUY” – A MIXED METHODS
APPROACH TO SEXUAL RACISM ON GAY DATING APPLICATIONS**

Nathan Patrick O’Brien
San Francisco, California
2019

Sexual Racism is the covert form of racial prejudice enacted in the context of sex or romance. This is apparent within online dating spaces, specifically among gay dating applications like that of Grindr. There is a large amount of literature on gay dating apps, specifically Grindr, however most of this literature focuses on issues outside of race. The present study focuses on the intersections of racism and dating relationships among gay men of color. This study uses a blended quantitative and qualitative survey to gather data regarding experiences of discrimination on gay dating applications among 100 men of color across the United States and Canada. It focuses on how gay men of color navigate gay dating apps and how these apps shape their relationships and sexuality. Findings suggest that racism in gay dating apps can negatively affect how gay men of color navigate these online spaces and cope with their experiences of discrimination. The study concludes that many participants experience various forms of discrimination and the toxicity that plagues gay dating applications has got to change as soon as possible.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

5/22/19
Date

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Introduction

“At Grindr, we’re into diversity, inclusion, and users who treat each other with respect. We’re not into racism, bullying, or other forms of toxic behavior. These are our preferences, and we’ve updated our Community Guidelines to better reflect them. Same app. New rules. Everyone is entitled to their opinion. Their type. Their tastes. But nobody is entitled to tear someone else down because of their race, size, gender, HIV status, age, or – quite simply – being who they are. Join us in building a kinder Grindr. Express yourself, but not at the expense of someone else. Report discrimination when you see it. Use your voice and share your story to call out prejudice and spark change. Together, we can amplify the conversation and take steps towards a kinder, more respectful community.” – Mission statement from Kindr Campaign.

This is the mission statement from Grindr’s new anti-discrimination campaign called Kindr. Within this new initiative, the popular gay dating application will try to combat toxic behavior with profile screenings, stricter photo and profile guidelines, and education and conversation on this issues that plague the community. One issue in particular that this Kindr campaign is meaning to target is Sexual Racism. Sexual Racism is the covert form of racial prejudice enacted in the context of sex or romance. This is apparent within online dating spaces, specifically among gay dating applications like that of Grindr. Amid the threat of a class action lawsuit in which this dating app was called out for ignoring overt and covert acts of racism, the Kindr Campaign came into fruition. However, is it too little too late? The toxicity that these apps help perpetuate have gone

unchecked for years. Will this campaign change things? Or was this campaign just an attempt at damage control?

I, personally like the fact that an app has done something to combat the problematic rhetoric that surrounds gay dating apps. I also think it is important to note the fact that an app felt social pressure to acknowledge this kind of racism and prejudice. This kind of acknowledgement with this campaign unquestionably demonstrates the seriousness of this issue. I hope that more applications follow suit and that these topics find themselves into more and more conversations within the gay community. Being a former user of the app Grindr, one need not look very long to come across a profile that excludes an entire race or multiple races from their interests. However, profile exclusion is just the surface of how sexual racism rears its ugly head on these apps, and me being white means I will never bear witness to most of this issue. Nevertheless, I do not think the burden of this should lie at the hands of people of color saying enough is enough. Silent white voices are just as culpable as the profiles and prejudicial rhetoric. Racism is embedded within society which means it is just as present inside the gay community. This research aims to echo the voices of men of color and the impact this rhetoric has had on relationship formation and health outcomes among these app users in hopes of further legitimizing the damaging effects aggressive racial filtering produces.

Literature

Historically, racism is not new to the LGBT community. Many scholars have focused on highlighting various events, policies, or histories in which queer people of

color have been discriminated against, or visibly erased within the LGBTQ community. Elena Kiesling articulates varying political examples of anti-blackness within queer politics. Focusing on events like hate crime statues, and proposition 8, Kiesling's analysis of queer politics has highlighted the erasure of blackness and a history of anti-blackness within the organization of the LGBT movement (Kiesling, 2017). In addition to anti-blackness in queer politics, the intersections of HIV stigma and race was another realm of racism within the LGTB community. Gossett argues based in queer necropolitics, the intersections of race and HIV status greatly impacted people of color through severe cases of HIV criminalization and mass incarceration. This meaning that the law and criminal justice system actively used harsher punishments for queer people of color, highlighting the societal complications of the intersections of sexuality and race (Gossett, 2014).

