Being Attractive on a Dating App: Generational and Gender Differences in Tinder Bios and Profile Pictures

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Abstract:

On dating apps, the image that users project of themselves, especially in terms of physical attributes, is important. This study explored how individuals of different generations and genders present their desirability through photos and self-descriptions— 'bios'—on their Tinder profiles. Through a virtual ethnographic study, 400 profiles of users aged 18–70 years were analysed and grouped into generation- and gender-based categories. The photographs were thematically analysed using observation matrices and descriptions. The results showed that, although all groups try to present themselves positively, generation- and gender-based differences exist in how individuals present their physicality through photographs (postures, angles, type of photo, place, facial expressions, body stereotypes, sexualisation) and bios. With respect to generations, these differences are attributable to the values and preferences of each group. Regarding gender differences, the influence of sociocultural stereotypes and ideals of femininity and masculinity is observed.

Keywords: physical attractiveness, dating app, generations, gender, photographs.

Introduction:

The Internet has become a vehicle for connecting with others for different purposes, including work (LinkedIn), social networking (Facebook and Instagram), and buying or selling (Wallapop) (Mesa-Medina & Marfil-Carmona, 2018). A more recent phenomenon is the emergence of location-based, real-time dating websites and apps, designed to allow people to connect more intimately (Tinder, Bumble, Grindr, etc.). In such apps, the image users project of themselves is crucial, especially in terms of physical attractiveness.

One of the most popular dating apps worldwide is Tinder, created in 2012. It is 'a global online dating platform available in more than 190 countries and more than 40 languages' (Tinder, 2024). Users generate a profile by uploading photos (mandatory), choosing from predetermined descriptions, and adding a self-description (optional) known as the 'Tinder bio'. They parameterise their gender, age, sexual orientation, desired type of relationship, age range, and kilometres within which they want to find a match (this app uses geolocation). Subsequently, the

profiles of like-minded people are displayed. The user must swipe right (like) or left (reject a profile). If the selected person likes their profile, a connection is established, and they may start interacting.

Given its high diffusion, the 'Tinder phenomenon' has sparked research interest from multiple angles. One of them is the reproduction of real-life relational dynamics, such as gender stereotypes and sexism (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Ciocca et al., 2020), the standards of feminine beauty ideals (Cruz, 2023), and the commodification of the body (Mesa-Medina & Marfil-Carmona, 2018). Tinder is designed to generate contact between users; thus, it is necessary to maximise the probability of receiving a like by highlighting one's desirability. As decisions are immediate and based almost solely on photographs (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2023), it is important to show a physically attractive image that would leave an impact.

According to Arreola (2021), Tinder creates a profile to manage the impression the audience will have—manufacturing a seductive appearance through ingratiation and self-promotion (Arreola, 2021). These strategies are related to the development of embodiment, a construct associated with the esteem and appreciation of the body and the quality of the experience of living within it (Piran, 2016), in terms of connection and comfort, functionality, self-care, satisfaction of bodily desires, and freedom from objectification (Piran et al., 2023). Projecting an attractive image influences social responses and interpersonal interactions while determining, to a large extent, the attributions, attitudes, and behaviours of others (Rodgers et al., 2019).

The experience of embodiment and the characteristics considered physically attractive are mediated by sociocultural factors. Therefore, the strategies used by users of Tinder and other dating apps are built on these foundations. Arreola (2021) found that users uploaded candid photographs, appearing friendly, self-confident, interesting, and attractive, which showed their physical beauty. Conversely, in a study conducted in Germany

(Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2023), the profile pictures were of a controlled nature, such as selfies or posed photographs, to present a romantic ideal, playfulness, authenticity, and sociability. According to the authors, this corresponds to implicit knowledge about social norms, unwritten rules, and assumed expectations the imagined anonymous audience possesses.

There are numerous potential motivations for creating a Tinder profile, such as the following: social connections, friendship, casual sex, or even a romantic relationship (Arreola, 2021; Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017); extroversion and openness to experience (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017); self-esteem or self-validation (Ciocca et al., 2020; Linne, 2020; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017); entertainment and curiosity (Arreola, 2021; Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017); stimulation of the sexual-affective imagination, sublimation of the romantic ethos, and sexual drives (Linne, 2020). However, regardless of the motive, users may interpret the lack of success or matches on the app as a rejection of their physical appearance (Portingale et al., 2022).

Several studies have highlighted the negative consequences of using Tinder, especially the frustration, stress, and possible burnout it may cause (Anderson et al., 2020; Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020; Linne, 2020; Pearson, 2023), as well as the impact on self-awareness, self-esteem, and behaviour (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020; Linne, 2020). This is especially related to the centrality of physical appearance, which increases the likelihood of experiencing symptoms of body dissatisfaction (Portingale et al., 2022), as a logic of consumption and 'play' is introduced into sexual-affective relationships, in addition to competition and constant comparison between candidates (Linne, 2020).

