

DISCUSSION OPEN ACCESS

On Male Plight on Tinder: A Comment to Räsänen

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ABSTRACT

This commentary examines gender asymmetries in online dating, particularly on Tinder, and highlights overlooked factors in Joona Räsänen's article. First, the growing number of men struggling to find romantic partners is a broader societal issue that extends beyond Tinder. Second, given that men outnumber women on the platform by a ratio of three to one, finding a match is inherently more difficult for men. Third, Räsänen's claim that Tinder constitutes an injustice for men and his suggestion to revert to traditional methods of assortative mating lack sufficient justification. Finally, based on recent studies of women's behaviour on Tinder, I propose an alternative hypothesis: many men may simply struggle to use the app effectively—that is, they may be bad at using Tinder.

1 | Introduction

Joona Räsänen's contribution to this special issue, 'The Grim View of Online Dating—Rethinking Tinder' (Räsänen 2024), analyses the problem of Tinder dating from the perspective of gender biases and male plight. He focuses on the general circumstances of online dating apps such as Tinder, especially their practically unlimited dating pools, quick-paced selection of partners, and emphasis on physical appearances, which—besides the gender imbalance of users—put many users, especially men, at a disadvantage (Räsänen 2024, 8). He asserts that Tinder and other dating apps constitute a problem for justice and therefore proposes that the issue should be a public and political concern (Räsänen 2024, 1; see also his Räsänen 2023).

While it is important to focus on the male experience and the specific challenges men face on Tinder, I will highlight some points that need further defence to justify the conclusion that dating apps are inherently unjust, especially to men, and that accordingly we would be better off without them (Räsänen 2024, 8).

Contrary to what Räsänen suggests, I shall argue that Tinder, as such, is not to be blamed for the problems male users are experiencing.

2 | The Male Plight: A Tinder-Specific Issue or a Broader Societal Shift?

The difficulties men face on Tinder should be seen in a broader context (e.g., Bozick 2021). For example, in Finland, childlessness among men has soared. While in 1990 fewer than 20% of men remained childless, by 2024 this number had increased to roughly 30%. However, the increase in childlessness among women has not been proportional (respectively, 14% and 20%). Part of the explanation for this trend is likely found in the fact that, nowadays, following a divorce, more men start a second family and have children with a new partner. In addition, fewer than 20% of single women aged 25–34 report difficulties in finding sexual partners, while the number for single men in the same age group is more than double that of women (Heinonen 2025).

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Some of the difficulties men face in finding a partner on Tinder might simply reflect a broader societal change, a phenomenon that may have little to do with Tinder itself. Räsänen's discussion would benefit from a clearer account of this context and Tinder's specific role within it.

Räsänen discusses the well-known gender asymmetry on Tinder. Three out of four Tinder users are male (Business of Apps 2024). Clearly, this gender imbalance negatively affects the prospects of heterosexual men finding company on Tinder (Räsänen 2024, 5). The fact that many men are unable to find company on Tinder may be due simply to this gender imbalance. After all, even in the best-case scenario, where every user on Tinder finds companionship, roughly three out of four men will inevitably be left without a partner.

Räsänen's positive suggestion that we should return to old forms of 'assortative mating' that made most people 'at least relatively satisfied' (Räsänen 2024, 5) seems, at best, premature. I think the strongest warranted conclusion is that, given the gender imbalance on Tinder, men would probably be well-advised to seek companionship elsewhere. Furthermore, Räsänen's suggestion might turn out to be untenable. Even the old forms of dating might fail to produce good consequences for most people in the current environment, where single, sexless women are both happier and fewer in number than single, sexless men (Kuokkanen and Sorsa 2025). Any assortative mating requires sharing an environment, which Räsänen's suggestion overlooks. Finland is, again, a case in point. More women (46%) than men (33%) attend university. Because of this, the number of young women in cities with universities is greater than that of young men, while the situation is the opposite in all other towns in mainland Finland (Heinonen 2025). As society has changed, there simply is no going back to old forms of assortative mating.

Räsänen's main claim—that Tinder poses a problem for justice—is open to challenge. This is at least the case from a rights-based view of justice. That is, it is very difficult to see that any particular right is violated in this case. It cannot be anything like 'the right to find romantic partners', on Tinder or elsewhere, for that would entail that someone else had a corresponding duty to offer such companionship. Any suggestion that someone would have a duty to cater to others' needs for romantic intimacy blatantly violates basic principles of autonomy and human rights.

3 | Are There Gendered Differences in Behaviour on Tinder?

