

Gender Identity Construction in Cyberspace: A Netnographic Analysis of Tinder Users

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Abstract: Tinder is one of the virtual spaces that allows individuals to negotiate and present themselves dynamically. Stereotypes and traditional social norms continue to influence how gender is understood and represented online, which in turn reinforces problematic biases in interactions in digital spaces. This study aims to analyze the construction of gender identity among Tinder dating app users within the framework of a digital society. Employing a qualitative method with a netnographic approach, this research involves the researcher's active participation in the Tinder platform's virtual space by observing 52 user accounts and conducting in-depth interviews with five informants. The findings reveal that Tinder users construct gender identity through visual and textual elements, including profile photos, brief bios, hobbies, and interests. Gender identity on the platform can be manipulated and diversified to represent themselves as "women" and or "men." It underscores the necessity for contextualization and redefinition of gender identity within cyberspace. The study makes a significant contribution by revealing how gender identity on Tinder challenges traditional binaries through performative practices that blur the rigid boundaries between "feminine" and "masculine" while offering new insights into gender fluidity within digital spaces as arenas for renegotiating social norms.

Keywords: dating apps; gender identity construction;
netnography; self-representation; Tinder

Abstrak: Tinder adalah salah satu ruang virtual yang memungkinkan individu untuk bernegosiasi dan menampilkan diri mereka secara dinamis. Stereotip dan norma sosial tradisional terus mempengaruhi bagaimana gender dipahami dan direpresentasikan secara online, yang pada gilirannya memperkuat bias yang bermasalah dalam interaksi di ruang digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konstruksi identitas gender di kalangan pengguna aplikasi kencan Tinder dalam kerangka masyarakat digital. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan pendekatan netnografi, penelitian ini melibatkan partisipasi aktif peneliti dalam ruang virtual platform Tinder dengan mengamati 52 akun pengguna dan melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan lima orang informan. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa pengguna Tinder mengkonstruksi identitas gender melalui elemen visual dan tekstual, termasuk foto profil, biodata singkat, hobi, dan minat. Identitas gender di platform ini dapat dimanipulasi dan didiversifikasi untuk merepresentasikan diri mereka sebagai

“perempuan” dan atau “laki-laki”. Hal ini menggarisbawahi perlunya kontekstualisasi dan pendefinisian ulang identitas gender di dunia maya. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dengan mengungkapkan bagaimana identitas gender di Tinder menantang binari tradisional melalui praktik-praktik performatif yang mengaburkan batas-batas kaku antara “feminin” dan “maskulin”, sekaligus menawarkan wawasan baru tentang fluiditas gender dalam ruang digital sebagai arena untuk menegosiasikan kembali norma-norma sosial.

Kata Kunci: aplikasi kencan; konstruksi identitas gender; netnografi; representasi diri; Tinder

A. Introduction

Digital technology has introduced new forms of interaction that differ from those in the “real” world, one of which is online dating within cyberspace. This phenomenon is intriguing as the identity constructed in cyberspace often differs from real-world identities due to its anonymity, making it difficult to trace the valid owner of a user’s identity. Wang explains that identity in cyberspace becomes blurred, ambiguous, or even pseudo, revealing only a representation of the self.¹ This obscured identity allows individuals to become whoever they wish to be, including engaging in gender swapping, where one adopts a different gender identity. The question of “Who am I?” becomes central to identity formation in online dating, highlighting the interplay between managing one’s real-life gender identity and constructing a virtual gender identity.² An article by Winarty elaborates further on the representation of virtual identity on Instagram through a netnographic study.³

The study reveals that Instagram users demonstrate gender identity by maintaining self-image through multilayered identity construction. Each layer plays a critical role in how identity is constructed, displayed, and preserved,

¹ Yixian Wang et al, “Heterogeneous Network Representation Learning Approach for Ethereum Identity Identification,” *IEEE Transactions on Computational Social Systems* 10, no. 3 (2023): 890–99, <https://doi.org/10.1109/TCSS.2022.3164719>.

² Xiangjie Kong et al, “VOPRec: Vector Representation Learning of Papers with Text Information and Structural Identity for Recommendation,” *IEEE Transactions on Emerging Topics in Computing* 9, no. 1 (2021): 226–37, <https://doi.org/10.1109/TETC.2018.2830698>.

³ Shenthya Winarty, “Representasi Identitas Virtual dalam Komunikasi Mahasiswa Urban di Instagram: Studi Netnografi pada Universitas Pembangunan Jaya,” *Jurnal Bisnis dan Komunikasi Digital* 1, no. 3 (2024): 13, <https://doi.org/10.47134/jbkd.v1i3.2517>.

emphasizing the dynamic nature of virtual identity construction. Similar findings are observed on TikTok. Agustina notes that influencers on TikTok display their virtual identities with remarkable flexibility.⁴ Users present beauty within a “masculine” identity as the perception of masculinity on social media becomes increasingly fluid and subject to reinterpretation based on users' perspectives. Both physical and emotional aspects of identity are reconstructed. TikTok allows users the freedom to obscure their real identities, thereby enabling the creation of virtual identities.⁵

The issue of gender identity has long been shaped and reinforced by stereotypes perpetuated by the media, which take on a different form in the context of the internet.⁶ Consequently, the study of gender identity in cyberspace has become critical, given the contextualization required by digital communication technologies.

One manifestation of this identity phenomenon can be observed on Tinder, an online dating application with millions of users, ranking as the most downloaded app in Indonesia. Tinder is a popular iOS Apple Store and Android Play Store dating platform. It was founded by a group of students from the University of Southern California and was launched in September 2012. Initially, the app was designed for university students seeking connections outside their immediate social networks. Tinder later underwent significant development through the startup company Hatch Labs. Over time, Tinder expanded internationally, gaining millions of users annually. It has even received prestigious awards, such as the Editors Top Pick Innovative Award and the 2022 Dating Sites Reviews Single's Choice Gold Award.

"Dating" refers to a consensual courtship, a stage in a romantic relationship where two individuals meet socially to assess their compatibility as

⁴ Shola Brel Agustina, "Men with Gender Minority as a Beauty Influencer on TikTok," *Journal of Development and Social Change* 5, no. 2 (2022): 114–28, <https://jurnal.uns.ac.id/jodasc/article/view/64941>.

