Dating scripts on social media:

A case study of Matthew Hussey's YouTube videos

Pauline Hoebanx

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By: Pauline Hoebanx

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Chair
Dr. Amy Swiffen

Examiner
Dr. Julie Archambault

Examiner
Dr. Océane Jasor

Thesis Supervisor(s)
Dr. Marc Lafrance

Approved by
Dr. Amy Swiffen — Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean

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Abstract

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Pauline Hoebanx

Heterosexual dating practices have been studied extensively in the social sciences. Many of these studies have employed Simon and Gagnon's scripting theory (1986) as their theoretical framework, finding that heterosexual dating norms have not changed since the 1950s (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). Among these studies, some have used dating advice as an empirical source of data, though they have remained focused on dating advice in the print media (e.g. Eaton & Rose, 2011; Rose & Frieze, 1993). There are no existing studies about dating advice on social media, and the present study proposes to address this gap in the literature, by conducting a qualitative case study of a sample of 30 videos from dating coach Matthew Hussey's YouTube channel (Hussey, n.d.). By changing the dynamics of information production, distribution and consumption, social media has increased the flow of accessible information, and this thesis examines whether such a transformation has affected norms surrounding dating scripts. Drawing upon Jackson's four dimensions of the social (2006a), I propose an analysis of the intersections of heteronormativity, mononormativity (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018), and neoliberalism in Matthew Hussey's dating advice videos. This research found that the dating scripts discussed in Hussey's videos are akin to those described in previous studies. However, an unexpected finding of this project was the limitations of scripting theory in accounting for structural power relations.

Keywords: dating scripts, scripting theory, heterosexual dating advice, social media, self-help, YouTube

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Introduction

> Every single one of us wants to make an impact when we're on a date, so here are five simple things that you can do to stay in his mind long after you've said goodnight. (Matthew Hussey, transcripts, p.92)

Matthew Hussey's YouTube videos made dating seem easy. I first discovered them in 2016, when I had just moved from Brussels to Toronto. YouTube had automatically recommended one of his videos to me, and while I do not remember what it was about, I do remember clicking on it, curious to learn more about dating norms on the other side of the Atlantic. I soon started watching Hussey's videos regularly. They were short, entertaining, and promised to teach me the "5 First-Date Moves That Make Him Want More," the "3 Steps to Make Him Commit To You,", the "5 Dating Hacks that Make Him Fall For You," and even "The Only 2 Answers You Need for Every Dating Problem." I felt like his videos were teaching me the rules of a game I had never properly learned how to play. The advice was familiar: he relied on the same tropes I had learned growing up from the media and from discussing dating woes with my friends. For example, in his video "What Makes You Undervalued by Men…", Hussey says:

> People need to see us as a challenge. If we come too easily, we will not be valued. It doesn't matter what your actual value is, don't expect people to value it if it comes to them too easy. (Transcripts, p.26)

I had always heard I should 'play hard to get,' but the advice seemed to make more sense when Hussey recommended it; there was a reasoning behind every action and reaction. He made dating seem less like a haphazard art, and more like a strategic game. But something unsettled me about his advice. Watching his videos sometimes made me feel like I was responsible for the dating problems I would face – problems my friends were facing as well. According to Hussey, it was somehow my fault that men were reluctant to commitment: I was not saying the right things, nor acting in the right way. On a particularly difficult day during my fieldwork, I wrote "This

feels like I am being scolded. This is triggering bad relationship flashbacks" (Personal notes, Visual analysis, p.10)

I felt disillusioned and annoyed by Hussey's advice. Why was this dating coach putting the responsibility of culturally shared dating problems and frustrations on the shoulders of individual women? Why was this man teaching women how to make a man commit to them, instead of addressing why they would need to force a man to do so in the first place? Why did women need to learn how to make a man fall for them, as if being themselves were not enough?