Setting the previous considerations aside, there are further problems with Räsänen's analysis. True enough, men on Tinder use strategies and evaluation criteria that differ from those used by women, leading women to receive considerably more matches than men (Roshchupkina et al. 2023, 170). Men on Tinder favour 'mass-like' or inclusion strategies, whereas women rely on exclusion strategies (Berkowitz et al. 2021).

As Räsänen correctly emphasises, while an increasing number of men find themselves unable to find company on Tinder, a small portion of men attract most of the attention from women. As noted above, however, such asymmetries do not seem unique

to online dating environments. In addition, the differences in reproductive potential between men and women are well discussed in evolutionary psychology (see, e.g., Geary et al. 2004) and seem to explain why, in general, men are often more relaxed than women in their mating preferences.

The gender differences in behaviour and strategies on Tinder, however, cut both ways. One well-attested difference between men's and women's partner preferences is that men tend to emphasise attributes related to sexual desirability (such as youth and good looks), whereas women place more value on social-status-related qualities (Regan et al. 2000). This phenomenon likely has deep evolutionary roots, with women having a greater role in nearly all stages of postcoital reproductive responsibilities, such as pregnancy and child-rearing (Trivers 1972). To a certain extent, these uneven costs persist even today. Although many women need to worry less about unwanted pregnancies than in the past due to better birth control, they still, to some extent, have to factor in higher risks associated with an unfortunate partner choice.

Other gendered risks concern sexual harassment and violence. Tinder has a concerning prevalence of sexual harassment, and women are disproportionately targeted (Byn 2024). Notably, this harassment occurs only after a match has been made. Therefore, many men who receive matches turn out to be rude or even criminal. Considering the risks involved in receiving a match—which affect women more than men—it makes sense that women are highly selective on Tinder and look for men with a 'nice character' (Roshchupkina et al. 2023). This selectivity is also a precautionary measure that plausibly reduces the risk of having to interact with dangerous dates.

There are further risks that especially women face when looking for a partner. Meeting with a stranger is inherently more dangerous for women due to gender differences in physical strength and tendencies towards aggression. For example, unlike women, heterosexual men need not worry much about being raped by their dates (Boateng et al. 2023). Heterosexual men are not statistically at risk of their partner choking them during sex without consent, potentially leading to unconsciousness or even death. For women, this is a real and increasing risk (Moore and Khan 2019). Being highly selective in mate selection—on Tinder or otherwise—seems entirely rational in the face of such gendered risks.

4 | Do Women Choose Tall Men?

We should be careful when examining the actual reasons behind highly selective decisions, such as those related to dating. Räsänen, along with a tradition of empirical studies, focuses on highly generic data about women's well-documented preferences for taller or highly educated men. However, such generic information provides unreliable explanations. A purported explanation for why a particular woman chose a particular man on a particular occasion, based on statistical generalisations like 'women in general prefer partners taller than themselves', is insufficient.

The question of women's actual choices is complicated, as are similar questions about real decision-making processes.

However, the focus on available scientific data tends to obscure this obvious fact. For example, it should be clear that when a woman reports in a study that she views height (or any other characteristic) as an important feature in a possible partner, she might mean (a) that she would not date anyone unless they are of a specific height (say, not shorter than herself or taller by a certain measure), (b) that she definitely prefers tall men over short men, or (c) that, in general, height is a factor she certainly takes into account when deciding whether to accept a date. The significance of these different attitudes towards height varies notably.

Option (a) states that height is a deal-breaker, meaning that no other characteristic in a man can compensate for a lack of height. Option (b) simply expresses a value judgment but does not necessarily consider a lack of height as a deal-breaker. Option (c) is a generic estimate of the general importance of height and tells very little about how someone reporting this attitude would behave in an actual choice situation.

One problem with surveys, such as those about women's preferences, is that they rarely distinguish between attitudinal differences. They simply ask a woman to consider whether a trait like height is important on a scale from 'not at all important' to 'very important'. In studies considering population-level trends, this approach is sufficient for research purposes. However, such population-level information tells us next to nothing about the actual weight women give to a man's height, on Tinder or otherwise.

To simplify, a woman might report that she values height very much, yet still be quite willing to compromise—at least to a degree—on a partner's height if he has plenty of other desirable characteristics. Most research is silent on the relative weighting of desirable qualities, but it seems safe to say that it would be fallacious to infer that all women who report appreciating height in a possible partner consider it a strict deal breaker (the fallacy some disillusioned men seem to make).

To understand how gendered behavioural patterns are constituted, we need to study the individual behaviours that make up the pattern. Unfortunately, few studies have considered it important enough to study women's (as well as men's) actual choices directly by observing the decision-making process or simulating it in a laboratory. Mostly, we have data based on questionnaires asking about researcher-chosen characteristics, with no way to estimate the relative weight women attach to the surveyed qualities (Csajbók et al. 2024).