⁵ Anindita Widiastuti, Atwar Bajari, and Ira Mirawati, "Studi Etnografi Virtual: Konstruksi Identitas Virtual Anggota Subkultur Humor Mencela Diri di Tiktok," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan (JISIP)* 7, no. 2 (2023): 2598–9944, <https://ejournal.mandalanursa.org/index.php/JISIP/article/view/4754>.

⁶ Nabila Vina Fairuzzahra, "Stereotipe Gender dalam Serial Drama Daughter of Lupin (2019)," *Paradigma: Jurnal Kajian Budaya* 11, no. 2 (2021): 194, <https://doi.org/10.17510/paradigma.v11i2.430>.

potential partners. In today's modern era, finding a romantic partner is important and challenging. However, the methods for meeting potential partners have evolved with the advent of the internet, which has introduced cyberspace as an alternative to face-to-face interactions.

In general, partner selection is largely influenced by personal intuition and preferences. The internet has transformed matchmaking by leveraging vast user data to create matches. Recognizing the unique opportunities provided by online platforms, many commercial websites have emerged to offer dating services to users seeking romantic relationships. Over the past two decades, web-based companies have developed matchmaking services that facilitate access to potential partners, user communication, and compatibility assessments.⁷ With time, more interactive and mobile dating tools have emerged, such as Tinder. Tinder was designed to help users find friends, romantic partners, or even serious relationships, including marriage.

Several dating apps operate similarly to Tinder. For instance, Bumble is a dating app designed with women in mind, giving them control by allowing only women to initiate conversations with men. This unique approach makes Bumble particularly popular among women. Another notable app is OkCupid, which is recognized for its personality-based matchmaking system and its inclusive approach, particularly among the LGBTQI+ community. OkCupid allows users greater freedom to express themselves while leveraging data-driven insights for matchmaking. Meanwhile, Raya is an exclusive iOS-based app that originally focused on dating but has since evolved into a platform for professional networking and socializing, especially within the creative industry.

Tinder stands out due to its user-friendly interface, which mimics digital gameplay.⁸ Once users set up their profile and preferences, they can "play" Tinder.⁹ One of Tinder's key advantages is that users are not informed about

⁷ Okoye Blossom Chisom, "Effects of Modern Dating Applications on Healthy Offline Intimate Relationships during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Tinder Dating Application," *Advances in Journalism and Communication* 09, no. 01 (2021): 12–38, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2021.91002>.

⁸ Maria B Garda and Veli-Matti Karhulahti, "Let's Play Tinder! Aesthetics of a Dating App," *Games and Culture* 16, no. 2 (2021): 248–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019891328>.

⁹ Gaby David and Carolina Cambre, "Screened Intimacies: Tinder and the Swipe Logic," *Social Media + Society* 2, no. 2 (2016): 20–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641976>.

who rejects them, ensuring that only mutual matches receive notifications. This feature provides positive reinforcement, reducing the uncertainty often associated with dating. Additionally, Tinder helps minimize emotional risk by allowing users to control first impressions and avoid direct rejection. The reciprocal matching system lowers the likelihood of rejection, making the experience feel less intimidating. Since dating inherently involves uncertainty and the possibility of embarrassment or rejection, Tinder's design helps ease these concerns.¹⁰

In Indonesia, matchmaking among prominent families traditionally considers social status, aiming to arrange marriages between their children. However, in modern times, the concept of "matchmaking" is often perceived as parental coercion, forcing their children to marry individuals they do not love. Consequently, it is not uncommon for children to resist their families' wishes.¹¹ Matchmaking is typically arranged by parents, grandparents, close relatives, or trusted friends. However, with the emergence of dating applications, users now have greater autonomy in selecting suitable partners through digital platforms.

With the advancement of digital media, finding a romantic partner has increasingly shifted to cyberspace, which possesses distinct characteristics compared to traditional face-to-face dating. Manasikana and Noviani explain that dating is a relational stage based on mutual interest and compatibility, serving as a preliminary step before forming a deeper relationship.¹² Over time, the approach to dating has evolved, particularly with the advent of online platforms. One significant implication of online dating is the reinterpretation of user identities shaped by digital technology.

As a dating platform, Tinder introduces diverse gender identities that may not always align with those in physical space. The concept of gender cannot be directly transferred to cyberspace without modification, requiring a

¹⁰ Dana Berkowitz et al., "Tinder: A Game with Gendered Rules and Consequences," *Social Currents* 8, no. 5 (2021): 491–509, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294965211019486>.

¹¹ M. Misbahul Amin, "Perjodohan dalam Pandangan Islam," *Jas Merah: Jurnal Hukum dan Ahwal al-Syakhsyyah* 2, no. 1 (2022): 74–84, <https://ejournal.staidapondokkrempyang.ac.id/index.php/jmjh/article/view/280>.

¹² Rinta Arina Manasikana and Ratna Noviani, "Peran Media Massa dan Teknologi dalam Transformasi Keintiman di Indonesia," *Calathu: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 3, no. 1 (2021): 7–19, <https://doi.org/10.37715/calathu.v3i1.1895>.

reformulation of gender identity within digital contexts. Budi Irawanto argues that gender should not be understood strictly within the dichotomy of "feminine" and "masculine" but rather as a dynamic and fluid construct subject to change.¹³ Thus, gender can be seen as a product of social construction.¹⁴

Fitrianiingrum et al. found that Tinder is generally used for social interaction, with a significant portion of users engaging in online sexual activities.¹⁵ These activities include exchanging sexual content, engaging in explicit conversations via text, creating sexualized content, and even participating in sex work. Users' motivations for using Tinder vary, ranging from seeking romantic relationships to casual entertainment or "just for fun." The construction of Tinder's identity is largely shaped by self-representation, where users curate their profiles to attract attention.¹⁶

Dating applications facilitate the construction of authenticity through the features they provide. Tinder, in particular, promotes a friendly and appealing identity presentation. However, this framing raises concerns regarding authenticity and safety, as it allows users to adopt false identities. Furthermore, Tinder's design has the potential to discriminate against individuals who fall outside normative categories, whether in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, occupation, or gender identity.¹⁷

Research on gender representation in cyberspace remains limited, particularly studies using the Netnography method. So far, existing research has not comprehensively addressed the issue of gender in virtual spaces, which requires a different analytical approach. Previous studies conducted by Ilmiawan

¹³ Budi Irawanto, "Mereguk Kenikmatan di Dunia Maya: Virtualitas dan Penubuhan dalam Cybersex," *Jurnal Kawistara* 7, no. 1 (2017): 30–40, <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.23728>.

