Swiping, Stealthing & Catfishing

Dating & Hookup Apps in the Media

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Safety, Risk & Wellbeing on Dating Apps
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We pay respects to the traditional custodians of all the lands on which we work, and acknowledge their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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Executive summary

Popular media reporting of health and wellbeing issues can shape public opinion. Media narratives also influence research, policy and practice in relation to health services, health education and health promotion. Consequently, the Safety, Risk and Wellbeing on Dating Apps project team undertook an analysis of media reports relating to dating and hookup apps, in order to better understand the ways apps and app use are currently debated and discussed in public spaces.

The use of apps such as Tinder and Grindr have drawn significant popular media attention. News reportage often focuses on the negative aspects of apps, often associating them with sexual abuse, rape, extortion, harassment, sexually transmissible infections (STIs), and poor mental health. In contrast, emerging ‘social news’ platforms and entertainment-focused news genres adopt a less risk-focused approach.

This report adopts an analytical approach grounded in the disciplines of media and communication and cultural studies. It maps key themes, but does not seek to confirm nor challenge the factual accuracy of news media claims about dating and hookup apps.

Based on a one-year snapshot of news media coverage from Australia, UK, and the USA, we identified three key categories of news articles relating to dating and hookup apps: Risk, Wellbeing, and Safety and Play.

We further unpacked key articles from each theme to illustrate the range of media conversations we found. When foregrounding risk, many articles report on crimes associated with app use. Others highlight harassment, and the misuse of personal data and privacy violation. Health and wellbeing are also widely canvassed, often drawing direct connections between STI transmission and app use.

Significantly, our findings highlight the high volume of more positive, supportive, and educational accounts of app use, which focus on strategies for supporting user safety and wellbeing. These stories offer a departure from risk-based accounts of app use that may be of value to sex and relationship educators, health promotion professionals, clinicians, policy-makers, youth workers and other professionals.

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations for professionals developing health campaigns, resources or interventions relating to the use of dating and hookup apps:

1. Be aware of individual and organisational levels of ‘digital media literacy’ – including knowledge and skills relating to news genres and social media.

2. Seek professional development and capacity building opportunities in order to better understand and respond to digital dating and relationship practices among the communities you work with.

3. Understand how popular media discussions of dating and hookup app use may conflate app use with STI transmission and other ‘health risks’ without evidence.

4. Draw on existing popular media genres when developing content for health campaigns, programs and resources that relate to digital cultures of sex and dating.

For more information regarding this project, please contact the Lead Chief Investigator, Professor Kath Albury: kalbury@swin.edu.au.
Introduction

This report aims to inform and support professionals developing health campaigns, resources or interventions to cut through and move beyond popular media narratives regarding dating and hookup apps. It also examines these media narratives in order to better understand the cultural context of app use in Australia and elsewhere.

Apps such as Grindr and Tinder have inspired significant popular media attention. Media reports often associate these apps with sexual assault and harassment, blackmail scams, breaches of personal data privacy, mental health impacts, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

There is, however, little evidence regarding the role apps currently play in users’ everyday negotiations of consent, personal safety, condom use, contraception, and other aspects of sexual health and wellbeing. Risk-focused media reporting obscures understandings of how dating apps integrate into users’ everyday lives.

This report is the first public output from the Safety, Risk and Wellbeing on Dating Apps project, an Australian Research Council funded Linkage partnership between researchers at Swinburne University of Technology, the University of Sydney, ACON Health, and Family Planning NSW.

Using qualitative and quantitative methods grounded in the disciplines of media and communication and cultural studies, our project explores users’ perspectives and experiences of dating and hookup apps. In doing so, it seeks to build an evidence-base to assist the scoping and strategic planning of health promotion campaigns targeting Australian dating app users.

This report focuses on the dominant media sources that generate a significant space for public discussion – producing and circulating shared knowledge, anxieties, and experiences. These sources tell us a lot about what matters to people regarding health, wellbeing, risk, and safety in dating and hookup app use.

Our focus is on public discourse, or how audiences (including both health professionals and laypeople) are oriented to think about dating and hookup apps and their social impact through news and online media content.

Rather than seeking to confirm or directly challenge the factual accuracy of online news articles, this report maps common themes occurring in public media conversations about dating and hookup app uses in Australia, USA, and UK.

The digital media ecosystem has seen dynamic change since the rise of what has been called web 2.0. Reliance on print newspaper, television, and radio journalism seems to have declined as social media platforms such as Facebook have come to dominate a ‘post-broadcast’ era.

However, prominent news, information, and opinion sources (such as the Sydney Morning Herald or the Washington Post) remain critical conduits of public knowledge and facilitate debate and discussion. The major commercial daily news sites attract significant audiences – with top sites attracting between 50 and 100 million unique monthly visitors.¹

A number of social news sites like Buzzfeed – a platform that rose to fame for its highly shareable pop culture listicles (list-based articles) and quizzes – are included in our analysis. Hurcombe and colleagues (2019) define social news as ‘born-digital’. These news sites tend toward editorial policies that depart from traditional news values such as objectivity and ‘balance’, leaning, instead towards a ‘strong and explicit positionality’ (Hurcombe, Burgess & Harrington 2019, 1).
Platforms such as BuzzFeed, Junkee and Vice media deliberately blur the boundaries between entertainment content and classic news reporting – indeed BuzzFeed Australia has broken significant news stories in recent years.

The emergence of these platforms has an impact on the evolution of news as ‘spreadable’ or shareable media (Jenkins et al. 2018). Subject matter like dating – and dating apps – are treated both as news and as ‘relatable’ social content on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, with implications for public discussions of health and wellbeing.

As Briggs and Hallin (2016) observe, news reporting does not simply convey ‘myths’ or ‘facts’ regarding health and wellbeing. Health researchers, health policy-makers, health care providers and laypeople alike define health ‘problems’ (and their potential solutions) with reference to media narratives. This process is most striking in relation to the reporting of epidemics and public health crises – such as HIV or Ebola – but is also evident in ‘lifestyle’ reporting of health and wellbeing issues.

Following Briggs and Hallin, we suggest that an analysis of news reporting can help us better understand the ways that dating apps are associated with health and wellbeing concerns.

Due to the relatively recent emergence of dating and hookup apps, it is fair to surmise that the majority of health and education professionals (including policy-makers) have had limited access to academic evidence relating to app use. While some may use apps themselves, this cannot be assumed. Consequently, we began our inquiry with the following questions:

**RQ1.** What are the dominant themes for articles substantially discussing dating apps and their uses?

**RQ2.** How are risk, safety, and wellbeing characterised in news media conversations?

**RQ3.** Are there cultural or geographical differences in the ways that dating apps are discussed in Australia, USA, and the UK?

