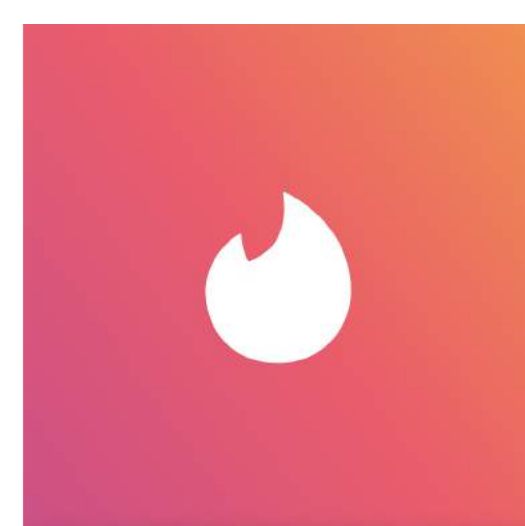# The Happs with the Apps: An Online Dating Podcast

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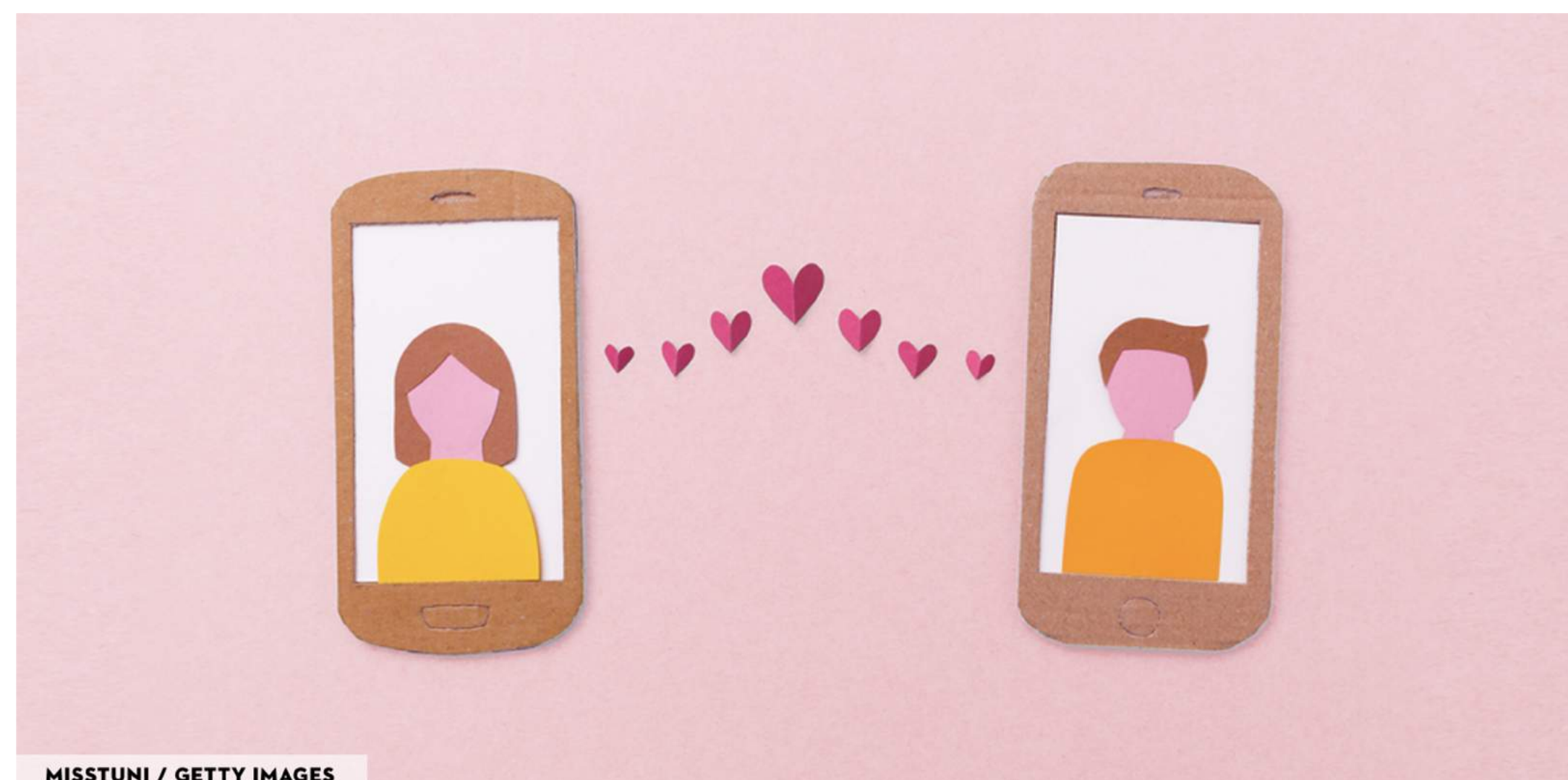
Abstract

While exploring new methods of digital research, I spent the year conducting interviews and recording stories from dating app users around the country and abroad as part of a soon to be released podcast, **The Happs with the Apps**. With the aid of sociological research studies and data on the impact and trends of online dating since the early 2000s, this podcast series engages in a range of discussions with users navigating the virtual spaces of popular apps like Bumble, Tinder, Hinge, Match, and eharmony in search of friendship, love, and intimacy, with particular emphasis on changes to this landscape following the impact of COVID-19. Using the platform of audio storytelling, the aim of this project was to familiarize listeners with how dating app users from all walks of life form relationships, ultimately correlating these experiences with investigative psychological research and sociological studies geared in understanding the sophisticated matchmaking algorithms facilitating such introductions.