¹⁴ Rino Andreas et al., "Hidup dalam Komunitas Virtual: Studi Etnografi Perempuan Bertato di Ruang Siber," *Jurnal Ilmu Budaya* 11, no. 1 (2023): 181–90, <https://journal.unhas.ac.id/index.php/jib/article/view/25946>.

¹⁵ Frismayanti Fitrianiingrum et al., "Fenomena Pencarian Partner Casual Sex Relationships Menggunakan Aplikasi Kencan Daring Tinder di Masa Pandemi COVID-19," *Indonesian Journal of Sociology, Education, and Development* 3, no. 2 (2021): 106–17, <https://doi.org/10.52483/ijsed.v3i2.55>.

¹⁶ David J Bell et al., *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2004), 150, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203647059>.

¹⁷ Ramadhani Akbar Ilmiawan et al., "Popular Dating Apps in Indonesia and the United States," *Bulletin of Social Informatics Theory and Application* 5, no. 2 (2022): 88–96, <https://doi.org/10.31763/businta.v5i2.405>.

have examined the negative impacts of popular online dating applications in Indonesia and the United States.¹⁸ Similarly, research by Poerwandari et al. has revealed that online dating apps are frequently used not only to find friends or romantic partners but also as a platform for fulfilling sexual desires.¹⁹

Research conducted by Harahap suggests that the online dating application Tinder encourages users to self-disclose.²⁰ It includes the amount of information they share, their level of honesty, their goals and intentions, and the intimacy they express.²¹ Furthermore, a study about searching for casual sex relationship partners using the Tinder online dating application during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the popularity of Tinder significantly increased during the pandemic.²² Although this application is often associated with the stigma of casual relationships centered on fulfilling sexual desires,²³ its usage patterns reveal more complex dynamics.

In line with previous research, several studies highlight how Tinder functions as a medium that shapes identity through user interactions and social networking technology.²⁴ This application plays a crucial role in constructing gender and sexual identity, as its features facilitate the self-representation of users' gender and sexuality. Tinder and Bumble efficiently enable users to express their gender identity through profile descriptions and interactive features.

¹⁸ Umar Suryadi Bakry, "Pemanfaatan Metode Etnografi dan Netnografi dalam Penelitian Hubungan Internasional," *Jurnal Global & Strategis* 11, no. 1 (2017): 15, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jgs.11.1.2017.15-26>.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari and Cintia Berliana, "Dating Apps and Risky Sexual Behaviors among Young Adults in Large Cities in Indonesia," *Psychological Research on Urban Society* 5, no. 2 (2022): 4–18, <https://doi.org/10.7454/proust.v5i2.145>.

²⁰ Marlina Heldyah Harahap, "Keterbukaan Diri (Self Disclosure) Pengguna Aplikasi Kencan Online (Tinder)." [Undergraduate Thesis]. (UPN Veteran Yogyakarta, 2022), 67.

²¹ Vicky Aditya Nugraha, "Pola Komunikasi Melalui Aplikasi Tinder (Studi Kasus Remaja Pengguna Tinder)." [Undergraduate Thesis]. (Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta, 2022), 5.

²² Fitrianingrum et al., "Fenomena Pencarian Partner Casual Sex Relationships Menggunakan Aplikasi Kencan Daring Tinder di Masa Pandemi COVID-19."

²³ Irawanto, "Mereguk Kenikmatan di Dunia Maya: Virtualitas dan Penubuhan dalam Cybersex."

²⁴ Caitlin MacLeod and Victoria McArthur, "The Construction of Gender in Dating Apps: An Interface Analysis of Tinder and Bumble," *Feminist Media Studies* 19, no. 6 (2019): 822–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1494618>; Janelle Ward, "What Are You Doing on Tinder? Impression Management on a Matchmaking Mobile App," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 11 (2017): 1644–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1252412>.

Based on these studies, a key issue arises regarding the construction of gender identity in virtual spaces, which differs significantly from identity in the "real" world. It is particularly relevant for individuals accustomed to conventional matchmaking through face-to-face interactions. Many users experience a sense of being "deceived" when they equate digital identity construction with real-world identity despite the differing characteristics of these two contexts. Additionally, previous research has yet to explore the construction of gender identity in cyberspace comprehensively. Theoretical frameworks used in offline gender studies cannot be directly applied to the virtual realm, necessitating a more contextualized approach.

This research is particularly relevant as it examines how technology influences gender identity through features embedded in dating applications. These features appear to simplify finding an ideal partner while redefining gender roles and identity in digital spaces.

Based on these concerns, the research seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How do Tinder's features shape gender identity in cyberspace? 2) How is gender identity constructed within the Tinder online dating application?

To address these questions, this study employs relevant and contextually grounded theories to analyze gender identity construction among Tinder users within the framework of digital society. It also examines how Tinder's features influence gender identity dynamics in Indonesia. The findings of this research contribute new insights in the field of social humanities, particularly regarding the intersection of technology and gender identity. Furthermore, it demonstrates that digital identity continuously evolves within a dynamic technological environment.

Gender is a socio-cultural construct divided into feminine and masculine categories, defined by scholars in social humanities. It refers to the roles, functions, and responsibilities assigned to individuals based on societal norms, which can evolve dynamically over time. Although often associated with "sex," they are distinct concepts..²⁵

²⁵ Feryna Nur Rosyidah and Nunung Nurwati, "Gender dan Stereotipe: Konstruksi Realitas dalam Media Sosial Instagram," *Share: Social Work Journal* 9, no. 1 (2019): 10, <https://doi.org/10.24198/share.v9i1.19691>.

As digital technology advances, gender identity becomes increasingly intertwined with media, shaping new ways of understanding gender, particularly in cyberspace. This study aims to explore these complexities and provide a deeper analysis of how digital platforms influence gender identity representation in the modern era.

According to Goffman, media users rely on "substitutes for cues, tests, clues, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc., as predictive tools" when interacting with strangers for the first time. Community members share a set of communicative resources and expectations that enable them to establish mutual understanding collaboratively. From these theoretical perspectives, it becomes evident that the constraints imposed by the app's self-presentation tools influence users' ability to present their gender authentically and intelligibly. The app's interface dictates the type of information that can and should be displayed "on stage"²⁶ while the profile-based nature of communication conceals any information not explicitly facilitated by the interface. It includes assumptions regarding the experience and construction of gender, many of which are embedded in the app's design.