**RQ4.** How have the concepts ‘dating app’ and ‘hookup app’ permeated more broadly as a cultural referent for digitally mediated relationships?

By mapping the public discussions about dating and hookup apps, a systematic media analysis can provide professionals developing health campaigns, resources or interventions with a sense of the dominant themes and nuanced understandings already in circulation.

Our findings highlight the prevalence of positive, supportive, and educational accounts of app use, suggesting potential communication strategies for health promotion and education.

**About this report**

After providing Background research and details of our Methodology for this study, the report presents an overview of the key categories of media content to emerge through systematic analysis: Foregrounding Risk; Considering Wellbeing; and Exploring Safety & play as pedagogy. A detailed appraisal of these topics follows.

These themes are mapped across the three source locations (Australia, UK, and USA) in the Global trends section.

The Discussion that follows focuses on using the findings as a starting point to inform discussions of dating and hookup app use in a range of settings and contexts, including sexual health clinical practice, sexual health education, health promotion and youth work. This is followed by our practical Recommendations.

This report does not examine subcultural or ‘alternative’ digital sources such as targeted LGBTQ+ news platforms.
Background

Dating & hookup apps in the research landscape

A wide range of new profile-matching and location-oriented apps offer popular tools for facilitating dating and sexual hookups. As early as 2014, Forbes reported that users of Tinder worldwide ‘now swipe through 1.2 billion Tinder profiles a day, and that each day, Tinder makes more than 15 million matches’ (Bertoni, cited in Albury 2017, p. 83).

As apps like Tinder, Grindr and Bumble have come to achieve a level of mainstream utility in connecting young people seeking relationships, dating, and sex, they have become the focus of research aiming to monitor and understand the health outcomes of new sexual practices, particularly among younger populations and those vulnerable to health risks.

Health researchers have addressed the use of dating and hookup apps in association with ‘sexual risk behaviours’ (Landovitz et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2012; Winetrobe et al. 2014), primarily in the context of HIV prevention among men who have sex with men (MSM). Other health risks discussed in relation to dating and hookup app use include risks of substance use (Holloway 2015), body dissatisfaction (Goedel et al. 2016), and mental health disorders (Turban et al. 2017).

Researchers have also identified personal safety as a concern within app use and online dating – particularly women and MSM. Bauermeister and colleagues (2010) found that MSM were more concerned by the risk of physical violence than risks to sexual health. Albury and Byron (2014, 2016) found that same-sex attracted young people associated hookup apps with risks of outing and online harassment.

Research examining straight/heterosexual hookup app users in still emergent, and tends to explore risky sexual behaviours (Sawyer, Smith & Benotsch 2018), increased incidents of STIs (Enomoto, Noor & Widner 2017) and gendered abuse (Choi, Wong & Fong 2018; Gillett 2018).

Aside from sexual health risks among straight app users, breaches of privacy and ‘revenge porn’ or image-based abuse in relation to apps have been addressed within the fields of criminology, legal studies, and media studies research (March et al. 2017; Thompson 2018; Vitis & Gilmour 2017).

Trans and non-binary/genderfluid people’s experiences of dating and hookup apps have, to date, been under-represented in research literature.

A growing body of research in the fields of sociology, media and communication and cultural studies has begun to explore the transformation of intimacy and the mediation of relationships from more diverse and often positive perspectives (e.g. Duguay 2017; Hobbs, Owen & Gerber 2017; Møller & Petersen 2018).

We note that research focused solely on potential risks may miss an opportunity to engage with the full range of media content discussing dating and hookup apps. Such research further overlooks the context of public discussion that can feed into supportive approaches to navigating digitally-mediated dating and intimacy. Consequently, this project seeks to not only explore the risks associated with app use, but to engage with app users’ own strategies for enhancing their personal safety and wellbeing. Our methodology is outlined in the following section.
Methodology

Media as a source of public conversation

Media content analysis has been carried out since the early days of mass broadcast media to provide an understanding of the predominant (and alternative) ways of discussing issues of public concern. This can involve both quantitative and qualitative approaches, drawing data from a set of news media sources over a defined time period.

Recent approaches to media content analysis acknowledge the increasing complexity of the digital media ecosystem and seek to track the production and flow of ideas, information (and misinformation), attention, and public engagement across a wide range of channels. Focus is placed on the levers of influence and the individuals or institutions that influence public debates through social media channels and help to circulate news media content.

New research tools have been developed to provide targeted online news media analysis. For this report, we have used Media Cloud (mediacloud.org) in combination with NVivo qualitative analysis software, to extract, explore and map media sources related to dating and hookup apps.¹

Our research aimed to generate an objective snapshot of contemporary news and popular online media sites’ accounts of dating and hookup apps.

The primary research questions are:

**RQ1.** What are the dominant themes for articles substantially discussing dating apps and their uses?

**RQ2.** How are risk, safety, and wellbeing characterised in news media conversations?

**RQ3.** Are there cultural or geographical differences in the ways that dating apps are discussed in Australia, USA, and the UK?

**RQ4.** How have the concepts ‘dating app’ and ‘hookup app’ permeated more broadly as a cultural referent for digitally mediated relationships?

While news stories may be shared globally, concerns and assumptions regarding app use may vary according to geographical and cultural contexts. Consequently, the third research question targets the simultaneous global and local nature of digital media content.

Finally, while we focus on media content about dating and hookup app use, our linguistic approach refers to ‘the expression of the speaker’s or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions’ presented (Thompson & Hunston, cited in Bednarek 2006, p. 3).

An extensive array of media discussion does not directly relate to dating app use, but instead connects the phenomena of apps - or the notion of ‘swiping right’ or ‘hooking up’ - with broader changes to the culture and practices of dating, relationships and casual sex. For this reason, our fourth question reflects dating apps’ broader cultural context.

See Appendix 1 for full details about the research methods, data collection and results.
Findings

Depicting dating & hookup apps: From health risks & crime to playful learning

In a crowded media landscape, publications aim to grab attention and channel public interests and fears. The goal is to strike a chord with a set of common or popular beliefs, interests and social concerns, often (but not always), with reference to a selection of actual events and lived experiences.

In the case of dating and hookup apps, the array of public perspectives is perhaps not as negative or limited in range as might be expected. At a top level, our dataset can be divided into three main themes of relevance to this study: Risk, Wellbeing, and Safety and Play.

Figure 1 (next page) maps the three key themes, along with subthemes, that we found in our selected sample of 300 articles.

In our detailed analysis of articles covering the themes of Risk, Wellbeing, and Safety and Play, we explore specific examples and explain two main aspects – the articles’ focus (i.e. their content), and their stance on, or evaluation of, dating and hookup apps and user experiences.