Women seem more susceptible than men to being valued for their physical appearance when looking for a partner (Portingale et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Strubel and Petrie (2017) conducted a study with participants of diverse ethnic origins. They found

that, regardless of gender, Tinder users reported lower levels of satisfaction with their facial and body characteristics and higher levels of insecurity in terms of their physical image compared to people who did not use the app. Thus, it is concluded that dating apps involve implicit pressures on appearance and that their use is associated with various negative perceptions about the body and oneself, which increases the likelihood that people will introject an ideal body figure and compare themselves with others (Strubel & Petrie, 2017).

Focusing on Tinder bios in Argentina, Linne and Fernández (2019) found that users employed three common seduction strategies, emphasising economic, cultural, and erotic capital. Regarding erotic capital, users showed themselves as attractive through displays of healthy habits and physical activity and sports. In some profiles, the three capitals were combined to attract mates (Linne & Fernández 2019).

Despite the aforementioned concerns, it is recognised that Tinder facilitates socialisation and communication (Linne, 2020), acting as a tool to overcome social barriers or a coping strategy to overcome personal challenges (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020). In this sense, Tinder also becomes a new way of getting to know each other to start long-term relationships (Timmermans & Courtouis, 2018), accessible to people aged 18 and over, regardless of whether they are baby boomers (1946–1964), generation X (1965–1979), generation Y or millennials (1980–2000), or generation Z or centennials (2001–2005), who are now at least 18 years old (The Centre for Generational Kinetics, [CGK], 2023).

Each of these generational groups has distinctive characteristics related to the era in which they grew up and the physical and psychosocial particularities of their evolutionary cycle. Baby boomers (BB), for example, are the products of large, traditional, and conservative families; they had to adapt to the accelerated social and technological changes of recent decades (Díaz-Sarmiento et al., 2017). They are over 59 years old, with the passage of time leaving visible traces on their physical appearance.

However, generation Xers (GX) grew up in changing households (Díaz-Sarmiento et al., 2017); they witnessed the emergence of technology (Zemke et al., 2013) and the liberal and consumerist ideas of the time (Díaz-Sarmiento et al., 2017). As they are currently aged 44–58 years, they have a mature image. Generation Y (GY; 23–43 years), children of the last baby boomers and the first X, grew up with social networks, cell phones, ecological movements (Zemke et al., 2013), and demonstrations in favour of sex-gender diversity and abortion (Díaz-Sarmiento et al., 2017). Younger generation Y (GY-1), individuals enjoy a young appearance; in the older ones (GY-2), the physical characteristics of maturity are noticeable. The young people of generation Z (GZ; 18–22 years) are children of the last Xs and the first Ys, going through the stage of 'emerging adulthood', characterised as a passage between adolescence and adulthood (Papalia & Martorell, 2021). They inhabit a diverse, technological, and virtual world, in which they are significantly influential as consumption trendsetters (CGK, 2023), especially in matters related to fashion and physical appearance.

Apparently, each social context manages its rules of what may be attractive to show or describe on Tinder profiles; thus, it is interesting to study the Ecuadorian scenario. Therefore, this study explores the physical characteristics considered attractive on a dating app through photos and bios. Specifically, the study examines which characteristics people consider relevant to highlight in their self-presentation, exploring the possible differences between genders and age groups. The effect of gender on the behaviour of Tinder users is considered in practically all the studies reviewed. Despite the variety of age ranges contemplated in previous research, no evidence exists regarding analyses that consider generational differences.

Methods;

Design:

This ethnographic and virtual study analysed information extracted from a social network (Consultoría Estratégica de Investigación de

Mercados, IMEC [Strategic Market Research Consulting], 2019), in this case, from a sample of heterosexual Tinder users. According to Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), ethnographic designs 'aim to explore, examine, and understand social systems (groups, communities, cultures, and societies) (...). Such designs seek to describe, interpret, and analyse ideas, beliefs, meanings, knowledge, and practices present in such systems' (p. 482). This study aligns with this description of an ethnographic study design.

Sample

The sample comprised 400 Tinder profiles (200 males and 200 females aged 18–70 years), distributed in groups as shown in Table 1. In the case of Generation Y, the sample was doubled and divided into two age groups (23–30 and 31–43 years), as this group has experienced different evolutionary stages and has distinctive characteristics according to age (Papalia & Martorell, 2021).

The inclusion parameters of the profiles were as follows: 1) age range 18–70 years; 2) self-reported as heterosexual; 3) located within 31 kilometres from the collection point; 4) with profile picture; 5) containing a bio. The following were excluded: profiles belonging to national or foreign users without permanent residence in Ecuador, those with inconsistencies or lacking age information, those with other images instead of photographs, and those without a bio. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample.