David Bell highlights three key aspects of cyberspace relevant to gender identity. First, cyberspace allows organic bodies to experiment with gender identity more freely. Second, the interaction between organic bodies and technology fosters an intimate relationship between biological existence and digital structures. Third, the term *cyborg*—a cybernetic organism—emerges as a fusion of modernity and organic elements shaped by cultural and social influences. These principles illustrate that cyberspace fosters a shift toward *post-gender* realities, challenging traditional gender categories.²⁷

Donna Haraway, a feminist scholar who pioneered discussions on women and cyberspace, argues that technology enables women to transcend the limitations imposed by their physical bodies.²⁸ This perspective aligns with

²⁶ Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life: Selections," in *The Production of Reality: Essays and Readings on Social Interaction*, 2010, 262.

²⁷ Bell et al, *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts*, 113.

²⁸ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th Century," in *The International Handbook of Virtual Learning Environments*, ed. Donna J. Haraway (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1990), 117–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-3803-7_4.

Irawanto's assertion that virtual reality constructs an "imaginary" world distinct from the physical world. The nature of cyberspace allows users to alter and duplicate their gender identity, transforming what was once an imaginative exercise into a tangible digital experience.²⁹ In this sense, cyberspace complicates conventional notions of "real" reality as the boundary between imagination and lived experience becomes increasingly blurred.

This transformation challenges the traditional understanding of the "natural body," as technology disrupts the binary between culture and nature in shaping the cyber-body experience. The concept of *disembodiment* emerges within gender discourse in digital media, rejecting the conventional notion of the gendered body and instead portraying gender in cyberspace as fluid, dynamic, and unfixed. Claudia Springer further elaborates on this phenomenon, introducing the concept of *interface pleasure*, which describes the immersive experience of users engaging in virtual interactions.³⁰ Virtual reality fosters the illusion of control over physical reality, particularly concerning gender and race, echoing Baudrillard's notion of *simulacrum* a "simulated body" that manifests in hypermedia societies. Ultimately, the body is understood as a cultural construct.³¹

Given these theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to address existing gaps by re-examining the construction of gender identity in the context of the Tinder dating application. By analyzing how digital interactions redefine traditional notions of gender, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of identity formation in the digital era.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the netnography method, an anthropological research technique that analyzes publicly available

²⁹ Irawanto, "Mereguk Kenikmatan di Dunia Maya: Virtualitas dan Penubuhan dalam Cybersex."

³⁰ Claudia Springer, "The Pleasure of the Interface," in *The Body* (London: Routledge, 2020), 247–50, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060338-40>.

³¹ Rocío Carrasco, "(Re)Defining the Gendered Body in Cyberspace: The Virtual Reality Film," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 22, no. 1 (2014): 33–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2013.866597>.

information on the internet, where users engage and interact through social media. Netnography integrates various online research disciplines, including content analysis, text exploration, narrative construction through interpersonal communication, ethnographic observation, and digital discourse analysis.³² Unlike traditional ethnography conducted in physical settings, netnography aims to restore the human element in virtual world experiences by immersing researchers in digital communities.³³

Data Collection and Sampling

This study utilizes primary and secondary data to explore the construction of gender identity on Tinder. Primary data consists of virtual artifacts from the Tinder application, including user profiles, interactions, and self-presentation strategies. This study observed 52 Tinder accounts and conducted in-depth interviews with five informants from various regions in Indonesia. The informants were selected based on specific criteria, including being active Tinder users, having maintained an account for at least six months, displaying pronouns on their profile photos, and a willingness to share artifacts of their activity on Tinder. These artifacts provide insight into how users construct and negotiate their gender identity within the platform's digital environment. Observations were conducted through a premium Tinder account to document user interactions and analyze patterns of gender representation. Meanwhile, secondary data comprises scholarly articles, books, and online publications on gender identity construction in cyberspace. These sources help contextualize the findings within existing academic discussions on digital identity, self-representation, and the influence of technology on gender perception. By integrating both primary and secondary data, this study aims to comprehensively understand how Tinder shapes gender identity and social interactions in the digital age.

³² Stefanie Duguay, "Dressing up Cinderella: Interrogating Authenticity Claims on the Mobile Dating App Tinder," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 3 (2017): 351–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1168471>.

³³ Robert V Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), 18–19.

The study employs participant observation, literature review, and interviews with Tinder users to ensure comprehensive data collection. Informants are selected through purposive sampling, focusing on active Tinder users engaging in face-to-face dating. Data collection was conducted between July and August 2023. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed triangulation techniques, including theoretical triangulation. It involved analyzing the same phenomenon through different theoretical perspectives to enhance interpretive depth and minimize researcher bias. Specifically, the study utilized Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which conceptualizes gender identity not as an innate or static trait but as something continuously enacted through repeated social practices. Within the context of Tinder, this theoretical lens allowed for an exploration of how users "perform" gender through profile construction, textual self-descriptions, and interactive behaviors, thereby revealing the fluid and constructed nature of gender identity in digital spaces. The participant in this study can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Tinder User Informant List

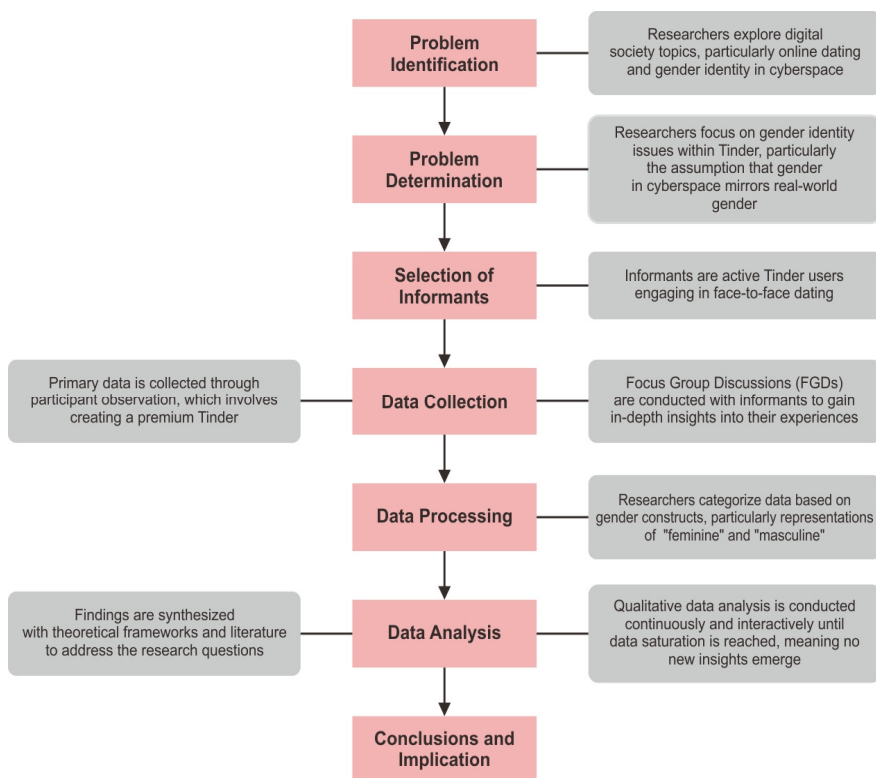
No.	Tinder Name	Informant Name	Gender	Address
1	Mie Goreng	DRR	Female	Garut, West Java
2	Sendyy	Sandy	Male	Solo Baru, Central Java
3	Zyahra	ZNA	Female	Surakarta, Central Java
4	Pia Delvia Putri	RIP	Male	Marabahan, South Kalimantan
5	Bagas	RTNM	Female	Rembang, Central Java