As these articles were published within a twelve-month period, they cannot be seen as representative of all media reportage on dating and hookup apps. In some cases, these articles reflect a surge of interest in high-profile incidents such as app-related court cases that occurred at a specific time. We note, too, that many articles reflect more than one of the three key themes.

To focus on answering our research questions, we have excluded two other groups of articles that fell under our themes of App Technologies (articles more focused on apps’ features or the parent companies’ business models), and Peripheral Mentions (where dating and hookup apps are mentioned in passing but are not central to the discussion).

The headlines for Risk-themed articles show a heavy focus on harassment, scams or privacy breaches, and Wellbeing-themed articles cover STI outbreaks, ‘epidemics’ of mental ill-health, or loneliness associated with dating apps.

However, we want to emphasise the equally dominant presence and popularity of articles that take a pedagogical stance, offering insights into how to negotiate or master app use. Many of those articles portray the lighter side of app use cultures. In each case, including those articles focused on Risk and Wellbeing, the stance taken is not straightforwardly negative.
Figure 1. Proportion of articles coded to dominant themes and sub-themes, with example headlines and location of publication (n = 300)
Foregounding risk

A distinct set of articles associate, and often sensationalise, a number of risks with dating and hookup app use. Headlines feature phrases like ‘Tinder rapist’ or ‘Grindr scammer’.

However, while such headlines paint a clearly negative picture of the apps and their use, the stance taken by each article varies greatly.

Often there is an ambiguity around where the blame or social problem is located. The stance taken by these articles can place blame with individuals, with the apps’ corporate owners (e.g. Grindr or Tinder – especially in relation to security and privacy breaches), with the design features of apps, with societal trends concerning racism and misogyny, or even with generational attitudes to dating, casual sex and relationships in the digital age.

Key themes revolve around crime, harassment and breaches of privacy relating to personal data. Of the first category, ‘crime’ most commonly included ‘catfishing’ (false profiles used to lure users for a range of purposes), extortion and blackmail, stalking, sexual assault, homophobic violence and violence against women by men – including murder.

Articles about harassment address unsolicited sexual messages and images and offer first-person perspectives on experiences of abuse via dating apps. Articles on personal data and privacy deal with data breaches by apps, disclosure of Grindr users’ HIV status to third party apps, and concerns regarding catfishing and other scams.

Crime

A number of articles report on crimes associated with app use. The emphasis on the role of dating apps in these crimes shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the app. Often the articles simply pair app use with instances of violence against women and patterns of abusive behaviour and gendered violence more widely, involving men who were known to the victim, usually an ex-partner or someone they had dated.

However, the added detail that the perpetrator met the victim through a dating app was foregrounded in the reporting of the crime, through headline phrases such as ‘Tinder rapist’ (Cooper 2018) or ‘Stalker back in jail... after failed Tinder date’ (Kidd 2018). Some articles emphasised that a crime followed an infidelity discovered through (or suspected because of) the partner’s app use, and some headlines, such as ‘Woman goes missing after posting about upcoming Tinder date’ (Brennan 2017), foregrounded the victim’s app use.

Several articles reported on ‘stealthing’ (the practice of removing a condom during sex without a partner’s consent), with a spike in conversations about whether stealthing should be officially classified as a form of sexual assault. In one news article (Golloyan 2017), stealthing is referred to as a ‘new sex trend’ linked to Tinder and casual sex.

Stealthing also appears in coverage of a case in the UK, in which a HIV positive man was charged with deliberately infecting partners he met through Grindr by falsifying his serostatus and tampering with condoms (Keay 2017; Thompson & Mills 2017). This trial was covered in a sensationalised way by the UK press.

A US opinion article (Cracker 2017) provides an account of the practice of removing condoms during sex in the context of gay men’s sexual cultures and ‘the psychic fallout of the AIDS epidemic more broadly’, reframing the practice as ‘bareback brinksmanship’, and linking in with debates about the use of PrEP (the Pre-exposure Prophylaxis drug preventing HIV transmission). This article takes a first-person perspective and emphasises the need to ‘discuss’ rather than ‘criminalise’ the practice and associated contexts.

A cluster of news articles cover cases of extortion, blackmail, and violence against gay men by homophobic individuals or groups who contacted them on Grindr using fake profiles. Two Australian cases were covered: one involving a group of Perth teenagers who met with gay men from Grindr to rob and bash them (Jail for two who lured gay men to bashings 2017), and the high-profile case of a Canberra teenager who used Grindr for extortion, leading to the suicide of one of
the men targeted (Dingwall 2017; Grindr scammer sentenced to six months’ detention for blackmail 2017).

A UK newspaper also covered a case of a vigilante group entrapping a man on Grindr by pretending to be underage (Smith 2017). Entrapment was presented across a range of scenarios as a common risk associated with the location and hookup functionality of apps.

Revenge porn, or image-based abuse, was also reported in cases of extortion and blackmail. In one Australian article, coverage of the ACT Greens’ push to legislate against image-based abuse (Gorey 2017) referenced the extortion of gay men on Grindr. Discussions of image-based abuse most commonly referred to the practice of ‘catfishing’ or falsifying one’s identity via stolen profile pictures (for example in Lusher 2017).

Media coverage of the use of image-based abuse in catfishing was framed as a public warning, with headlines such as The terrifying Tinder scam catching out countless Australians (Foster 2018).

**Harassment**

Harassment frequently featured as a risky consequence of using dating and hookup apps. A number of news and human-interest articles outlined cases of women receiving unsolicited sexual messages and ‘dick pics’ on Tinder (Hartley-Parkinson 2017; Jones 2017), with the latter also being sent via Apple’s Airdrop (Bluetooth) feature (Dunn 2017).

A range of first-person articles offered insight into experiences of harassment and discrimination online (including sexual racism and HIV stigma on gay apps (Nichols 2017; Wong 2017); and using Tinder as a trans woman (Dawson 2017), or as a person with a chronic health condition (Young 2017).

Both reportage and firsthand accounts of app use emphasised the discriminatory attitudes and abuse experienced in Grindr chat and on Grindr dates.

A Huffington Post AU article (Nichols 2017), for example, reports on the ‘Real Conversations of Grindr’ campaign launched by the HIV Foundation Queensland, which addresses abusive and stigmatising messages received by HIV-positive Grindr users. In one op-ed, the author cautions that the ‘ghosting, bad behaviour and dick pics’ which he sees as characterising Grindr could migrate to Tinder (Ewart 2017), implicitly warning straight users.

**Personal data and privacy**

This category included coverage of Grindr’s security flaws in relation to personal information, location data, and its exposure of HIV status to third party apps in March 2018 (Dirnhuber 2018; Fernando 2018; Kimball 2018; Wong 2018).