In addition to the historical lens of racism within the LGBT movement, there is also scholarship that is not historical. Technology has shaped the way people interact in all aspects of life, from social media pages to cellphone access, the world shifts and adapts to technology. Gay dating applications like Grindr and Jack'd have fascinated scholars since their inception in the late 2000s. These dating applications have made easy access for gay men to find sexual partners in a specific geographic area within the app users' vicinity. With these apps, users have pages of available men for sex, dates, hookups, or chatting. These apps center on what the user prefers based on the profile they create. However, some scholars have found that these applications can perpetuate racialized sexual discrimination or as many scholars have coined, sexual racism. Early

writing on sexual racism focused almost exclusively on heterosexual relationships between Black and white people living in the USA (Callender, Holt, and Newman, 2015). However scholars have begun to explore other groups in more recent work. In Australia a study was conducted on sexual racism among gay or bisexual men who were still maintaining a gay dating profile. It found a remarkable amount of gay men to be tolerant of sexual racism with 96% of participants recall seeing a profile that engaged in some form of racial discrimination. However, 64% agreed that it was OK to indicate a racial preference online, and 46% reported not being bothered with profiles excluding race (Callender, Holt, and Newman, 2015).

In addition to focusing on sexuality and users on dating profiles, scholars have focused their literature on specific minority groups. The impact of sexual racism is significant within the Asian community with online dating applications. In one qualitative study, all participants experienced acts of discrimination, based on their race, while interacting with other online daters. Four subthemes emerged within the context of discrimination and stereotypes. These included: racial rejection, emasculation, and intra-racial discrimination (Peng, 2013). In addition to multiple accounts of emasculation and feminization, Asian men also experience a large amount of racial microaggressions from predominately white users (Bader, 2017). Just like feminization and rejection in Asian men, black men experience some similar themes. Scholars have found that some dating sites will perpetuate these racialized tropes in ads for pornography or post fetishistic ads for racialized sex like those in craigslist ads (Plummer, 2007 Smith, 2012). In addition to

fetishism, some users have witnessed users' profiles riddled with white supremacist rhetoric (Wade, 2018).

Scholars have also positioned sexual racism with mental health outcomes ranging from self-worth and depression to internalized racism. Plummer argues that sexual racism can in turn be subjected to the same internalization as any other form a racism (Plummer, 2007). In addition to internalized racism, Wade describes various ways in which sexual racism can have a significant impact of depressive outcomes and low self-worth (Wade, 2018). With these conversations of mental health outcomes, sexual risk comes into play. Smith argues that since White Men in some scales are deemed the most attractive, that men of color may be more likely to engage in unprotected sex based on this attraction (Smith, 2012).

This literature has opened the conversation of the overwhelming status of sexual racism in online dating spaces. Racial microaggressions, feminization and fetishism follow gay men of color within these online dating spaces. In addition to how sexual racism reveals itself within this online community, it is also plagued with negative mental health outcomes and risky behavior. Though there is some scholarship on sexual racism, a glaring gap in the literature fails to focus on the impact this kind of racism has on relationship formation. What coping strategies do users who experience this kind of discrimination implement? Do these experiences differ from those who use these apps for sex versus those who are actively seeking a relationship? This technology has exponentially changed how gay men connect with each other and though the apps may

center around casual sex interactions, the literature fails to ever examine relationship seekers who are very likely negatively impacted.

Methods

By letting men of color describe their experiences in open ended survey questions, this mixed methods survey study is aiming to add depth to the impact in which men of color experience discrimination on gay dating applications. New data will help shed light on understanding what happens in these online spaces and how these users react and cope with their experiences.

Recruitment

The primary recruitment strategy was to advertise the study on social media. Upon Institutional Review Board approval, gay social media pages on Instagram and Facebook were messaged a script of the study and a link to the survey. It is important to note that many gay social media pages were not receptive to these messages, thus an overwhelming majority of participants who completed the survey came in response to my public postings on my personal Facebook and Instagram pages, reflecting an uneven racial identity and age spread of participants who completed the survey. The survey link was posted with the script so participants could click the link and participate anonymously if they chose. Some participants commented on the public postings that they completed the survey. Instead of commenting publicly some participants chose to private message me on both social media apps with further questions or statements stating they completed the survey. Once I reached 100 eligible participants the survey

was closed and the link from my social medial pages was removed. All responses to the survey were strictly voluntary and anonymous therefore confidentiality was not compromised.