Research Process

This research was conducted through several systematic stages, see Figure 1. The first stage was problem identification, where the researcher reviewed various literature related to digital society, particularly in the context of online dating applications and the construction of gender identity in cyberspace. This literature review identified a research gap in understanding

how gender is constructed in digital spaces such as Tinder. The next stage focused on problem Determination, specifically examining how Tinder's features influence the construction of user gender identity and how the differences between genders in the real and digital worlds can lead to misunderstandings in social interactions.

Figure 1
Research Process - Skema teralu tipis/kabur



After defining the problem, the next step was selecting informants. The informants in this study were active Tinder users who engaged in face-to-face dating. The selection was conducted using purposive sampling, considering demographic variations such as location and user experiences with the app.

Data collection was carried out using multiple techniques, including participant observation, where the researcher created a premium Tinder account to observe user interactions and document profiles through screenshots. Additionally, this study incorporated Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with informants to gain deeper insights into how they represent themselves within the application.

Once the data was gathered, the next stage was data processing, where the researcher categorized findings based on aspects of gender construction, particularly how "feminine" and "masculine" identities are represented on Tinder. The categorized data was then analyzed using a qualitative approach, conducted interactively and continuously until reaching data saturation, meaning no new significant information was discovered. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn, including the interpretation of findings, implications for understanding gender in the digital society, and recommendations for future research.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were a top priority. Before conducting interviews and FGDs, all informants provided written consent regarding using their personal data, which would only be used for this study. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained to ensure the integrity and ethical standards of the research.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure ethical research practices, informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting FGDs and interviews. Participants agreed to using personal data solely for research purposes, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Results and Discussion

Tinder is a popular online dating application designed to facilitate social interactions and help users find potential partners. The platform provides opportunities to meet new people, expanding the chances of finding a match based on individual preferences and interests. Tinder showcases a diverse user base from various backgrounds, including nationality, religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation, allowing users to explore relationships with individuals from different walks of life.

Beyond finding romantic partners, Tinder also serves as a platform for building social connections and expanding social circles. Many users not only find romantic relationships but also form friendships, professional connections, or collaborations with like-minded individuals. Interacting through Tinder can offer valuable experiences, such as enhancing social skills, improving communication abilities, and gaining insights into different cultures and perspectives.

Additionally, Tinder provides users with the freedom to express their identities openly. Users can showcase their uniqueness and personal character through features that allow for personal styling choices—including clothing trends, makeup, and accessories. This flexibility enables individuals to present themselves authentically while building social interactions within the online dating space.

Construction of Gender Identity through Tinder's Feature

Users who install the Tinder application can create an account and customize their profile using the "Edit Info" feature. In Tinder version 14.11.0, users can specify their gender identity, upload multiple photos, and select preferences related to interests, relationship goals, lifestyle, and gender.

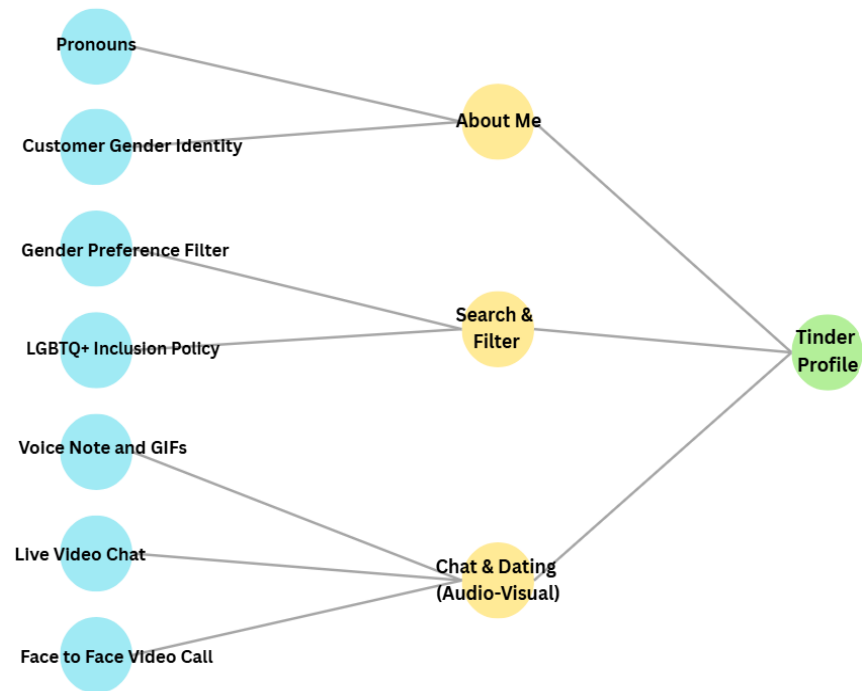
The "Gender" option in the application allows users to identify as either "male" or "female." By default, Tinder provides these two gender options, which appear in a selection menu after tapping the gender label. Users must choose one of the two options, and if their Tinder account is linked to Facebook, the application will automatically pull gender data from their Facebook profile.

The gender identity construction can be seen in Figure 2.

About Me – Brief Personal Bio

This feature allows users to briefly describe their identity, including their name, age, hobbies, profession, and personal highlights. Users can also upload multiple photos that best represent their image, aiming to attract potential matches. This feature illustrates how technology plays a role in shaping identity. Lim (2008) explains that technology serves as both a medium and a tool that connects individuals to their world. In this context, it is evident that people attempt to define themselves through digital technology.