One story outlined a Tinder breach in which 40,000 images were stolen to train Artificial Intelligence in image recognition (Papenfuss 2017). These articles place fault with the apps’ corporate owners, but also suggest that disclosure of personal information is itself risky and problematic. Little attention is paid, for example, to the benefits of dating apps allowing for open conversations and upfront information about sexual health and safety.
Considering wellbeing

The category of wellbeing emerges out of a set of articles that associate dating and hookup apps with a range of issues concerning sexual health and mental health, along with reference to drugs and drug use, and health research relating to app use.

Generally, articles focusing on sexual health discussed increases in STIs, and various issues relating to HIV transmission and HIV status particularly among MSM app users. Mental health was raised as an issue for many app users in relation to anxiety, loneliness and depression, and as a barrier to authenticity, intimacy and sociality.

Sexual health

The stance taken by this cluster of articles towards the apps and their users is often ambiguous. Most focus on the ways sexual practices and activities are changing, and the associated health issues. In these articles, apps and their use are often understood as enabling factors.

Sexual health was most commonly represented through an emphasis on STI risk linked to dating app use (Graham 2018; Jones 2017). Typically, ‘online dating’ or use of dating and hookup apps is taken as one headline factor amongst others linked to increased STI rates, including the rise in the number of visitors to Australia (e.g. ‘with over 640,000 backpackers’ who are thought to engage in ‘risky’ practices such as ‘having multiple sexual partners without protection while using drugs and alcohol’) (Jones 2017).

One article points to the platforms themselves as responsible for health intervention, praising the apps that facilitate health promotion campaigns or partnerships with health organisations, but declares in its headline: Tinder and Grindr don’t want to talk about their role in rising STIs (Belluz 2017). Elsewhere, increased incidents of gonorrhoea are blamed on dating and hookup apps: ‘Irresponsible online dating is to be blamed for the rising STI rates’ (Jones 2017).

Where the articles we categorised as addressing wellbeing were most positive and offered the most in terms of public pedagogy (or learning through shared firsthand accounts), they tended to look more to personal and firsthand experiences.

Public health trials in Australia, the UK and USA, making the HIV prevention drug PrEP widely available for MSM, were cited, linking this to changing cultures of dating, sex and hookup app use (Cracker 2017).

In a feature article titled Sex without fear – my experiment with the HIV-prevention drug PrEP (Cain 2017) a UK journalist documented his first weeks of using PrEP and explored cultures of communicating HIV status on gay dating apps. The piece considers some of the negative or cautious responses the author received after changing his Grindr profile to HIV-negative and taking PrEP, raising issues around intimacy and negotiating consent for unprotected sex. A detailed account of PrEP, its side effects and the screening and testing regime of PrEP trials is also given.

Mental health

Mental health is referenced both directly and indirectly in a number of articles concerned with intimacy, trauma, depression, anxiety, social exclusion and loneliness. Wellbeing and app use are entwined in these articles as they explore the negative emotional and mental health experiences associated with dating apps, hooking up, and contemporary mediated relationships in general.

Common themes include gay men’s vulnerability to body dissatisfaction or unhappiness about their appearance, and pressure from within the community, said to be fuelled by porn and Grindr profile pics – ‘40 percent of the images on the site were of faceless, buffed torsos’ as one article informant recounts (Romensky 2017).

In a range of first-person think pieces, hookup apps are viewed as contributing to loneliness and a decline in ‘gay community’ and associated intimacy and social support. An article on What it’s like
to be gay in Cleveland (2017) takes a firsthand perspective, describing experiences of negativity, animosity, isolation, rejection, social exclusion and cliques enabled by social media and dating and hookup apps.

As mentioned in relation to the theme of harassment, the effects of stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive app users within MSM app cultures was addressed in an Australian project highlighting the ‘horrific messages HIV-positive people receive on Grindr,’ (Nichols 2017).

A widely-shared feature article in the Huffington Post (Hobbs 2017) explores what it calls The epidemic of gay loneliness through a number of firsthand accounts, as well as through reference to a range of research findings highlighting high rates of mental illness among LGBTQ+ people. The author attributes a decline in gay community to the ‘shocking primacy of hookup apps in gay life... For many of us, they have become the primary way we interact with other gay people’ (Hobbs 2017). The article frames MSM hookup apps as fostering cultures of prejudice and bullying, eroding intimacy, and contributing to users’ negative self-image. The author foregrounds his own experiences, noting that he has ‘been in and out of therapy more times than I’ve downloaded and deleted Grindr’ (Hobbs 2017). This captures a commonly expressed concern about Grindr and its capacity to facilitate ‘healthy’ connections and relationships.

It is not only gay dating cultures that are associated with anxiety, negativity and mental health issues. Several articles highlight pressures on single people around Valentine’s Day and urge safety and restraint in Tinder use (Levin 2018; O’Neill 2018; Stevenson 2018). Another warns that ‘swiping through [Tinder] makes you unhappy about your body’ (Weston 2017), linking the app to poor body image and low self-esteem among heterosexual users.

Anxieties regarding heteronormativity are also present in a piece in The Sun which references changing gender roles and ‘sexually-liberated women,’ and describes Tinder as ‘toxic’ to straight men, saying access to sex without commitment makes them feel ‘burnt out, bored – and lonely’ and ‘like prostitutes’ (Daubney 2017). Given the tabloid source, it is likely this article was designed to be clickable as an ‘ironic’ outcome of the success of hookup apps in facilitating sex.
How to stay safe & play

A significant number of articles concern what we refer to as safety and play. That is, they take a more explicitly positive, entertaining or educative stance toward dating and hookup apps and their use. Their stance can be described as ‘how to’ – meaning they present as resources for learning about, understanding, or mastering app use and online dating.

We relate this cluster of articles to safety and play because they directly or indirectly aim to create shared knowledge about cultures of app use, or comment on particular negative uses of apps and help readers navigate the ‘horror stories’ or design features of different apps. This is often achieved through the context of play, humour, or relatable entertainment.

A significant number of articles draw from press releases featuring research undertaken by dating app companies, such as RedHotPie’s statistics on the time of year when most breakups occur (Sichlau 2017), or Happn’s data about which nationalities are ‘most likely to cheat on holiday’ (Riches 2017) and which universities have the ‘most attractive’ students (Shammas 2017).

‘How to’ articles and ‘listicles’ often document incidences and recognisable tropes of unappealing or bad behaviour on dating apps, usually written by women who date men. This can be self-descriptions (for example, a satirical glossary of men’s off-putting Tinder bio phrases) (Bastow 2017), or choice of photos, as discussed in I am a Tinder guy holding a fish and I will provide for you (Collier 2017), which satirises men’s profile pictures.