Eligibility

Eligible participants were men who do not identify as White/Caucasian, ages 18 years and older, who resided within the United States or Canada. Eligible participants also needed to currently use or have at one point in their lives used gay dating applications. I purposefully chose not to screen participants based on sexual orientation and focused solely on dating app experiences. This means that men who do not identify as gay were not excluded from participating. Twenty-five men were deemed ineligible for the study. Approximately twenty men were deemed ineligible due to identifying as White/Caucasian. Five men were deemed ineligible due to never using gay dating applications in their lifetime.

Survey

This study used a blended quantitative and qualitative survey to gather data regarding experiences of discrimination on gay dating applications among men of color. The survey was designed to distinguish between relationship seeking app users and sex seeking app users based on the participants answers to a set of closed ended questions. In order to collect more personal experiences of discrimination, open ended questions were created and made available to those participants who reported experiences of discrimination. By doing so, participants were able to give detailed accounts of their

attitudes and experiences of sexual racism and discrimination on dating applications. The survey took approximately 4 – 6 minutes to complete. Survey items included: demographic questions, questions on app usage, partner demographic questions if participants reported being in a relationship, close ended questions on app discrimination, and open-ended questions on experiences of discrimination depending on how the participants answered the close ended questions. No compensation was given, and names or identifying information were not collected. On the survey, all participants agreed to the implied consent statement and were deemed eligible by self-reporting their racial identity and current or previous gay dating application usage. Those that reported their racial identity as solely White/Caucasian were deemed ineligible from the survey and demographic data was deleted. Those that also reported to have never used any gay dating applications in their lifetime were deemed ineligible from the survey and demographic data was deleted. Because the survey was anonymous, none of the participant's confidentiality was compromised and participant's participation was strictly voluntary.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the quantitative survey data from the closed ended questions was tabulated within Qualtrics and recorded for descriptive analysis. The qualitative data was downloaded and coded using open coding to identify common themes and topics. There were 12 codes that were identified from the qualitative data. Four codes were categorized from the experience of discrimination section and consisted of racial microaggressions, exoticized/fetishized, cut off/shut out, and aggressive racism. Four codes were categorized

from the emotional reaction sections; these codes consisted of Numbness, Blocking, Resilience, and Strong Emotions. The remaining four codes were categorized from the attitudes towards dating apps section and consisted of: Caution, Social/Personal Awareness, Negative attitude/Deleted Apps, and Little Impact. These coded themes encompass the majority of qualitative data participants voluntarily shared in the open-ended section of the survey.

Demographics

The demographic breakdown of the participants is as follows: 64% of the participant population identified as Black/African American. 16% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 13% identified as Mixed/Bi-Racial, consisting of White/Native American, Black/Native American, White/Asian, Black/Latino or unspecified, 3% identified as Asian, 3% identified as Middle Eastern/ North African, and 1% identified as Other, unspecified. Age was broken down by ranges, whereas 75% of participants answered that their age range fell between 25 – 34 years old, 17% answered between 18 – 24 years old, 7% answered between 35 – 44 years old, and 1% answered between 45 – 54 years old. All participants resided from various cities spread across 20 states within the US and 2 provinces within Canada which were broken down by region (see table 1).

N = 100

Ethnicity	Percentage	Age Range (Years Old)	Percentage	Geographic Area	Percentage
Black/African American	64%	18 – 24	17%	Pacific West	40%
Hispanic/Latino	16%	25 – 34	75%	Midwest North	2%
Mixed/Bi Racial	13%	35 – 44	7%	Midwest South	7%
Asian	3%	45 – 54	1%	Northeast	32%
Middle Eastern	3%			Southeast	19%
Other	1%				

(Table 1)

App Usage

The variations of app usage were separated into four distinct groups which included current user versus past user, length of app usage, motivations for app usage, and specific apps of use. Starting with current users, 53% of participants currently use gay dating apps as opposed to 47% who have used the apps but do not any longer. With length of app usage, 66% of participants have used these apps for more than 2 years, 7% have used the apps for more than one year, 12% have used the apps from 7 months up to 1 year, 12% have used the apps for 2 months to 6 months or half a year. Lastly, 3% have used the apps for less than a month. Regarding the motivation for using the apps,