Figure 2
Gender Construction Diagram through Features



The “About Me” widget provides additional space for users to express their gender identity. It can be done implicitly through language, emojis, or other references that convey a particular gender representation or explicitly by adding further nuance to the representation created by the “Gender” widget. For example, users who identify as non-binary can include their preferred pronouns.

From interviews with five informants, most preferred to keep their real identity private, while some presented an idealized but authentic version of themselves, however, one informant admitted to providing an inaccurate age. The detailed interview findings are as follows:

“Personally, when I use Tinder, I prefer not to use my real identity. So, I first create an empty email account just for Tinder. Then, I use an identity that isn’t actually mine. I also use photos that I can easily find—not my own, but those of relatives or

even friends. As for my age and gender, it depends. I've created multiple accounts with different identities. However, I always set my age to be over 20, usually between 23 and 24."³⁴

Tinder users who choose to hide their real identity have more freedom in how they present themselves. It reflects digital media's nature, allowing for anonymous identities, alternate profiles, or even photos of others. This behavior demonstrates how informants use the "About Me" feature to establish an initial identity. Tinder does not require users to upload real photos of themselves as long as the images comply with intellectual property rights and respect others' privacy.

However, users can also choose to conceal their gender identity by not including facial or body photos. The profile pictures serve as an initial visual cue for gender identity, which other users interpret when interacting on the platform.

Search Features and the Reinforcement of Gender Constructs

This feature allows users to search for potential matches using the swiping method. According to Paramita, this is the most crucial element in Tinder's matchmaking process, as it determines the likelihood of users meeting their desired partners.³⁵ The feature raises debates about user control over personal information, as it enables them to receive numerous potential matches.

Some perspectives suggest that Tinder's matching system taps into primal instincts, resembling how early humans selected mates thousands of years ago when they still lived in caves. However, cultural traditions, such as those in Java, challenge this view, where partner selection is still influenced by lineage and ancestry. This contradiction is leveraged by technology to help individuals break free from cultural constraints that may limit their choices.

Informants preferred this feature, as it allows them to choose a partner without considering race or ethnicity. They agreed that physical attractiveness, beauty, or handsomeness are the primary factors when selecting a potential match. One informant even used this feature to find Tinder users who met their ideal criteria.

³⁴ Interview with ZNA as a participant in July 2023.

³⁵ Fransisca Benedicta Avira Citra Paramita, "Changes in Culture and Matchmaking Behavior: Online Dating on Tinder," *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2021): 33, <https://doi.org/10.20473/ijss.v13i1.26353>.

"If I find someone attractive, I swipe right! If their profile and bio match my preferences, it's even better. Sometimes I get a match, but sometimes I don't—maybe I'm just not their type!"³⁶

Tinder's search and filtering features significantly reinforce gender norms by enabling users to sort potential matches based on predefined categories. The gender-based search function reproduces binary and heteronormative frameworks, implicitly encouraging users to align their self-presentation with conventional gender expectations to increase visibility and match potential. According to informant data, non-binary individuals or those who deviate from normative gender expressions often feel pressured to simplify or conform their gender identity into binary categories to avoid algorithmic exclusion. This dynamic contributes to the reinforcement of rigid gender divisions within the platform. Furthermore, location-based browsing and age filters intersect with gender stereotypes, as users in certain regions or demographic groups tend to adhere more strictly to traditional gender roles in order to align with local cultural norms. Thus, Tinder's search functionalities not only reflect existing constructions of gender but also actively shape how users negotiate and perform gender identity within a digitally mediated romantic economy.

Chat and Dating

The next feature is chat and dating, where users who have matched can start conversations with each other. This feature enables users to build closer connections through text messages and video calls. It is commonly used to get to know a potential partner better, although some users may not always be honest or open about themselves.

Once a match is established, Tinder users typically move toward face-to-face meetings. If a user is not satisfied with their match, they can restart the search process until they find someone who aligns with their preferences.

Although this feature allows for multiple attempts, finding a compatible partner is still challenging due to location and specific criteria. To enhance the user experience, Tinder offers premium subscription packages—Tinder

³⁶ Interview with RTNM as a participant in July 2023.

Platinum, Tinder Gold, and Tinder Plus—providing exclusive benefits beyond those available in the app's free version.

As experienced by informant ZNA, they attempted to identify other users through conversations (chatting) on Tinder without using paid features.

"Women are more sensitive to typing styles. If someone types in a sloppy or exaggerated way, like a 'jemet' (low-class internet slang user), it's a red flag. Another clue is excessive flirting. Sometimes, their profile picture might show a woman, but the way they talk isn't feminine. Women usually talk about skincare, food, and lifestyle topics, while guys tend to talk about hanging out, asking things like 'Where are you?' or 'Let's meet up!' It's rare for a woman to invite another woman out like that. Women usually talk about makeup and fashion."³⁷

Informant 2 explained that recognizing Tinder users' identities can be difficult. They even felt deceived by a man pretending to be a woman. It happened because they identified gender solely based on the bio section, felt a connection, and then continued the conversation via chat.

"I had a unique experience just recently, maybe a month or two ago. I matched with someone—I thought they were a woman, but it turned out they were a shemale or trans woman. Their profile looked feminine, but after a closer look, I realized they were wearing a wig. I had already started chatting before they finally admitted it. They even used the Remini app to enhance their pictures and make them look more HD!"³⁸

"I had a similar experience when I matched with someone who had a female name—Maya, I think? I started chatting, but I made the mistake of not asking if they were male or female. I assumed they were a woman because my Tinder settings were set to match with women. I was shocked when I found out the truth, and after that, I stopped using Tinder altogether."³⁹

However, informant DRR had a different experience from Sandy. They matched with someone whose identity was consistent with their Tinder profile. Relationships that start on Tinder often continue on other, more private platforms—especially when mutual trust has been established and a face-to-face meeting has taken place. "Yeah, it usually moves to another platform, either Instagram or WhatsApp."⁴⁰

³⁷ Interview with ZNA as a participant in July 2023.

³⁸ Interview with Sandy as a participant in July 2023.

³⁹ Interview with Sandy as a participant in July 2023.

⁴⁰ Interview with DRR as a participant in August 2023.