An Instagram account called Reasons we’re not dating, which lists bad dates experienced by three women who date men, is profiled in an article that frames the ‘dating disasters’ around the uptake of apps (Bowman 2018).

Listicles such as Ten spectacular Tinder moments (Brancatisano 2017) offer screengrabs of inept, creepy or sexist chat. Gendered entitlement in dating app cultures is exemplified in stories such as the man who sent a woman a bill for their first Tinder date after she didn’t reply to his messages (Knox 2018).

Another set of articles offers positive advice on how to use apps well, such as those focusing on funny or most successful chat-up lines (Chan 2017). Unsurprisingly, BuzzFeed in the USA, along with UK tabloids, offer many articles taking this kind of stance, appealing to younger readers likely to use apps and open to such tips.

One BuzzFeed piece offers: Create a Grindr profile and we’ll tell you what your best quality is (Del Valle 2017). Dating app platforms themselves play a role in offering methods for understanding cultures of app use by providing data on popular users, such as an article outlining the UK’s ‘15 most wanted singles’, drawing on data produced by Happn (Millington 2017).

Positive pedagogies are also generated by app companies taking a clear stance in relation to users’ behaviour, as shown in a story about Bumble’s open letter to a ‘sexist’ user who was barred from use after writing abusive messages to a woman on the app (Mullin 2017).

Visual communication and play

In many articles, dating apps are positioned as producing unique problems with communication and relationships.

Some pieces coin new terms, such as ‘kittenfishing’ (app profile pictures which make you look younger than in real life) (Moss 2017), or ‘roaching,’ described as a ‘dating trend to be wary of, especially if you use online apps’ in which relationships remain deliberately undefined and the partner continues to date other people via apps without explicitly saying so (Rebello 2017). Each deal with what might be considered app-based relationship practices to be cautious of. These articles produce rather than reflect dating app terminology, and work to generate a sense of expertise or literacy to better understand digital dating and hookup cultures.

Emoji use is an aspect of in-app communication that was referenced in
several articles which explored new ‘gaymoji’, a set of custom emojis launched by Grindr (Trebay 2017). This ‘gaymoji’ set included symbols for PrEP use and various sexual practices and was reported to cause some controversy among app users, particularly for its lack of racial diversity and its inclusion of drug references (Mascarenhas 2017).

Some articles celebrate playful or creative uses of dating apps, such as ‘funniest chat-up lines’ and profiles (Chan 2017). They also outline stories of unusual uses of the app, such as the student who accidentally swiped left and then contacted every student at his university called Claudia to find a missed connection (Cox 2018); or the young man who made a self-deprecating PowerPoint presentation for his profile (Petcar 2018).

Other forms of play satirise the cultures of different apps, for example What it would be like if dating apps went to a singles night (Connor 2017) or a piece imagining the app profiles of popular characters (Disney dating app profiles 2018).

Pedagogical articles often claim apps have changed the rules for dating and hooking up, or made them more complicated to navigate. This is shown in articles that address etiquette in dating app use — for example who pays for the date (Lawton 2017). It is also evident in articles on dating outside your socio-political circles, or how to identify signs of incompatible politics in people’s profiles (Spring 2017).

**Mediated relationships, ethics and ‘authenticity’**

Articles in this category discussed the role of media and technology in relationships. In many sources, ‘Tinder’ was used as a shorthand term for all dating apps; or as a rhetorical device to explain (or question) contemporary practices of intimacy and sociality. Opinion pieces refer to ‘the age of Tinder’ (Jones 2017) and some question whether app use is healthy at both an individual and broader social level. Tinder is often framed as synonymous with dishonesty or non-monogamy in relationships (35% of us in relationships are still regularly using dating apps, Larbi 2017) and is heavily stigmatised, as shown in UK coverage of celebrities who use Tinder, particularly older women (Ruby 2017; Wright 2017).

Apps are also commonly linked to shifting gender norms in heterosexual dating (Millennial women take sex into their own hands 2018). Human interest articles address ethical challenges (I saw my friend’s husband on Tinder, Green 2018) and relationship configurations (‘He is an easy man to fall in love with’: terminally ill author writes heartbreaking dating profile for her husband, 2017) which are presented as new and unique to apps.

Most articles on mediated relationships assume the reader will have a negative attitude to dating apps. In an Australian first-person article, My Tinder farmer: how a 123km radius helped me find love in the bush (Hoffman 2017), the author initially describes feeling ‘pathetic’ for ‘stooping’ to using Tinder after moving to a rural area, but later praises its potential to connect her to dating opportunities.

An article which profiles a range of users’ experiences of ‘first time dating in the age of Tinder’ (Jones 2017) offers a mix of first-person perspectives, including the familiar concern about apps ‘gamifying’ relationships, but also some positive personal accounts from people using apps later in life.

Some articles link dating and hookup app use with feelings of alienation or inauthenticity as per an article titled How to ditch the dating apps and meet someone in real life (Hampson 2017). Such articles offer ‘real life’ dating recommendations as an alternative to, or reaction against, dating app use, as per the benefits of an event named ‘dating with dogs’, which invited dog owners to meet at a local brewery (Winchester 2018). Others profile initiatives that mix ‘real life’ dating with social media include the Gold Coast café that invited customers to add their Instagram handles to a list for other customers to follow (Forbes 2018).
Global trends & local variations

By comparing media sources from three developed English-speaking countries, this study does not achieve any sort of global representativeness. However, including distinct sets of Australian, US and UK media sources means that we can begin to compare some of the international trends in how dating and hookup apps are discussed, while spotlighting some local differences.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of articles by country of publication, categorised under the key themes (Risk, Wellbeing, and Safety and Play), alongside the most prominent subthemes for each (Crime, Pedagogies, and Sexual Health). These data indicate that Australian media accounts of dating and hookup apps in relation to risk, wellbeing and safety and play are comparatively high, and particularly high in relation to risk, including media conversations about crime.

Much of the media discussion of dating and hookup apps implies a ‘universal’ experience of app use. As described in the previous section, these discussions often seek to define generational change or describe the transformations brought about by digitally mediated relationships. In fact, the locative technology of Tinder, Grindr and similar apps can emphasise very localised experiences. Against this generic backdrop, local ‘risks’ and incidents are detailed, as well as national health and wellbeing concerns. We highlight some of these from our dataset below.

Local differences and comparisons

There were noticeably more articles in the Australian sources drawing attention to risks such as specific crimes, scams, harassment, breaches of privacy and the like. Relatively few of the US articles covered crime, scams, abuse and harassment. There, risks were dominated by accounts of personal data and privacy breaches by apps. And the US sources were often located in tech news, focusing on apps’ features and platform developments. Those articles followed news about the tech companies running the apps, specifically Tinder and Grindr, along with new start-ups and alternative apps.