participants were given a small list of choices in which they could select more than one answer. The percentages reflected in these responses are based off of all 100 participants answers for each listed choice. Beginning with the highest selected choice, 83% of the participants selected potential dates as motivation for the apps, 74% of participants selected boredom as motivation for the apps. Followed by 68% of participants selecting casual sex/ hookups as motivation. Then 67% selected actively seeking a relationship , 64% selected seeking friends, and 3% selected other and filled in fear of missing out, window shopping, or unspecified and motivations for using the apps. Just like motivation for app usage, specific apps of use allowed the participants to select more than one possible choice. With these listed choices, Grindr took the lead of specific apps participants have used or currently use with 85%. Tinder followed with 66% of participants using the app. Jack'd followed closely with 64% of participants using the app. 57% of participants using Scruff. Dating apps like OKCupid, Growlr, Hornet, Bumble, Surge, Chappy, Match.com, EHarmony and Zoosk all were chosen by 43% or less of the participant pool (See table 2).

Apps Used	Percent of users
Grindr	85%
Jack'd	64%
Tinder	66%
Bumble	19%
Scruff	57%
OKCupid	43%
Growlr	22%
Hornet	19%
Surge	15%
Chappy	15%
Match.com	9%
EHarmony	1%
Zoosk	6%
Other	14%

(Table 2)

Relationship Status

Regarding participants in relationships, 40% of participants answered that they were currently in a relationship, with relationship length ranging from 2 months together to 10 years together. The racial demographic breakdown of the partners of participants currently in a relationship is: 38% White/Caucasian, 23% Hispanic/Latino, 23% Black/African American, 10% Mixed/Bi-Racial, 3% Asian, Middle Eastern/North

African, and Unspecified Other respectively. Regarding where participants found their partners, 57% of participants in a current relationship found their current partners on gay dating applications, while the next highest location was “crossing paths at the gym, store, class etc.” with 21%. Then 10% met through mutual friends and 3% met on a dating site with subscription. Lastly 10% of participants in current relationships chose the other option and filled in “Facebook”, “Instagram”, or “At work” when meeting their current partners.

With 60% of the participants answering that they are not in a current relationship, 64% of that these participants are relationship seeking. However, less than 36% of participants who were not relationship seeking were deemed sex seeking. To be deemed a sex seeker, a participant must have answered NO to seeking a relationship and have selected the motivation for using dating apps as “Casual Sex/Hook up”. With this extra condition, 28% of participants who were not currently in a relationship, and not seeking a relationship were deemed sex seekers.

App Discrimination

The remaining section is broken down into participant’s partner preference, app usage and discrimination. First participants we asked if they prefer their partner to be of the same racial background as them to which 70% of participants answered that it does not matter, while 27% answered No, and 3% answering yes, that they prefer a partner of the same racial background as them. Participants were then asked if they stated in their dating app profiles, that they do not wish to receive messages from men of a specific race

to which 99% of participants answered that they did not state this in their profiles, while 1% did. Participants were then asked if they have seen profiles that excluded their racial identity in which 81% answered that they have seen profiles that excluded them by race. They were then asked if they felt that they received limited messages or responses on dating apps due to their race, to which 57% felt they had, and 27% answered that they were unsure. It is important to note that only 16% of participants answered No to this question. The final question of the survey determined if participants were given the set of qualitative questions. The survey then asked if participants ever felt discriminated against or treated unfairly on dating apps due to their race. Here 67% of participants answered yes, that they felt they have experienced some type of discrimination due to their race. This left 33% saying that they never felt discriminated against personally on gay dating applications.

Experiences of Discrimination

Within the experiences of discrimination section, 4 major themes emerged from data analysis. Racial Microaggressions, Fetishism, Filtering/Exclusion, and Aggressive racism. The most common theme of these four was this whole filtering/exclusion based off race. Many participants stated “No Blacks is very common to see on nonblack guys profiles” or “Sorry, No Asians” when describing what they witness within profiles. However, this theme expands beyond what profiles state. For example, one participant stated: “I was using the Grindr app and I was chatting with a guy and the conversation was going well. I listed everything on my profile with the exception of my race and once he asked for a picture, I sent him one and he blatantly stated: the conversation has been

great but I'm not into black guys. Then he blocked me." This is a more extreme case of racial filtering, though it was not stated in a profile, it is still a distinct example of being cut off/ or blocked solely based on the participants race.