Tinder functions as an entry point for initiating relationships. Once users feel comfortable chatting, they transition to other social media platforms such as WhatsApp or Instagram. Users are generally selective about sharing their personal IDs or phone numbers, especially when using fake accounts. This indicates that Tinder often serves as a temporary gateway for building connections. Users shift to more private and intimate platforms if the relationship progresses before potentially meeting in person. Many users conduct additional observation and validation across multiple platforms before establishing trust and compatibility. Therefore, the relationships initiated on Tinder can often be classified as temporary or exploratory.

Tinder has evolved into one of the largest online dating applications worldwide. Several key factors contribute to its global popularity. First, its portability as a mobile app differentiates it from earlier dating websites, which could only be accessed via desktop. Tinder's mobile integration makes it easy to incorporate into daily life. Second, accessibility on smartphones allows for spontaneous use and frequent interactions. Third, GPS tracking enables users to connect with people nearby, increasing the likelihood of real-life meetings. Fourth, integration with other platforms like Facebook and Instagram provides additional self-presentation options—finally, haptic gestures such as scrolling and swiping shape users' perceptions of potential matches.⁴¹

Self-presentation on dating apps requires a balance between authenticity and idealization. Users have control over the information they disclose, but because online dating ultimately aims for in-person meetings, they must carefully manage their profiles. Tinder users who intend to meet in real life tend to be more honest in their profiles, revealing more personal details,⁴² including their WhatsApp number or Instagram handle.

According to Paramita, technology is a tool designed to support human activities. It is a product of human creativity and should serve as an aid rather than something that controls people. Technology represents developing and

⁴¹ Giulia Ranzini and Christoph Lutz, "Love at First Swipe? Explaining Tinder Self-presentation and Motives," *Mobile Media & Communication* 5, no. 1 (2017): 80–101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157916664559>.

⁴² Ranzini and Lutz.

implementing tools or systems designed to solve human problems, including online dating.⁴³

Goffman explains that self-presentation can be managed by manipulating settings, appearances, and behaviors, highlighting the complexity of identity in daily life. The goal of gender identity presentation is to create a desired impression, shaping how others perceive them.⁴⁴ This process involves impression motivation and impression construction, where users adjust their behavior to influence others' perceptions—especially within dating.

Dating applications like Tinder actively shape users' gender identities through platform features that influence how individuals present themselves. During profile creation, users are prompted to select from binary or predefined gender categories (e.g., male, female, non-binary), which can simultaneously constrain and affirm expressions of gender identity. Elements such as photo selection, self-descriptive bios, and stated dating preferences often align with dominant gender norms emphasizing physical attractiveness for women and performative masculinity for men. The swipe-based interaction, which relies on rapid visual and textual judgments, further reinforces gender stereotypes by encouraging users to make choices based on culturally constructed ideals of attractiveness. However, Tinder also offers affordances for more diverse expressions, including options for displaying pronouns and selecting non-heteronormative preferences, allowing for the articulation of more fluid and non-binary identities. As such, Tinder not only mirrors prevailing gender norms but also functions as a socio-technological space where those norms are negotiated, reinforced, or subverted through user interaction and platform design.

Gender Identity and Technological Reflections

The construction of gender identity on Tinder through digital media is more complex than in real-life interactions. Identity is expressed through various elements, such as profile pictures, short bios, and lifestyle choices. Feminine identity, for instance, may be represented by a woman wearing a

⁴³ Paramita, "Changes in Culture and Matchmaking Behavior: Online Dating on Tinder."

⁴⁴ Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life: Selections."

hijab, while masculine identity is often conveyed through images that emphasize traditional masculinity within a heteronormative framework.

Although Tinder showcases a diverse range of identities, the authenticity of these identities cannot always be verified with certainty. Identity on the platform is constructed through features that allow users to shape their presentation based on personal preferences. For example, a woman may create multiple accounts with feminine and masculine identities. It demonstrates that identity can be multiplied and altered according to users' needs.

In addition to being part of larger “scambot” schemes, fake Tinder accounts are often created by individuals who adopt a fabricated identity frequently presenting as “female” to deceive users in romance scams or solicit money directly. These deceptive profiles exploit gendered assumptions to manipulate emotional trust. Beyond fraud, some users create fake accounts to experiment with alternative identities in a low-risk, anonymous environment driven by curiosity, ego, or exploration of self. Moreover, the platform’s anonymity can be weaponized, enabling certain users to harass or emotionally manipulate vulnerable individuals without fear of real-world consequences. Such behaviors include sending harmful messages or engaging in emotional “games,” highlighting the darker potential of digital spaces where accountability is limited and identity can be easily disguised.

Informants also indicated that profile pictures often serve as a key reference in determining identity on Tinder.

"In my opinion, masculinity is often associated with muscular photos, facial hair, and a certain aesthetic. Long hair isn't necessarily considered masculine—it's just hair. Clothing is usually dark-colored, and masculine users are often portrayed engaging in gym workouts, riding motorcycles, or playing soccer."⁴⁵

Tinder users navigate a cyberspace that allows for a more interactive and flexible identity formation. Unlike "real" identity, which is tied to a single physical body, online identity can be modified, constructed, and simulated. In this context, the body is not limited to a single gender but can be presented according to users' preferences and intentions. A woman, for instance, may choose to present herself with a more masculine identity and vice versa.

⁴⁵ Interview with Sandy as a participant in July 2023.

Tinder provides users with an interactive interface that resembles a theatrical stage, presenting a visual reality. Tinder users represent themselves through photos to create meanings of "who" they are and "what" kind of world they wish to portray. This phenomenon is also evident in how informants attempt to represent themselves with diverse identity characteristics. They strive to present themselves most appealingly to the digital audience, standing out amidst the multitude of virtual identities in the digital society. The visual reality constructed on Tinder can be understood as deliberately formed imagery in cyberspace. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's assessment of themselves based on their abilities and dignity, which is subjectively shaped by recognition from others deemed ideal by society.⁴⁶

The presence of Tinder users in cyberspace introduces new dynamics, where identity becomes more interactive and flexible. Users can modify, construct, and simulate their identities according to their preferences and desires. One of the intriguing aspects of identity in cyberspace is the flexibility in presenting the body. The body is no longer confined to physical or biological constraints but can be altered and adjusted to reflect the user's identity. For instance, an individual biologically classified as female may depict themselves as male in cyberspace and vice versa. This phenomenon allows individuals to express their gender identity more freely without being bound by traditional concepts of sex and gender.