Nevertheless, there is one study Räsänen also cites, according to which women's behaviour on Tinder turns out to be much more rational than mere statistical information might suggest (Roshchupkina et al. 2023). Interestingly, in that study, women were found to use men's profile pictures and their contents effectively as cues about the personality of the profile owner. For example, women considered men's outfits, image backgrounds, composition and self-presentation as direct indicators of personality (rightly or wrongly). As the authors noted, their results at least partially support the hypothesis that judgements about men's 'moral character' drive women's swiping decisions (Roshchupkina et al. 2023, 176; La Olivera-Rosa et al. 2019).

According to the study, women effectively seek to assess men's personalities based on whatever information they have at hand. It is plausible that this result can be generalised. In general, when assessing the prospects of a long-term relationship, women attach more importance to similarity and appealing personality traits—such as intelligence, honesty and warmth—than men do, as men tend to focus more on sexual attractiveness (Regan et al. 2000).

Moreover, women with previous experience on Tinder pay attention to additional information (e.g., job, education, hobbies, name) and attempt to form an impression of whether a man can be trusted (Roshchupkina et al. 2023, 175–76). The digital dating environment differs from other settings for finding partners, but the women studied clearly adapted to it by using images and whatever information was contained in the images and profiles as proxies for traits that make a desirable partner, such as likability and trustworthiness.

5 | Are Men Presenting Themselves Effectively on Tinder?

The study mentioned above (Roshchupkina et al. 2023) found that the reasons for rejecting certain men on Tinder were quite homogeneous, whereas the reasons for accepting certain men were highly varied. This is to be expected because attractiveness is highly subjective—within certain general limits—and thus not a singular property that an individual man either possesses or lacks. Let me pause to explain this observation.

According to received wisdom and many studies, people's judgements about attractiveness tend to converge remarkably (e.g., Townsend and Wasserman 1997). However, it would clearly be a mistake to infer that attractiveness is a singular trait with no variation. Consider how there is also remarkable agreement on the opinion that ice cream is good. Yet this does not mean that everyone likes ice cream, nor does it preclude significant differences in preferences for different flavours. More importantly, when people are looking for a date, they plausibly weigh attractiveness against other perceived traits. Hence, how people judge the profiles they encounter on Tinder varies significantly. A physically attractive man can still be rejected by most women if he appears egocentric or too superficial, for example.

Even among 'attractive men', not all are attractive by the standards of all women. Likewise, even among men who consider themselves generally disadvantaged in terms of attractiveness, there remains hope of finding a partner—either among women who appreciate their looks or among those who view physical appearance as an insignificant factor compared to other traits, such as reliability (for some) or adventurousness (for others).

Räsänen's suggestion that some men are doomed to loneliness because of Tinder's emphasis on looks seems problematic. The main reasons women rejected a profile were found to be a large age difference and the man's failure to post a clear image of his face. Posing with expensive cars or watches was generally viewed negatively, as it signalled superficiality—challenging the assumption that women directly seek wealth or social status. Intentionally showing off muscles (i.e., 'flexing') was also

perceived negatively. Men who included such pictures in their profiles were associated with lower intelligence, potential aggression (possibly posing a risk to women), and a preference for casual sex over serious dating (Roshchupkina et al. 2023, 175).

Most men who struggle to get matches on Tinder may simply fail to project the qualities women seek. The issue is not necessarily that they lack the desirable traits but that they do not present them effectively. In this game of first impressions, men might just be bad at using Tinder.

Even minor changes to a man's profile can increase the number of matches he receives (Tyson et al. 2016). However, men often have highly mistaken ideas about what women find attractive. For instance, men tend to believe that flexing is an effective strategy for attracting women on Tinder (Dunlop 2018), while the opposite appears to be true. Other negative cues for women included cluttered apartment backgrounds, serious or awkward facial expressions, and the use of unnatural photo filters—not necessarily the men's physical appearance itself (Roshchupkina et al. 2023). Additionally, studies suggest that profile cues indicating low ambition or presenting highly selective positive information negatively impact judgements of a profile owner's attractiveness, likability and dating desirability (Van der Zanden et al. 2022, 864).

Given this, men's success—or lack thereof—in Tinder's highly competitive environment may depend more on their ability to present themselves effectively than on their inherent traits. However, we should be cautious in drawing conclusions, as the data remain limited. The inability to project one's personality in a seemingly honest and thoughtful manner—sincerity—may be one of the most significant deal-breakers. Notably, this is a social skill rather than a fixed personal attribute.

The upshot is that many of the problems Räsänen associates with Tinder may, in fact, be due to broader societal trends and evolutionary factors—while others may simply stem from men not knowing how to use Tinder effectively.

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