Fetishism/Exotification was another overarching theme emerging from the data. This is where the participants shared instances where racial stereotypes were at play and the sole purposes of being messaged on the apps. For example, one participant stated: "Many men of different races only seem to want to be with me because I'm black and the stereotype about black men and large penises. This didn't become an issue for me until I realized many of these guys aren't interested in me romantically. They are only psychically attracted to a fantasy. This habit, or what I like to call a dog whistle is something I don't experience when communicating with fellow black men." This trope was common throughout the data being that over 60% of the participants were black. However, this theme of fetishism/exotification was not limited to just one race. One participant shares: "I've also been exotified numerous times, stereotyped as the hairy, dominant Arab man." Another participant stated "There were various times where white men expected me to be submissive due to me being Asian and assumed that I like to be told what to do. I find it very uncomfortable when they think they're entitled to be dominate over myself due to my race and dismiss me as a man." These racial tropes appeared throughout the data from those participants who were not cut off or filtered based on their race.

Racial Microaggressions were another common theme that was found throughout the shared discrimination experiences section. Most of the racial microaggressions that

were shared were compliments given to participants with racist undertones. For example one participant shared: “Getting called cute for a black guy, or eventhough you’re black, I’d totally date you.”. Another participant shared: “A Caucasian boy started messaging me, when I looked at his profile it stated (No Hispanic or Middle Eastern) to which I replied why are you messaging me? He replied I don’t usually do this but you’re so cute so...” All of these examples would fall under the category as microinsults meaning verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's racial heritage or identity.

Juxtaposing microinsults, the final theme found within the data is much more aggressive racial assaults within messaging or on profiles. This theme, though less common than the previous three, consists of racial epithets and degrading language based on race. For example one participant stated this: “Monkey, whore, nigger, black bitch are the names I’ve been called because I have turned guys down. I have even been called out my name when I told a guy I thought he was handsome. Most white men hit me up because they assume, I have a big dick. When I tell them I’m not interested is when they use racial slurs.” Though this example is a racist assault via rejection, some of these aggressive racial assaults were part of the filtering/exclusion theme. For example, these participants recollect these racial assaults when messaging: “My profile didn’t have a picture on it at one point in time. This guy messaged me and asked me to send a pic. Once I did he said he doesn’t date niggers and then proceeded to block me.” “I’ve had people tell me they aren’t interested in terrorists (I’m Middle Eastern).” Again, blocking or filtering based on race was a major common theme throughout the data, however these

examples are far more aggressive with the language and were therefore categorized as racial assaults.

Emotional Reactions

After participants shared their experiences with discrimination on the apps, they were asked to describe how they reacted emotionally to these examples. Several different themes emerged from the data: Resiliency, Numbness, Blocking, and Internalization/Mixed emotions. Each of these four themes were fairly equal in how they emerged. Resiliency was one theme that usually stood on its own. This is when participants would state that they were unbothered by the racial discriminatory profiles or messages. Some examples are as followed: “It doesn’t bother me. It is more their loss than mine. I’m the gift.” “I didn’t let it bother me.” “I educate on why that is outstandingly racist and then go on with my life.” “I rolled my eyes and kept it moving.” Within this theme, the participants reacted by dismissing the discrimination and continuing on.

Blocking was another theme that emerged from the data. Here participants would block out the discrimination by blocking the profile. Some participants said things like: “I never argue with them, I usually just either laugh at them or block them.” Or “I just block them instantly, so I don’t have to see their discriminatory expressions whenever I open up my app.” Like resiliency, blocking was another common theme that was on the healthier side of coping with these volatile acts of discrimination.

Numbness is a theme that appeared throughout the data. Here participants would articulate this numb or desensitized feeling in dealing with these discriminatory experiences. Here are how some participants articulated this theme: “I’ve heard it so much I’ve grown numb to feeling sad.” “After a while you become used to it, to the point where it doesn’t register much. I like to think that it didn’t affect me emotionally or cognitively but I’m sure it has an impact.” “It was daunting at first, but I’m numb to it now. It makes me not want to pursue men outside my race. Whenever they reach out, I have my guard up.” “First it hurts like hell, but after a while you become numb to it.” This numb or desensitizing to these experiences is what distinguishes this theme from resiliency.