Generally, ‘how-to’ or pedagogical articles and pieces exploring digitally mediated relationships aim for a universal rather than place-specific stance, but there were some differences according to location.

Australian and UK sources were nearly twice as likely to focus on issues of safety and play – with more ‘how to’ articles and humorous or entertaining pieces written by younger app users (and audiences). This could be related to the types of media sources included for each country, with more tabloid publications in the UK, and more ‘serious’ (or legacy) sources in the US sample included, rather than local news or college news sources.

Health and wellbeing, and specifically sexual health stories, were often country specific and referenced local population health statistics. Some provide rich detail about local cultures and practices, as noted in the ‘wellbeing’ section above - with two notable US long-read articles and one from the UK exploring location-specific experiences of gay dating.
cultures (Cain 2017; Hobbs 2017; What it’s like to be gay in Cleveland 2017).

Most crime stories in the sample were from Australian sources, followed by the UK. Many of these are news reports on specific high-profile cases of violence against women or gay men, including scams, image-based abuse/extortion, stalking, sexual and other physical assault, and murder that occurred within the sample period.

Discussion

Our dataset includes articles written from a range of perspectives, from factual news reporting to tabloid news to first-person opinion and editorial content. It also includes more recent forms of social news reporting, such as listicles.

As noted in our introduction, we have not sought to evaluate our dataset in relation to ‘realistic’ or ‘unrealistic’ accounts, and indeed we are wary of analyses that suggest there is a single correct lens through which to view digital cultures and news reporting. Further, we have not sought to evaluate the impact or ‘spread’ of articles shared on social media (although we did note that some of the stories that appeared in our dataset were also popular in our personal social media feeds).

Finally, we have not imposed overall measures of ‘quality’ or ‘accuracy’ on our data. Instead, we have sought to better understand the ways dating and hookup apps are currently represented in popular news media. We adopt this approach for a range of reasons – firstly, the dataset offers us a means of reflecting on how non-users of apps (including educators and health service providers) are likely to perceive both app users and the cultures of dating and hookup app use (Briggs & Hallin 2016). Secondly, we sought to better understand how public conversations about dating and hookup app use (and non-use) are shaped in popular media settings, with the aim to discover new models for sexuality education and health promotion practice.

Returning to the initial questions that prompted our inquiry:

RQ1. What are the dominant themes for articles substantially discussing dating apps and their uses?

RQ2. How are risk, safety, and wellbeing characterised in news media conversations?

RQ3. Are there cultural or geographical differences in the ways that dating apps are discussed in Australia, USA, and the UK?

RQ4. How have the concepts ‘dating app’ and ‘hookup app’ permeated more broadly as a cultural referent for digitally mediated relationships?

Our review of media reporting relating to dating and hookup app use uncovered public conversations of criminal activity and unethical approaches to sexual consent and sexual health. This was expected – both because news reporting intrinsically favours ‘bad news’ and because dating and hookup apps are still considered by many to be novel (and therefore risky) technologies.

Our discussion and recommendations focus primarily on the theme of ‘Safety and Play’, as this theme featured prominently in the Australian sources we reviewed. While some of these articles seemed oriented toward entertainment, many articles in this category not only entertain, but explicitly offer strategies for participating in dating and hookup app cultures.

Additionally, our analysis drew us to the themes central to our overall research project, which prioritise perceptions of safety and risk associated with app use. As expected, accounts of coercion, abuse, sexual violence and discrimination are common in our dataset.

While we acknowledge the importance and complexity of these issues (both in terms of primary prevention and in relation to the need to support victims to recover and seek justice), we recognise that other Australian research projects have recently or are currently focused on these aspects of digital media culture (March et al. 2017; Henry & Powell 2018; Thompson 2018; Vitis & Gilmour 2017).
A relatively small but prominent set of investigative articles in our dataset brushed the surface of the question of wellbeing in app use, particularly in relation to mental health. Questions are raised of apps in their exacerbation of loneliness, poor social connection, stigma and mental ill health.

While links between app use and mental ill-health can easily be oversensationalised, they raise under-researched issues that deserve further scrutiny. Other online channels of communication have been investigated for their ability to facilitate positive peer-to-peer mental health support (Naslund et al. 2016; McCosker 2018). Not enough is yet known about the potential for dating and hookup apps to facilitate such supportive interactions, or the pressures they may add to the mental wellbeing of some users.

We also note that a number of media reports linked the increased use of dating apps with increased diagnoses of STIs in Australia and elsewhere. As Albury and colleagues (2017) have noted, global public health organisations have, in recent years, sought to access dating and hookup app data and metadata to assist in public health surveillance and interventions. However, significant concerns have been raised regarding the ethical implications of such actions, particularly where there is a potential to share data with law enforcement agencies (2017, 8).

To our knowledge, no epidemiological study to date has found causal links between dating and hookup app use, and increases STI or HIV diagnoses. Despite this lack of evidence, spokespeople for Australian public health services and health promotion organisations have made public statements speculating that such a link exists (as noted in our analysis of Sexual Health in the section ‘Considering wellbeing’).

We suggest that such statements may be representative of ‘biocommunicability’ in action. That is, where journalists and editors invite public health people to speculate on health and wellbeing issues – and health spokespeople agree to provide speculative commentary – a perception may grow amongst health professionals that actual evidence exists linking app use to STI and HIV transmission. Such a perception is not only inaccurate, but may lead to stigmatising beliefs about app use that raise barriers in relation to STI and HIV testing and treatment.

To this end, we caution health organisations against making such public statements, and encourage them to respond to journalistic inquiries for comment in ways that do not stigmatise app users.

**Considering safety and play**

As Australian researcher Alan McKee (2017) has argued, entertainment media producers can offer valuable insights to sexuality education and health promotion professionals seeking to produce engaging content. Similarly, Albury (2019) suggests that the Australian sexual health promotion workforce could increase capacity for both understanding and deploying digital technologies and platforms by looking to successful examples of news and entertainment-based digital content.

This approach to sexual health promotion is well-established in the field of gay men’s health promotion but is less common in content targeting other audiences (including lesbian, bisexual and queer women, heterosexuals, and non-binary and genderfluid people). With these points in mind, we note the limitations of the current study, which has focused on ‘mainstream’ news and entertainment media sources, which implicitly address ‘mainstream’ audiences. In the next iteration of this work, we will explore a sample of LGBTQ+ and ‘alternative’ community media content, as well as Australian social news sources that explicitly target a ‘youth’ audience.