Table 1 Sample Descriptions

	Generation Z (2001–2005)		**Generation Y (1980–2000)**				**Generation X (1965–1979)**		**Baby boomers (1946–1964)**	
Age	18–22 (n=80)		23–30 (n=80)		31–43 (n=80)		44–58 (n=80)		59–70 (n=80)	
	μ	SD	μ	SD	μ	SD	μ	SD	μ	SD
Men	20.38	1.275	25.28	2.320	34.75	3.629	50.03	4.666	62.55	3.305
Women	20.27	1.358	25.30	2.261	33.63	2.771	47.50	3.203	63.00	2.847

Ethical Considerations:

The methodology used in this research has been used in similar studies (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2023; Tyson et al., 2016). It comprises collecting data from Tinder users, such as photos and bios, which are publicly available and whose owners know that third parties will have access to their information. This research conforms to the fundamental principles of ethical analytical research in social networks (Marx & Mirbabaie, 2022). This study did not violate Tinder's terms and conditions, nor did users interact with them. All the information collected was anonymised.

Procedure:

Ten profiles were created (five females and five males) to gain access to and explore the app, with the following characteristics: self-reported as heterosexual, range of 31 kilometres, and type of relationship 'I keep thinking about it'. Furthermore, specific interests were added by referring to Linne (2020): female (traveling, social networks, yoga, coffee, shopping) and male (sports, trying new things, walking my dog, exhibitions, traveling). The information was collected by 21 psychology students, trained for the purpose, who worked in groups, under the researchers' supervision. All the information was collected from the same geographical site in two hours.

Regarding the profile pictures, the information was processed with the SPSS 28 software. Percentages by gender and age group were used, which were

contrasted with Chi-square (X2), based on the following categories:

1) Descriptive characteristics of the photographs: framing, angle, type of photo, place/space, image represented, posture, skin colour, type of clothing, tattoos, facial expression, setting (public/private).

2) Stereotypes about the body: build, skin display.

3) Sexualisation indicators: For this category, the three indicators of the *Escala de Sexualización* (Sexualisation Scale) developed by Merlyn (2020) were used: a) provocative attitude/posture; b) provocative clothing or absence of clothing; c) intimate environments.

Regarding narratives, the thematic analysis methodology of Braun and Clarke (De Souza, 2019), which allows identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns/topics in the data, was used. The information was encoded using the Nvivo 1.6.1 software. The categories of analysis were as follows:

1) Descriptions of physical characteristics.

2) Erotic Capital (Linne, 2020): descriptions that portray a healthy and attractive individual, referring to healthy habits and physical activity/sports.

3) Sexualisation of bios. This category brings together two themes present in the Tinder bios analysed:

   a) Approximations: specific requests for sexual encounters or innuendos by including sex in descriptions.

   b) Rejection: Specifications in the narrative about 'not seeking sex' or not wanting to be contacted if the other person is exclusively looking for sex.

Results:

Photographs:

Although only the main profile picture was analysed, the number of photos uploaded was counted. Male users uploaded an average of 5.78 photos ($SD = 2.56$), while female users uploaded

6.36 ($SD = 2.54$). This difference by sex is statistically significant ($F = 5.165$; $p = 0.02$).

Descriptive Characteristics:

Regarding gender (Table 2), men and women show themselves similarly in terms of framing (the most popular presentations are upper half-body, full body, and face only), type of photo (the most used are selfies and portraits), and being alone in the photo. In other characteristics, there are differences by gender. Thus, more men than women post photos with their natural skin colour (brown skin) ($X^2 = 8.210$; $p = 0.042$), sportswear ($X^2 = 26.263$; $p = 0.005$) and performing sports, recreational, and adventure activities ($X^2 = 19.783$; $p < 0.001$). However, more women than men post photos with tattoos ($X^2 = 4.263$; $p = 0.039$) and in spaces where it is difficult to recognize the place ($X^2 = 8.036$; $p = 0.018$); women use more high angles ($X^2 = 15.079$; $p = 0.001$), back-displaying or twisted poses emphasising the buttocks, and striking sitting poses versus standing poses or normal poses ($X^2 = 40.167$; $p = 0.001$) and make significantly more provocative faces or smile in photos ($X^2 = 48.996$; $p = 0.000$).

Regarding generational analyses, Table 2 shows that users of all generations prefer to post photos from frontal angles, which represent them alone, with standing or sitting poses, with natural skin tones, casual/informal type of clothing, with smiling facial expressions, or making other expressions, gestures, or postures.

GZ users tend to post photographs showing three quarters of their upper body (21.3%), showing the abdominal or hip area. This framing preference is more prevalent among GZ than other generations. Mirror photos (45.5%) and photos in private spaces like bathrooms or bedrooms (50%) are also preferred. More than other groups, GZ prefer neutral (53.8%) and serious (15%) expressions; smiling photos are scarce in this group (6.3%).