Methodology & Tools

The Happs with the Apps begins with an introductory episode on the top ranking and most popular dating apps and ends with a 2021 COVID-fueled love story fit for the ages. This project presents a range of thematic concerns, interweaving storytelling and dialogue through a mix of Q&A style interviews as well as montaged audio recordings and linked citations of current dating app scholarship and data. In-person interviews were recorded on GarageBand with an H6 Zoom Recorder and microphones. Remote interviews used a double-ender method with each participant recording audio on their own computer over Zoom. I am currently in the more finalized post-production editing stages- stitching files together, removing background noises, tangents, and mistakes, as well as mixing and mastering the audio to broadcast standards. Although still in development, these ~30-45 minute episodes will be released in the coming weeks and launched through Libsyn on my WordPress site.

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Episode Guide

Virtual Dating 411: An Introduction
Episode one offers an overview of dating app culture, with deep dives into setting up profiles as well as montages of clips from most every interview conducted to showcase the variety in preferences and interpretations online dating users have towards potential matches. What are the keys to compiling a perfect profile? How have apps adapted since COVID hit and what features are here to stay since?

Location Location Location
The most downloaded dating apps share profiles based on current location and are GPS-based. I speak with users in Santa Cruz, CA and Nashville, TN who discuss the struggles of making worthwhile connections in largely touristy areas and sifting through streams of transitory visitors. I speak with friends and family in Pittsburgh, PA who reflect on using dating apps in their hometowns and offer insight to seeing people they grew up with online. Here, a sweet relationship emerges between high school alumni a few years apart thanks to apps and social media connections, along with the comical complications of large extended families. What would you do if the algorithm suggested your cousins as potential love interests?

Data Dangers in Dating Apps
With the introduction of GPS-based data information in the previous episode, episode three digs deeper into the immense amount of data harvesting and surrendering of personal information when creating an online dating profile. Though not nearly as controversial as the antics of the Tinder Swindler, interviews delve into the darker side of online dating, including stories of catfishing, ghosting, scamming, and harassment. These stories are combined with data on the negative impacts of online dating.

Dating after Divorce
Though dating apps are most commonly used by younger millennials and Gen Zers, I investigate two of the most successful apps geared towards older users more serious about meeting someone, Match and eharmony. I outline the perks provided by paying for online dating and offer data on differences between revenues and business models for paid membership subscriptions. Here, I include interviews with a recently divorced mother of two taking on the online scene of NYC as her adult daughters also connect over their own online matchmaking. I also speak with an eharmony veteran who shares her on-again,off-again experiences with platform, always compelled to delete her account when her ex-husband appears as a suggested connection. We dive deeper into understanding just how exactly these algorithms work.

Location Location Location PART II
With the return of NFL fans to stadiums for the 2021 season, the dedicated Bills Mafia visited Nashville and took some time from jumping through tables to reflect on how they use dating apps on the road as avid travelers. This episode dives briefly into the parameters of casual dating and where the line is drawn between online dating and hookup apps. This group also discusses the pitfalls of using dating apps in a town so close to Canada. As COVID forced a nearly 19 month border closure, these Buffalo natives explain the difficulties in matching with Canadian users and having no chance of in-person connections during lockdown

The Happs of Niche & Inclusive Apps
The penultimate episode of this first season investigates apps not owned by Match Group and geared towards a more unique clientele. Here, I peruse the world of online dating services like Farmers Only, Sea Captain Date, Tabby, and Dig. This episode also reflects on the inclusivity of dating apps and features interviews with users of sex positive apps like #open, feeld, KinkD, and Fetlife, discussing how these differ from more mainstream dating apps and are designed with the queer, polyamorous, and ethically non-monogamous community in mind.

COVID Couple & Happily Ever After
Season one ends with a quarantine love story. I interviewed a recently married couple who recall how their impulsive decision to quarantine together after testing positive following a first date resulted in tying the knot.

References

This project was made possible in large part due to the immense scholarship, data, and research studies on the topic. Though the list is too extensive to cite entirely, included below are the most influential and cited studies/information referenced within multiple episodes:

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- David, Gaby, and Carolina Cambre. "Screened Intimacies: Tinder and the Swipe Logic." Social Media + Society, (April 2016).
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All resources will be referenced and linked for access with each podcast episode uploaded to the WordPress Site

Acknowledgements