Our survey identified a category of media reports that adopt a ‘playful’ approach to dating and hookup app use, deploying humour and empathetic storytelling techniques. Some of these articles deploy what we term *vernacular pedagogies*, which seem to promote safe and pleasurable practices of app use. These articles entertain readers, while...
sharing tips for negotiating safety, and negotiating ‘how tos’ for dating and hookup app practice. They offer a useful model for developing targeted education and health promotion content and resources for both app users and non-users.

We also identified a large subset of articles that discuss dating and hookup apps in order to explore new forms of intimacy and relationality associated with digital media cultures. These stories are not always focused on the apps themselves, but on the way social media platforms and digital devices impact on friendships and relationships. Where they do focus on apps, they reflect on the ways that the technical properties of digital apps and devices (such as the capacity for geolocation) effect user’s experiences of safety, play and wellbeing. That is, they allow us to think about the role digital technologies play in everyday life.

With these points in mind, we offer our recommendations for professionals developing health campaigns, resources or interventions relating to the use of dating and hookup apps who seek to use the findings of this report in their professional contexts.
Recommendations for sexual health professionals

1. **Be aware of individual and organisational levels of ‘digital media literacy’**.

We encourage professionals developing health campaigns, resources or interventions relating to the use of dating and hookup apps to reflect on their organisations’ cultural attitudes towards digital media, including social media and apps. This may involve reflecting on digital literacy at both individual and organisational levels, especially in interpreting and creating digital media content. We further suggest individuals and organisations reflect on the ways that health and lifestyle reporting shapes their understanding of the ‘issues’ relating to dating and hookup app use.

2. **Seek professional development and capacity building opportunities to better understand and respond to digital dating and relationship practices among the communities you work with.**

While many health promotion professionals participate in professional development activities relating to academic health research, popular media (including digital media) may receive less systematic attention within health organisations.

We suggest that reflection and hands-on engagement with entertainment-based pedagogical content offers an opportunity for building capacity within health, education and youth work settings. For example, popular media content can be read alongside scholarly research addressing app use, to inform research design.

It can also be used to elicit both internal conversations that lead to new forms of service provision, and to seed conversations with clients and community members that lead to new forms of outreach and engagement.

3. **Understand how popular media discussions of dating apps may conflate app use with STI transmission and other ‘health risks’ without evidence.**

News reports may draw a link between dating and hookup apps and STI transmission, despite the absence of supporting evidence. Sexuality educators and health promotion professionals can respond to these reports (via press releases, blogposts or social media content) to draw public attention to evidence-based approaches to sexual health and wellbeing. This report offers public communicators an overview of common themes emerging in news reporting. It can be used to prepare ‘cheat-sheets’, coach expert commentators, and draft briefing documents that can be updated in advance of ‘controversial’ app-related news events that demand a rapid response.

4. **Draw on popular media genres when developing content for health campaigns, programs and resources that relate to digital cultures of sex and dating.**

Professionals developing health campaigns, resources or interventions relating to the use of dating and hookup apps can draw on popular media genres to create evidence-based versions of ‘vernacular pedagogies’ regarding dating app use and app culture. This content could draw on traditional media forms (such as opinion columns or feature articles), or newer genres such as listicles to share information regarding sexual health issues (for example, in relation to increased rates of gonorrhoea in Australia).

Professionals adopting this approach should foreground playful and/or emotionally engaging language, and/or first-person accounts of app use. However, we caution against producing content that assume universal experiences of apps and app cultures, as users of diverse genders and sexualities may have very different experiences of app use.
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Appendix 1:
Data collection & analysis

Media Cloud is an open source platform for studying media ecosystems. It allows us to collect structured news and popular media content over a defined period from specific sources across different countries of origin.

The full source lists for US, UK and Australian media can be found at mediacloud.org. Media Cloud contains a collection of more than 1.1 billion stories imported via their sources’ RSS feeds, with 568,000 stories added to the collection daily. Sources are managed in a number of national collections to help targeted analysis. The Australian National collection contains 61 media sources, the U.S. Top Online News 2017 collection contains 31 sources, and the U.K. National collection contains 82 media sources reflecting a larger pool of news media sources. An indication of the types of sources for each location are presented in Table 1 below.

Keyword searches and timeframe

Source articles were collected between May 1, 2017 and April 30, 2018. This analysis is deliberately restricted to provide a contemporary snapshot of current perspectives and discussions, reflecting recent events, such as data breaches and crimes associated with app use as well as playful discussions and ‘how to’ guides to navigating cultures of app use safely and successfully.

The keyword set was developed through iterative search processes to best capture core relevant content and variations and identify exclusions where necessary. Only the most popular dating apps at the time of this research were used as search terms (Tinder, Grindr and Bumble) to maintain a relatively narrow search net. Search terms were:

- ‘dating app’
- ‘Tinder AND dating OR date’
- Grindr
- ‘hook-up app’ OR ‘hookup app’
- Bumble AND dating OR date

Search results after duplicates removed

Total number of articles = 6108: Australia (526); USA (1971); UK (3611).

A sample of 300 articles was selected systematically from the full dataset for qualitative coding using QSR NVivo software. The sample was derived by taking 1 in every 30 articles from the UK dataset (N = 100); 1 in every 20 articles from the US dataset (N = 96); and 1 in every 5 from the Australian dataset (N = 104) (some articles required subscriber access and were excluded).

Media content from the three countries of origin were combined for an overview analysis that sought to describe the

Table 1. Indicative sample of media sources by country

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<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
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<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)</td>
<td>Bloomberg</td>
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<td>Crickey</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>Buzzfeed</td>
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<td>Daily Telegraph Australia</td>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>Forbes</td>
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<td>Koori Mail</td>
<td>Evening Standard</td>
<td>Fox News</td>
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<tr>
<td>News.com.au (News Ltd)</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Huffington Post</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBS news</td>
<td>Liverpool Echo</td>
<td>L.A. Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sky News Australia</td>
<td>Mirror Online</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
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<td>The Age</td>
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dominant themes, and to draw out broad patterns at a global level. However, the stratified sample also enabled analysis by country. The sample was chosen according to keywords, as opposed to genre.

The overall dataset primarily consisted of news reportage or feature articles (authored by professional journalists), with the minority of articles consisting of opinion and/or editorial content. While this sampling method primarily yielded digital versions of articles from ‘legacy’ news sources (i.e. digital versions of print newspapers), it also surfaced stories from ‘digital first’ publications such as Huffington Post and Buzzfeed. While the current study does not analyse the differences between these publications in detail, our future research will focus on digital-first or ‘social news’ sources.

**Analytical framework and category development**

The analysis provides a systematic account of the dominant ways dating and hookup apps have been discussed publicly, and looks at how those discussions orient readers around specific kinds of risks and dangers, health and wellbeing concerns, and accounts of safe and pleasurable practices.