GY users prefer upper half-length framing, selfies, and photographs in private spaces. In GY1, there is a preference for neutral facial expressions, with a hint of provocativeness (10%). In GY2, photos taken from high (16.3%) and low (23.8%) angles

are common, and there is a preference to show themselves in sports outfits more than other groups (20%).

In the GX, the preference for selfies is maintained (53.8%), but the favorite frame is that of the entire face (32.5%). Thus, in a third of the photo sample, it is not possible to determine whether the picture is taken in a private or public space.

In the BB generation, users show their full bodies (36.3%) in portrait-type photos (68.8%). Unlike people of the other generations, they prefer photos taken in public settings (48.8%) while engaging in sports or recreational activities (38.8%). It is also the group that smiles the most in photos (73.8%).

Table 2: Descriptive *Characteristics of Photographs*

		Gender (%)		Groups (%)					Total (%)
		Men	Women	GZ	GY1	GY2	GX	BB	
				18–22	23–30	31–43	44–58	59–70	
Frame	Full body	28.5	29.5	17.5	27.5	35.0	28.8	36.3	29.0
	Upper mid-length	33.0	31.5	38.8	30.0	42.5	30.0	20.0	32.3
	Three-quarters of a body	12.0	13.0	21.3	12.5	12.5	2.5	13.8	12.5
	Whole face only	21.0	21.0	11.3	26.3	8.8	32.5	26.3	21.0
	Only truncated face	5.0	4.5	11.3	3.8	1.3	3.8	3.8	4.8
	Body only	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.5
Angles	Frontal	88.0	78.0	87.5	91.3	60.0	83.8	92.5	83.0
	Cropped (from above)	4.0	15.5	7.5	6.3	16.3	11.3	7.5	9.8
	Low angle (from below)	8.0	6.5	5.0	2.5	23.8	5.0	0.0	7.3
Photo Type	Selfie	38.5	45.5	27.5	43.8	53.8	53.8	31.3	42.0
	Portrait	45.5	37.0	27.5	31.3	33.8	45.0	68.8	41.3
	Mirror photo	16.0	17.5	45.0	25.0	12.5	1.3	0.0	16.8
Place	Private space	44.0	40.5	50.0	36.3	48.8	36.3	40.0	42.3
	Public space	35.5	27.0	12.5	28.8	32.5	33.8	48.8	31.3
	Not seen	20.5	32.5	37.5	35.0	18.8	30.0	11.3	26.5
Image depicted	Photo alone	94.5	95.5	97.5	95.0	92.5	95.0	95.0	95.0
	With one person	1.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	0.0	2.5	2.5	2.0
	With a group of people	1.0	1.5	0.0	1.3	1.3	1.3	2.5	1.3
	With pet	3.0	0.5	0.0	1.3	6.3	1.3	0.0	1.8
Posture	Lie	0.5	1.5	2.5	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.0	1.0
	Kneeling/ squatting	2.5	2.5	1.3	2.5	7.5	0.0	1.3	2.5
	On the back or								

	turned showing buttocks	0.5	5.0	7.5	1.3	5.1	0.0	0.0	2.8
	Doing an activity	2.0	0.5	0.0	1.3	2.5	0.0	2.5	1.3
	Standing normal	9.5	2.0	2.5	7.5	0.0	5.0	13.8	5.8
	Standing posing	40.5	38.5	42.5	42.5	41.3	40.0	31.3	39.5
	Normal sitting	9.0	1.0	0.0	6.3	1.3	2.5	15.0	5.0
	Sitting posing	18.0	23.5	17.5	15.0	32.5	18.8	20.0	20.8
	Not applicable/ cannot be seen	17.5	25.5	26.3	22.5	8.8	33.8	16.3	21.6
Skin colour	White	32.0	45.0	15.0	45.0	61.3	38.8	32.5	38.5
	Brown	63.0	50.5	77.5	47.5	35.0	56.3	67.5	56.8
	Dark	1.5	0.5	0.0	2.5	0.0	2.5	0.0	1.0
	Black and white photo	3.5	4.0	7.5	5.0	3.8	2.5	0.0	3.8
Type of clothing	Casual/casual	61.0	65.0	52.5	73.8	48.8	57.5	83.8	63.3
	Sportive	13.5	4.0	3.8	6.3	20.0	8.8	5.0	8.9
	Swimming suit	0.5	3.5	2.5	2.5	3.8	0.0	1.3	1.8
	Formal wear/social event	10.0	8.0	6.3	5.0	15.0	13.8	5.0	9.0
	Underwear/ pijamas	0.0	3.0	1.3	2.6	3.8	0.0	0.0	1.5
	Uniform	2.0	1.5	1.3	2.5	2.5	1.3	1.3	1.8
	Pants only	2.0	0.5	5.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
	No clothes	0.5	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
	Not applicable	10.5	14.0	26.3	6.3	6.3	18.8	3.8	12.3
Tattoos	Presence	2.5	7.5	6.3	7.5	6.3	2.5	2.5	5.0
	Absence	97.5	92.5	93.8	92.5	93.8	97.5	97.5	95.0
Facial expression	Serious	18.5	1.5	15.0	8.8	15.0	10.0	1.3	10.0
	Neutral	36.0	30.0	53.8	37.5	22.5	28.8	22.5	33.0
	Smiling	35.5	48.0	6.3	28.8	48.8	51.3	73.8	41.8
	Funny grimace	2.0	3.5	3.8	1.3	5.0	1.3	2.5	2.8