The final theme that appeared throughout the data was what I titled as Strong Emotions. These are feelings of frustration, sadness, anger, any type of strong emotion that the participants shared regarding these experiences of discrimination. Here are some of their responses: “Anytime something like this happened I felt worthless and invisible. Age has tempered that somewhat but hasn’t lessened the sting.” “I was offended and hurt that someone would even state something like that.” “Honestly it’s a bunch of mixed emotions, it generally fucks up your self-esteem” “Usually I keep it pushing, but every now and again it weighs on me. Its just disappointing that I wouldn’t even be given a chance. It’s frustrating that people are willing to write off an entire race.” These responses contain a significant amount of feeling an emotion whilst blocking, resiliency and numbness were themes that dismissed any kind of emotion.

Attitudes towards dating apps

The last four themes deal with attitudes towards dating applications. The themes consisted of Caution, Social Awareness, Little Impact, and Deleted Apps. The first of the themes is caution. Caution was a theme that emerged from the data where participants would describe a certain type of caution within the apps or dating in general. Some examples being: “It just made me be more cautious when chatting with people online. Nothing against the site itself, but definitely made me more guarded or protective of myself.” Or “I am very cautious about people’s intentions now. I feel on edge when I get certain messages.”

Social Awareness was another common theme that emerged from the data. This theme included some bigger picture or social or self-awareness that was distinct from just using the apps with caution. For instance this participant states “It made me realize my self-worth and how I value myself too much to waste time talking with people like this.” Or this participant claims: “This really just confirmed all the prejudices people have still in 2018.” This awareness can even be applied to the apps themselves like one participant stated: “Sometimes, even though I have multiple hookup apps, I switch over to Jack’d since it is primarily African American men using it. The likelihood of be being turned down for being black is very low.”

Little impact was a theme that appeared throughout these responses. This theme is in reference to the experiences of discrimination not affecting the attitudes of participants using these apps. For example some participants statements are as followed: “This didn’t

really stop me from using the apps at all, if anything it helps me weed out the douchebags.” “This had no effect on me. Racism is something that’s not limited to face to face interactions.” “It doesn’t. There are people in this world that think that way, so I let it go.” This theme was focused on the participants attitudes of dating apps, and if there was little to no impact like the previous examples then they were coded as their experiences as having little impact.

The last theme within this section was Deleted apps. This is where the participant stated that the toxicity on the apps or their experience was enough to make them delete the app or specific app. For example, these participants shared their reasoning in deleting the apps: “I deleted the app and stayed off other dating apps because of it. I rarely get on now because I know I’m just wasting my time. Even if I try to be friends with people on these apps they prefer light skin or white friends only. I’m even cautious of going to the clubs here because I’m pretty sure I’d be wasting my time there too.” “I deleted the app after that happened and had a pretty good year until I started dabbling in dating apps again.” “I honestly stopped using them as much anymore. It seems like a waste of time to even try and find someone if there is a whites/light skin only barrier. It feels hopeless.” Comments like deleting or limiting the usage of these apps after their experiences were just as common as the other three themes of this section.

Discussion

The examination of experiences of racism among gay male dating app users is an important one. Given the large numbers of men who rely on apps for sex and dating, it is

important to ensure safety for all users. Overall, men of color experience high rates of discrimination when using dating apps and the emotional impact is substantial.

Participants report a range of coping strategies when faced with blatant racism as well as microaggressions but many are left feeling rejected and violated. The present study aimed to shed light on who is most vulnerable and identify factors to reduce discrimination and racism among male dating app users of color.

Relationship Seekers versus Sex Seekers

Several distinctions are noteworthy. Specifically, distinguishing relationship seekers and sex seekers on dating apps is an important one. Many of these dating applications are solely focused on quick hookups and give users a radius of available men in the area. Were men seeking relationships treated differently than men seeking sex? The present findings suggest that men seeking relationships were not treated any differently regarding experiences of discrimination than men seeking sex. This is important to note because these applications can hide behind the fact that they are designed for quick casual sex. If there is no varying degree of difference between experiences of discrimination between sex seekers or relationship seekers than this suggests that sexual racism is an issue regardless of the user's intentions for the app. This is significant because these instances of sexual racism have gone unchecked by these app developers for years. The apps cannot hide behind hookup culture as an excuse to do nothing, if those that participate in hookup culture still experiences the same degree of discrimination as those who are seeking a relationship. This means that these dating applications, like that of

Grindr, need to be held accountable on their silence and reluctance of action on combating this issue that plagues their app.