Our analytical approach uses thematic analysis (Krippendorff 2013; Altheide & Schneider, 2013) and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss 1990) to identify patterns in the dominant themes and concepts surrounding dating and hookup apps. The analysis also provides detailed explanation of how those themes are discussed within exemplary articles.

While our second research question requires these qualitative approaches to characterise and explain the various accounts of dating and hookup apps, the first research question could best be answered by quantifying the dominant themes covered by articles in the data set. We took a random sample to identify patterns and quantify the primary categories or ‘codes’ (see Figure 1, within the report). While this technique remains subjective or interpretive, four members of the research team reviewed and iterated codes with an accepted level of inter-coder agreement.

The coding frame, which defined the top-level categories and second and third level subcategories, was developed by the research team using both deductive and inductive processes (Krippendorff 2013). This process identifies emergent categories in the data while also drawing on pre-conceived categories based on the research literature discussed (see Background) and our research aims and focus.

After initial review of the data sample, a set of top-level categories were identified. These related to articles primarily targeting aspects of wellbeing (sexual health, mental health and drug use), safety (crime, harassment, personal data and privacy), cultures of app use (play, hacks, alternative uses of hacks, digitally mediated dating, ‘how to’ for app use, identity issues) and app design and technology (app business models, platform affordances and developments, research on app use, commercial arrangements). The code ‘wrong meaning’ was used for articles that included words like ‘tinder’ and ‘hook-up’ coincidentally and not related at all to dating or hookup apps, and these articles were not included in the study sample.

We used the code peripheral for articles that referred once or in a very superficial way to dating or hookup apps but were not ostensibly about apps and their use. These articles remained part of the dataset, however, because they usually pointed to the way dating and hookup apps have come to signal societal, cultural and generational changes to dating, sexual encounters and relationships (as noted in the Discussion).

After further review and iteration, the final set of five top-level codes and sub-codes were:

- **Risk** (crime, harassment, personal data and privacy)
- **Safety and play** (pedagogies, play, alternative uses, and mediated relationships)
- **Wellbeing** (drug use, mental health, sexual health)
- **App design and technology** (business models, platform affordances, app company research, other Tinder-like apps)
• **Peripheral** (a wide variety of article topics with apps mentioned but not discussed)

Coincidental use of the terms for unrelated meanings were excluded (see Endnote 3 for breakdown of sources and references for each category).

In our analysis, we focus on the three codes most relevant to our research: ‘risk’, ‘wellbeing’, and ‘safety and play’. We explain through qualitative analysis the stance taken or evaluation proffered (Thompson & Hunston, cited in Bednarek 2006, p. 3) to consider how groups of media articles orient accounts of dating apps and their use around certain risks, aspects of health and wellbeing, and the more accepting and exploratory notions of safety and play.

### Appendix 2:

**News media references**


Bowman, L 2018, ‘Reasons we’re not dating will make you feel better about your own terrible love life’, Metro, 7 February, viewed 14 June 2019.


Connor, L 2017, ‘This is what it would be like if dating apps went to a singles night’, *Evening Standard*, 13 December, viewed 14 June 2019.


Cracker, M 2017, ‘Stealthing is a disturbing aspect of gay sexual culture. But calling it a clear-cut crime won’t solve the problem’, Slate, 1 June, viewed 17 June 2019.

Daubney, M 2017, ‘Why Tinder is “toxic” to men...by three blokes who claim they get TOO MUCH sex via the app that leaves them “lonely” and “feeling like prostitutes”’, *The Sun*, 2 November, viewed 17 June 2019.


Keay, L 2017, ‘Alleged victim of hairdresser accused of deliberately infecting lovers with HIV was “starstruck” by him and “let his guard down”’, Daily Mail Online, 17 October, viewed 17 June 2019.


Kimball, S 2018, ‘Grindr defends sharing user HIV status with other companies’, CNBC, 3 April, viewed 17 June 2019.


Larbi, M 2017, ‘35% of us in relationships are still regularly using dating apps’, Metro, 7 September, viewed 17 June 2019.


‘Millennial women take sex into their own hands’, 2018, CNN, 4 April, viewed 17 June 2019.

Millington, A 2017, ‘These are the 15 most-wanted singles in the UK, according to dating app Happn’, Business Insider, 22 October, viewed 17 June 2019.

Moss, R 2017, ‘“Kittenfishing” is the online dating trend you’ve probably experienced without realising’, Huffington Post, 3 July, viewed 17 June 2019.


Hartley-Parkinson, R 2017, ‘Mother says she is “one pervert away from joining a nunnery” over dirty messages’, Metro, 2 June, viewed 17 June 2019.

“He is an easy man to fall in love with”: terminally ill author writes heartbreaking dating profile for her husband’ 2017, ITV News, 4 March, viewed 17 June 2019.


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Riches, C 2017, ‘The nationalities most likely to cheat on holiday revealed - which countries’ lovers are loyal and which aren’t’, Mirror, 30 July, viewed 17 June 2019.


Riches, C 2017, ‘The nationalities most likely to cheat on holiday revealed - which countries’ lovers are loyal and which aren’t’, Mirror, 30 July, viewed 17 June 2019.


‘What it’s like to be gay in Cleveland’ 2017, Buzzfeed Community, 29 May, viewed 15 October 2018.


Endnotes


2 Media Cloud is an open source platform for studying media ecosystems, and is a joint project by the MIT Center for Civic Media and the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, jointly funded and supported by the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (http://mediacloud.org).

3 Overall, 288 articles were coded (excluding those with the wrong meaning). The number of sources coded, and references for each category, was as follows (some articles were coded to more than one node):
   'Safety and play' (56 sources, 172 references)
   'App design and technology' (47 sources, 129 references)
   'Risk' (43 sources, 99 references)
   'Wellbeing' (22 sources, 96 references)
   'Peripheral mention' (120 sources, 490 references)

Of these 5 codes, only 'safety and play', 'risk', and 'wellbeing' (a total of 121 articles) were directly included in our analysis.

4 The term ‘vernacular pedagogies’ builds on the work of Australian media researcher Jean Burgess’s term ‘vernacular creativity’ (2006). Burgess first used this term to describe the ways that amateur or hobbyist YouTube content creators drew on established and easily recognisable media genres (such as movie trailers) to create their own versions of shareable entertainment.

5 The Australian articles were cross checked against a separate search conducted through the Factiva media database, which included most of the same media sources. This was done to check the validity of the Media Cloud tool against a more established database of news sources. The results were comparable, with significant overlap and only minor differences between the articles returned. The sample used draws from the Media Cloud article set.