	Provocative grimace	0.0	7.0	2.5	10.0	2.5	2.5	0.0	3.5
	Not applicable	8.0	10.0	18.8	13.8	6.3	6.3	0.0	9.0
Context	Sports/ adventure/ recreational activity	19.5	13.5	2.5	13.8	17.5	10.0	38.8	16.5
	Expressions, gestures and postures	75.5	84.5	96.3	82.5	78.8	85.0	57.5	80.1
	In contact with animals	1.5	0.5	0.0	1.3	2.5	0.0	1.3	1.0
	Holding an object	1.5	0.5	1.3	2.5	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.0
	At work	2.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	3.8	2.5	1.5

Note: Groups: GZ 18-22 = Generation Z, between 18-22 years old; GY1 23-30 = Generation Y, group 1, between 23-30 years old; GY2, 31-43 = Generation Y, group 2, between 31-43 years old; GX = Generation X, between 44-58 years old; BB = Baby boomers, between 59-70 years old.

Body Stereotypes:

Notably, men, more than women, use profile pictures in which they show athletic or robust bodies; women tend to show themselves more with average bodies (Table 3). The difference between genders is significant ($X^2 = 19.168$; $p < 0.001$).

Regarding the generations, in GZ, average bodies are prevalent; there is an increase in this trend in GY2 (2 thirds), which is also the group with the highest percentage of athletic bodies (10%). One-third of the GX profiles feature medium bodies, and one-third have robust bodies. The group with the most photos showing thinness is the BB generation.

Table 3 *Body Build*

	Gender (%)		Groups (%)					Total (%)
	Men	**Women**	**GZ**	**GY1**	**GY2**	**GX**	**BB**	
			18–22	**23–30**	**31–43**	**44–58**	**59–70**	
Slim/very thin body	14.0	14.0	21.3	7.5	12.5	2.5	26.3	14.0
Medium body	41.0	54.0	47.5	46.3	61.3	31.3	51.3	47.5
Robust body	18.0	10.0	7.5	17.5	2.5	31.3	11.3	14.0
Athletic/Sports Body	9.0	1.5	2.5	6.3	10.0	3.8	3.8	5.3
Not applicable	18.0	20.5	21.3	22.5	13.8	31.3	7.5	19.3

Note: Groups: GZ 18-22 = Generation Z, between 18-22 years old; GY1 23-30 = Generation Y, group 1, between 23-30 years old; GY2, 31-43 = Generation Y, group 2, between 31-43 years old; GX = Generation X, between 44-58 years old; BB = Baby boomers, between 59-70 years old.

Regarding skin display (Table 4), the results clearly indicate that women show more skin than men (78.5% of male photos only show faces, arms, or legs), and the difference is statistically significant ($X^2 = 74.443$; $p = 0.000$). As for the generations, GY exhibits the most skin (between 23–30 years old, 61.3% show from a little to a lot of skin; between 31–43, 60% do). This percentage drops by half for GX.

Table 4 Skin Display

	Gender (%)		Groups (%)					Total (%)
	Men	Women	GZ	GY1	GY2	GX	BB	
			18–22	23–30	31–43	44–58	59–70	
A little bit	12.5	26.0	11.3	30.0	32.5	12.5	10.0	19.3
More or less	3.0	24.5	17.5	21.3	12.5	16.3	1.3	13.8
A lot	1.5	4.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	3.0
Almost complete	4.0	6.0	8.8	5.0	10.0	1.3	0.0	5.0
Complete	0.5	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Only faces/ faces and hands	78.5	39.0	56.3	38.8	40.0	70.0	88.8	58.8

Note: Groups: GZ 18-22 = Generation Z, between 18-22 years old; GY1 23-30 = Generation Y, group 1, between 23-30 years old; GY2, 31-43 = Generation Y, group 2, between 31-43 years old; GX = Generation X, between 44-58 years old; BB = Baby boomers, between 59-70 years old.

Sexualisation of the Profile Picture:

The results in Table 5 show a difference between genders in terms of sexualisation, with photos of women being more sexualised than those of men: 13.5% of men's photos have one or more indicators of sexualisation versus 39% of women's photos ($X^2 = 41.441$; $p = 0.000$).