This shift reflects broader cultural changes in perspectives on gender and identity. Society increasingly recognizes that gender is not a fixed and immutable entity but a broad and complex spectrum. Cyberspace provides a space for exploration and self-expression without rigid physical limitations. However, alongside this flexibility, challenges and ethical considerations arise. Identity falsification in cyberspace can have complex implications for social interactions, relationships, and perceptions. The ability to experiment with identity may create an ambiguous environment and raise ethical concerns regarding honesty, integrity, and user safety. Informants reported taking precautions to remain safe,

⁴⁶ Rosyidah and Nurwati, "Gender dan Stereotipe: Konstruksi Realitas dalam Media Sosial Instagram."

including avoiding direct meetings with other Tinder users and concealing their "real identity" behind a fabricated self-representation.⁴⁷

Social networking technologies provide tools for self-representation and interaction with others. Defining oneself in a computer-mediated context significantly impacts the meaning of gender identity. In modern graphical user interfaces (GUIs), users are often constrained by the binary classification of male and female, which conflates biological sex with gender through textual interfaces. The distinction between sex and gender is explored in feminist theory,⁴⁸ although gender is still frequently used as a formal variant of sex, even in contemporary academic discourse. This linguistic choice is relevant in the context of online identity, where some graphical interfaces use the term "gender" while offering only binary options of male and female.

These interfaces are designed to provide users with highly specific customization options, yet digital text enables the formation of gender identities. Interfaces that only permit the production of heteronormative identities act as a "regulatory regime," forcing users to conform to a rigid binary system. However, this does not preclude users from finding creative ways to experiment with gender despite these constraints.⁴⁹

The construction of gender identity on Tinder bridges the biological body and virtual reality, enabling gender representations that are fluid and mutable. The physical body becomes irrelevant as consciousness is integrated into the platform's features. Many theories related to digital embodiment often overlook the significance of corporeality in digital contexts, instead treating the human body as a fixed entity. Virtual reality provides the illusion of control over natural reality, particularly over the body, which is marked by dynamic, fragmented, and multiplicable gender aspects. Tinder users enter a space that reinforces

⁴⁷ Stephanie Tom Tong et al., "Self-presentation and Impressions of Personality through Text-Based Online Dating Profiles: A Lens Model Analysis," *New Media & Society* 22, no. 5 (2020): 875–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819872678>.

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Feminist Theory Reader*, ed. Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016), 353–61.

⁴⁹ MacLeod and McArthur, "The Construction of Gender in Dating Apps: An Interface Analysis of Tinder and Bumble."

heteronormative practices embedded within various technological and social systems.

In this regard, Tinder can be seen as reifying what Butler refers to as "universal rationality." The platform offers choices that are widely accepted by the majority, though they are often tied to gender labels in the interface, typically leading to a binary selection of "male" or "female." The relationship between male and female is reflected in the dichotomous algorithm of "one" and "zero." It can be argued that Tinder encourages users to construct online identities that blend gender and binary sex categories, often with "male" or "female" as the default options. This dichotomy implies the exclusion of non-binary users from the technological system they wish to participate in. Butler asserts the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is biologically determined, whereas gender is socially constructed through attributes of masculinity and femininity, which the values upheld by individuals often reinforce.⁵⁰ Gender expression is the outward behaviors and characteristics associated with masculine and feminine traits, which emerge from social constructions. However, what is considered masculine or feminine is a social construct, and many individuals adhere to gender stereotypes in their appearance and behavior. Gender expression refers to how individuals communicate their gender identity within a cultural context, including name, behavior, hairstyle, clothing, and speech.⁵¹ It is reflected in online dating practices on Tinder, where gender identity is categorized into rigid and dichotomous classifications.

Conclusion

This study shows that gender identity on the online dating platform Tinder is formed through a combination of visual and textual elements in user profiles. First, drawing from the research questions and empirical data, the construction of gender identity on the Tinder dating app differs significantly from identity construction in physical spaces. In cyberspace, users have the freedom to represent their gender according to their preferences. Gender representation is

⁵⁰ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory."

⁵¹ Nadissa Fadhila, "Diversity of Gay Identity and Gender Expression on Social Media," *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia* 11, no. 2 (2022): 118–28, <https://doi.org/10.7454/jkmi.v11i2.1033>.

shaped, modified, and simulated through various app features, such as profile pictures, the "About Me" section, hobbies, and interests. These findings suggest that users' gender identities on Tinder are shaped not only by self-identification but also by algorithmic mechanisms that curate visibility and interaction. Moreover, the construction of gender identity on the platform is not strictly determined by stereotypical gender attributes. Instead, it reflects a more nuanced and fluid process influenced by individual choices, platform affordances, and socio-cultural contexts embedded within the app's digital infrastructure. Additionally, gender identity can be manipulated and multiplied by creating multiple accounts that present different gender identities, whether as "female" or "male," within the framework of heteronormativity—where partner-seeking is based on sex differences. A user who is biologically female can present themselves as male, and vice versa. The app's features enable diverse and dynamic self-representation. However, this fluid gender identity has implications for dating relationships, which tend to be temporary, as they lack the emotional bonds typically formed in face-to-face interactions. Instead, these connections are mediated by Tinder's features, leading users to minimize the risk of identity fraud in cyberspace. Thus, despite the fluidity of gender representation, Tinder users often remain bound to masculinity and femininity attributes reinforced by individual values, necessitating a contextualization and redefinition of gender identity within cyberspace.

This study enriches gender studies with contextually situated understandings of identity formation in dating platforms. Furthermore, the findings bridge Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on performance with Butler's theory of performativity, illustrating how digital self-presentation operates across both frameworks. Methodologically, the study advances digital ethnography by demonstrating its capacity to uncover nuanced gender performances in virtual spaces. These insights not only expand theoretical frameworks but also contribute to ongoing policy debates on gender inclusivity and platform design, thereby strengthening the interdisciplinary scope of Gender Studies in the context of digital culture. This study has limitations in analyzing phenomena on the Tinder platform and the number of informants, so the future research could further explore gender identity construction across various digital media platforms. Do different digital media platforms lead to

shifts in self-representation? To what extent do various media features shape user identities in cyberspace? Furthermore, user interactions with digital technology foster a unique cyberculture, offering a distinct locus for netnographic methods, thereby allowing for the exploration of various phenomena in the boundless realm of cyberspace.[s]

Acknowledgment

The research team extends their gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud-Ristek) for providing research funding through the PDP (Penelitian Dosen Pemula) grant for the 2023 fiscal year, which has enabled the publication of this article. Additionally, we thank the Faculty of Communication and Business at Universitas Muhammadiyah Karanganyar (UMUKA Solo) for their support.

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