Racism versus Preference

Many white app users hide behind the notion that these instances of filtering/exclusion are based on preference. It is just what they are attracted to, that they cannot fathom being attracted to a difference race. It is not racism; it is just a preference. This is not only far from reality, but it is also a problematic way of thinking which is why sexual racism is still apparent on these apps. The results do not support that people of color participate in this “racial preference” or simply do not advertise it within the same degree on dating apps. 99% of the participants answered that they do not racially filter in their personal profiles, which is significantly high, if advertising racial preference was a social accepted practice on these apps. Furthermore, only 3% of participants disclosed that they personally prefer their partners to be the same racial background as them. Again, this clearly disproves this trope that racial filtering on profiles is a justifiable response to filtering out an entire race. Conversely, 81% of participants have seen profiles that exclude their race. Based on this data set, publicly justifying this trope of “racial preference” is merely an outlet for white men to disguise their racism and nothing more.

Health Outcomes

Though this study did not focus on health outcomes specifically, some of the data can be interpreted as suggesting various forms of mental health outcomes. For example

this participant that states: “After a while you become used to it, to the point where it doesn’t register much. I like to think that it didn’t affect me emotionally or cognitively but I’m sure it has an impact.” This participant openly stated that the degree of the discrimination they have witness on these apps may have affected them emotionally and cognitively. With this, certain themes in the emotional reaction and attitudes towards dating apps sections may influence work in which health outcomes mental and physical can be attributed to discrimination on dating apps. If we look at the theme of numbness, we can see that this type of desensitization is not a positive outcome when exposed to discrimination. As we saw with resiliency, this was the most positive reaction to discrimination. Participants were not hung up on what they experienced, it did not deter them from using apps or finding partners. However, those who “became numb” to these experiences tended to have negative attitudes towards the dating apps. With this, it is a fair assumption that this can be a potential negative health outcome. If 57% of participants found their current partners on dating apps, then the apps may hold a significant amount of weight within relationship seekers in their pursuit on finding a partner. These negative experiences causing participants to delete the apps, means that they are deleting something that is limiting their chances of finding a partner, if, they originally view the app as effective tool in finding a partner. For example, this participant states “I honestly stopped using them as much anymore. It seems like a waste of time to even try and find someone if there is a whites/light skin only barrier. It feels hopeless.” With this, it is a fair assumption that this “feeling numb” or desensitization from discrimination can have a negative health outcome.

Study Limitations

There are various limitations on any research study, and this study is no exception. It is important to note that the participants recruited for the study were based on my own personal networks on social media rather than more vastly inclusive networks, thus the demographic data reflects this uneven distribution of race, age range, and area of the United States. It is also important to note the potential limitations to me being white, conducting this research. Since I did use my own personal social media pages on Instagram and Facebook, this could visibly deter participants from participating regardless of the survey being anonymous. The qualitative section of the survey could be viewed as a possible limitation simply because it relied on the sole responses of participants filling it out within a survey setting. Lastly, the sample size of 100 could be considered a limitation because it is a convenience sample and not representative of the overall population.

Conclusion

This study shows that experiences of discrimination are equally felt by men seeking sex and men seeking relationships. This present study also suggests that racial filtering on profiles or messages is not a common practice within gay and bisexual men of color. Like the data states, 99% of participants have never excluded a race within their profiles. This study also suggests that the experiences of discrimination on dating apps may lead to negative emotional reactions and attitudes towards dating apps. In addition, these reactions and attitudes could lead to negative health outcomes. Based on these

findings, there is a lot to consider in future studies. One particular consideration would be evaluating the impact of the Kindr campaign. Did this have an impact? Does the app function differently now? Do we see fewer profiles of “racial preference” or fewer messages of racist undertones? Another strong consideration for future studies would be comparing the apps with experiences of discrimination. The dating app Tinder was the 2nd highest app uses by participants. This app has a completely different interface on how users match and interact with other users. Do participants experience less discrimination on apps the follow Tinder’s interface than that of Grindr’s? The dating app Jack’d has a similar design to that of Grindr and was the 3rd most popular. However, as one participant describes: “Sometimes, even though I have multiple hookup apps, I switch over to Jack’d since it is primarily African American men using it. The likelihood of be being turned down for being black is very low.” With this, does it mean that Jack’d would harbor fewer instances of discrimination simply because of the different users demographics? One last consideration for future research would be bridging the data on experiences of discrimination and directly linking it to mental and physical health outcomes like those of depression, anxiety, and internalized racism. One thing that remains certain is that the toxicity that plagues gay dating applications has got to change as soon as possible.

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