Table 5 Indicators of Sexualisation by Gender

		Men		Women	
		N	%	N	%
Number of sexualisation indicators	**0**	173	86.5	122	61.0
	1	18	9.0	27	13.5
	2	4	2.0	37	18.5
	3	5	2.5	14	7.0

Note: Number of sexualisation indicator: 0 = Absence of sexualisation indicators; 1 = Provocative attitude/posture; 2 = Provocative clothing or absence of clothing; 3 = Intimate environments.

Table 6 shows that in all generations (except BB), there are significantly more photos with indicators of sexualisation in women than in men. Moreover, sexualisation percentages are higher in men and women in GZ and then decrease in the case of men. As for women, more sexualisation prevails between 18–22 years; subsequently, a decrease is observed between 23–30 years, followed by an increase in the 31–43 age group, with a final decline at 44–58 years old. In this last group, it continues to reach 22.5% in women but not in men who do not show any indicators of sexualisation.

Table 6 *Sexualisation by Gender and Age Group*

		Groups									
		GZ		**GY1**		**GY2**		**GX**		**BB**	
		18–22		**23–30**		**31–43**		**44–58**		**59–70**	
		M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)
Sexualisation indicators	1	22.5	20	12.5	22.5	7.5	17.5	0	5	2.5	2.5
	2	5	30	5	20	0	30	0	12.5	0	0
	3	10	20	2.5	0	0	10	0	5	0	0
Image	Sexualised	37.5	70	20	42.5	7.5	57.5	0	22.5	2.5	2.5
	Non-sexualised	62.5	30	80	57.5	92.5	42.5	100	77.5	97.5	97.5
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test		13.215		6.999		26.384		9.255		-	
p		0.005**		0.043*		0.000***		0.003**		-	

Note: GZ 18-22 = Groups: Generation Z, between 18-22 years old; GY1 23-30 = Generation Y, group 1, between 23-30 years old; GY2, 31-43 = Generation Y, group 2, between 31-43 years old; GX = Generation X, between 44-58 years old; BB = Baby boomers, between 59-70 years old. Number of sexualisation indicator: 1 = Provocative attitude/posture; 2 = Provocative clothing or absence of clothing; 3 = Intimate environments.

Tinder Bios

Narratives about Physical Characteristics

Table 7 shows no significant differences in terms of gender in the descriptions of physical characteristics, but there are differences between generational groups. GZ uses more references of this type. In boys, these are related to having an appropriate height ('1.75 apparently that is important here', '1.81 tall, is it good for you?'), general appearance ('handsome'), or other traits ('nice eyebrows, nice hair'). The women in this group also report on height, warning when they are small ('I am 1.57, I am small', '1.55 tall do not expect much').

Erotic Capital

Table 7 shows that mostly, men highlight erotic capital in their bios. These are, above all, references to sports activity ('I like to exercise', 'I love sport, especially triathlons') and healthy habits ('active lifestyle', 'no vices', 'I take good care of my body', 'take care of myself, look good, eat healthy'). Notably, talking about this topic becomes important from 31 years onwards.

Sexualisation

Most sexual references are found in women's bios (Table 7). However, when broken down in terms of approximations and rejection, the picture is differentiated.

Thus, sexual approximations exist in both genders in almost the same ways, and these are made in the first three age groups (higher frequency in GY2). The approaches are indirect (for example, the phrase of a song with sexualised content: '*get on your knees, beg me to stop, I promise I love you if you do it for me*', or an allusion: 'I exchange them for candy') or direct ('I am looking for a *sugar mommy*', 'hello, *a free*', 'I am looking for *sugar* (no kidding)', 'a body', 'I enjoy extremes and between 3 is better (FMF)'). There is even a detailed request: 'We are a serious, responsible, married, fun and respectful couple, I am looking for my first threesome, who is in?'

Regarding rejection, the scenario is totally different because these narratives are only found in women's bios. The rejections are explicit: 'if you are only looking for *SEX, thank you, next*', '*I do not want*

sex, sorry', 'if you think I am looking for sex give yourself a *NEXT*", 'I am not looking for casual sex'). This type of narrative alluding to sex begins in GY1 and even one is presented in the BB slot: 'I do not like problems or obscenities'.

Table 7: References in Narratives about Physical Characteristics, Erotic Capital, and Sexualisation

		Gender		Groups					
		Men	Women	GZ	GY1	GY2	GX	BB	Total
				18–22	23–30	31–43	44–58	59–70	
Physical characteristics		13	16	12	6	2	4	5	29
Erotic capital		37	17	9	9	13	10	13	54
Sexualisation	Approaches	6	7	3	3	7	0	0	13
	Rejection	0	9	0	2	2	4	1	9
	Total	6	16	3	5	9	4	1	22

Note: GZ 18-22 = Groups: Generation Z, between 18-22 years old; GY1 23-30 = Generation Y, group 1, between 23-30 years old; GY2, 31-43 = Generation Y, group 2, between 31-43 years old; GX = Generation X, between 44-58 years old; BB = Baby boomers, between 59-70 years old.

Discussion:

The findings of this study show that how users of dating apps such as Tinder project their attractiveness differs according to gender and age group. Overall, all groups try to present themselves positively by highlighting desirable social attributes, which seems to be related to social expectations (Rodgers et al. 2019). For example, smiling faces appear more frequently in profile photos as the age advances, which would indicate the importance given, over the years, to a face that appears pleasant and gentle despite fading youth.

In GZ, mirror photographs and photos clicked in private spaces, with neutral or serious expressions, showing medium body build, with a visible abdominal and hip area are preferred. In their bios, physical characteristics are emphasised, supporting findings related to socio-affective play by Linne (2020). These results are typical of the stage between the end of adolescence and emerging adulthood, characterized by experimentation (Papalia & Martorell, 2021). A part of this process is the search for relationships, which allows a young person to learn about themselves, their tastes and preferences, as well as about others and what they can expect and look for in others. Hence,

physical attributes and body image are prioritized, as they are externally observable elements that define their attractiveness and social identity.

Meanwhile, GY prefers selfies and upper half-length framing in which they show more skin, although photos in private spaces prevail. In the GY-1 subgroup (23–30 years old), which transitions from emerging adulthood to early adulthood (Papalia & Martorell, 2021), the average body build and neutral expressions observed in GZ are maintained, but there is an increase in provocative, sensual grimaces. However, the allusion to physical characteristics in the bios decreases—this group considers 'showing' the attributes through photographs more important than describing them through words. They have introjected the importance society gives to the physical form as a determining factor of how others perceive and act towards them (Rodgers et al., 2019).

In GY2 (31–43 years old), located between early adulthood and early middle adulthood (Papalia & Martorell, 2021), photos taken from high and low angles, athletic bodies, and the use of sportswear are representative. Díaz-Sarmiento et al. (2017) describe this generation as more ecological, more

organic; in their narratives, GY2s express their preferences for sports activities and healthy habits, which is in line with some of the dimensions of the embodiment experience: connection and comfort with the body and harmonised self-care (Piran et al. 2023), as a way to retain youth in their body image. Nevertheless, GY-2s are at a stage at which many have had love breakups, which orients them towards the search for new experiences. Being attractive is important again, so erotic capital acquires representation in this group.

In GX (44–58 years old), located in middle adulthood (Papalia & Martorell, 2021), the preference for selfies observed in GY is maintained, but the preferred frame is the face, which does not allow the space in which the photograph was taken to be appreciated. In this group, medium and robust builds prevail—no evidence indicates an attempt in users to disguise or hide their physical constitution, which shows self-acceptance and an unproblematic body image (Piran et al., 2023). Erotic capital, although slightly lower than in GY2, is important for this group; this is congruent with their evolutionary cycle. Over the years, they have learned to value healthy habits in terms of diet and physical activity to manage their body's functionality (Piran et al., 2023).

BB users show more portrait and full-body photos in public spaces, engaging in sports or recreational activities and smiling; although these users are the ones with the slimmest build compared to the other groups, the average body build stands out. These findings seem to indicate several things. First, selfies favour young, smooth faces and bodies; possibly, this is one reason why BBs use them little because, in portrait photos, the marks of the passage of time are less evident. Second, taking a selfie requires poses, gestures, and showing off parts of the body, while portrait photos allow you to appreciate the environment around the subject. Thus, in generations X, Y, and Z, the attraction is more focused on physical characteristics and traits, while the attractiveness of a BB person is presented through their overall personality and lifestyle. Additionally, in the bios of baby boomers, erotic capital is once again important. Therefore, this

group attaches importance to the connection with their body, their functionality, and self-care, dimensions that are part of the incarnation experience (Piran et al., 2023). Interestingly, flexibility and adaptation to changes attributed to this age group (Díaz-Sarmiento et al., 2017) are reaffirmed by the presence of Tinder users aged 59–70 years.

Regarding gender, being attractive on Tinder means different things for men and women. Male users tend to post more natural photos, for example, with their natural skin tone (usually brown), showing their build (in some cases, robust) and often projecting a sporty image (through clothing or sporty activities). This characteristic is also evident in the bios, as more men than women allude to erotic capital, especially sports activities and healthy habits, which was also reported by Linne (2020), possibly because strength and fitness are traditionally considered indicators of masculinity and sexual vitality in males.

Female users post more photos taken up close, show more skin, show off their tattoos more than men, and use high angles increasingly, a fact also found by Lumbreras (2018). With this framing, women probably try to attract more attention to themselves and their appearance. In their profiles, the backward or turned poses emphasising the buttocks or sitting poses, with provocative expressions and smiles, stand out. These findings highlight the way in which the experience of embodiment is expressed in the female sex—, in many cultures, including that of Ecuador, women inhabit their bodies while viewing them from an external perspective. This perspective is shaped by social structures and discourses on what is considered attractive in the female body (Piran, 2016).

These differences highlight the importance that both genders attach to physical attractiveness. Women strive to look feminine in a way that is attractive to men (Cruz, 2023). Meanwhile, men portray themselves as 'a man in every sense of the word', catering to the sex-affective market through markers of social status (Linne, 2020). Thus, on

social media, people seek to expose 'the best possible version of themselves' (Linne, 2020, p. 14) and conform to stereotypes of physical attraction—viewing from the outside impacts social perceptions and outcomes and the projection of interpersonal interactions (Rodgers et al., 2019).

A separate analysis comprises the issue of sexualisation, found in photos and narratives. There is a clear tendency to equate attractiveness with sexualisation among female users. Thus, the projected image features the display of skin, the use of angles and poses that highlight breasts and buttocks, stereotypical characteristics such as a thin face and fair skin, and the use of poses, pouts, and simulated smiles, all of which present an unnatural image. These findings are consistent with the analysis of Cruz (2023), who concludes that the digital avatars shown on Tinder are fashioned after the stereotypical models of beauty promoted through cultural products, which 'encourages women to always be attractive to provoke male desire' (p. 264). Women who use and participate in social networks tend to self-sexualise more (Ward et al., 2023); in the case of Tinder, the app design (using photos as a hook) and the purpose (getting a match) can lead to greater self-sexualisation.

The level of sexualisation in the photos also varies according to age group: there is a greater sexualisation by younger women, which gradually decreases (with an intermediate increase between 31–43 years old); however, sexualisation persists until the age of 58. This could be explained by the fact that women aged 23–30 years are young in physical appearance according to social standards. Thus, they need not emphasise it; furthermore, they are developing a career, and the search for a partner is secondary. Sexualisation in photos and statements of a sexual nature in bios begin to gain importance in the 31–43 age group, probably because a double pressure begins in this band. First, there is social pressure to maintain a standard of beauty, often associated with the sexualisation of body image, as evidenced by several authors (Vendemia & Fox, 2024; Ward et al., 2023). Moreover, one feels the need to show that one is still fit and attractive, which is done by exhibiting the body. As the second pressure in this bracket can be to find a partner, showing yourself physically beautiful increases the chances of getting a match. The sexualisation of women remains high at age 44–58, probably for the same reasons, with the aggravating factor that, in this group, many have ended their long-term romantic relationships or have divorced and face stronger competition. Women, unlike men, must look physically attractive and show their attributes until they enter mature adulthood. In this study, it was found that from the age of 59 onwards, women stop sexualising themselves in photographs and place greater emphasis on other aspects, such as portraying themselves enjoying sports or recreational activities. This shows that there is a different awareness about the body; while appearance and weight are considerably important for older women, sexualising no longer seems to be important, as other studies also show (Bailey et al., 2016).

These findings on sexualisation in female profiles on Tinder confirm what has been evidenced in other studies, such as Mesa-Medina and Marfil Carmona (2018), who found that women expose themselves physically to a greater extent, making dating apps 'a visual showcase (...) where many girls exhibit their beauty leaving a halo of commodification of their own bodies' (p. 83).

As for the narratives, although it was found that there are almost an equal number of sexual approximations in the biographies of men and women. A new phenomenon observed is the narratives of rejection in female profiles. This may have to do with what Mesa-Medina and Marfil-Carmona (2018) find: there are many more sexual proposals towards female profiles, which may have caused users to establish a direct warning in their narratives, which, according to these authors, constitutes evidence of situations of harassment from men acting with machismo and sexual aggression.

Conclusions:

In several aspects, Tinder mirrors social reality: in real life, women also become more self-sexualised

and try to modify their physical appearance through makeup, clothing, and accessories. They even undergo cosmetic surgeries to enter the canon of attractiveness according to society; 86.3% of surgeries in 2020 were performed on female patients worldwide according to the International Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Therefore, the findings cannot be attributed to the app itself. Hence, the authors agree with what was stated by Mesa-Medina and Marfil-Carmona (2018): 'it is worth thinking about whether the exhibition of physical attributes, typical of the macho link of women to aesthetics, reflects the social values of the 'non-virtual' reality (p.82).

The present study constitutes a contribution to psychology, regarding the meaning given to being attractive in both men and women, at different stages of adulthood and based on social attributions and expectations. The reported findings are useful for understanding behavioral trends of various generational groups in relation to the environment in which they live and develop, which is useful for developmental psychology and clinical practice. Future research could include participants who are dating app users, for more direct information on the topic.

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Conflicts of interest declaration:

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the present study.

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