These videos were not just teaching women how to 'Get the Guy' (Hussey's catchphrase), they were telling a story about the expectations placed upon women and men in intimate and romantic settings. Studies focusing on Western[1] heterosexual sex and relationship advice books have found that most contemporary advice resembles the advice that was given in the 1950s, despite subsequent transformations of dating practices, as well as the structural reorganization of contemporary Western societies (e.g. Eaton & Rose, 2011; Rose & Frieze, 1993).

However, recent events have brought to light the broader structural pressures underlying men and women's intimate relations, and the prevalence of women's experiences of gendered violence and harassment at the hands of men. Founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke to assist survivors of sexual violence, the 'me too' movement was popularized in 2017, when the now-viral hashtag was used in a series of posts by women on Facebook and Twitter, denouncing situations of sexual assault and harassment they had experienced (Burke, n.d.; Zacharek,

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[1] For the purposes of my study, when I refer to the West, I am referring to Anglo-American Western countries.

Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). Not only did the movement bring to light the prevalence of sexual violence in women's lives, but it also revealed that oppressive behaviors could range from coerced sexual intercourse with a potential employer, to sexist jokes in a familial setting. This movement unmasked a social problem concerning relations between and amongst *all* men and women, rather than a problem concerning a few deviant men (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017).

There is a pressing need to study how sex and relationship advice educates those who consume it to accept and endure many of the things #metoo is resisting. While sex and relationship advice in books has been studied extensively in sociology (e.g. Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Eaton & Rose, 2011; Laner & Ventrone, 2000), no such research has been conducted on newer forms of media – with the notable exceptions of O'Neill's study on pick-up artists (PUAs) (O'Neill, 2015), further discussed in the 'Context' section, and Barker, Gill and Harvey's study on contemporary forms of sex advice (2018).

In this thesis, I propose to explore how Matthew Hussey's dating advice videos constitute and are constituted by the norms and expectations about women, men, and their intimate relations. Using a sample of 30 videos as a case study, I will explore how heterosexual dating advice in newer forms of media inform and are informed by the broader cultural norms and expectations about sex, gender, and sexuality. My aim is to contribute to the existing research on dating advice which has mostly remained focused on advice books. Dating advice on social media platforms has yet to be investigated. Newer forms of media have transformed the dynamics of information production, distribution and consumption, and I would like to examine the effects of these new dynamics on the reproduction of dating practices.

I will first situate my research within the existing literature on dating advice,

heterosexuality and the neoliberal culture of self-help. I will then present the two theoretical frameworks I have used to analyze the data collected for this study: scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), and Jackson's four dimensions of the social (1999; 2006a; 2006b). Following that, I will discuss my choice of methods – thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and visual situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) – before discussing my findings and suggesting avenues for future research.

Literature Review

Heterosexual sex and relationship advice literature generally portrays men and women as "essentially and *properly* different," a view that advice books often justify by drawing on evolutionary psychology theories about sex and gender (emphasis in original, O'Neill, 2015, p. 155). Most sex and relationship advice books are targeted towards heterosexual women (O'Neill, 2015) and generally teach them how to play a passive role in romantic or sexual encounters, advising them on the best way to react to men's initiations, or on how to prompt them (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Illouz, 2012). Heterosexual sex and relationship advice books are not representative of all Western sexual and romantic practices and beliefs. However, O'Neill notes that:

> [directed] by commercial imperatives, the most widely consumed forms of media exploit readily recognizable and easily consumable tropes, thereby reproducing highly conventional ideas about what relationships should look and feel like (2012, p. 15).

The commercial success of sex and relationship advice literature points to collectively shared experiences and anxieties about intimate relationships, and this literature can be analyzed as a source of data about dominant beliefs and expectations of men, women, and their relations (Atkinson, 2011; Ingraham, 1999; Papp, Liss, Erchull, Godfrey, & Waaland-Kreutzer, 2017). The "highly conventional ideas" about relationships constitute and are constituted by sex and relationship advice discourses, which have remained similar to those of the 1950s, despite the transformation of dating practices since then (Eaton & Rose, 2011).

In the following literature review, I will first define dating and dating scripts, then show how researchers have linked these scripts to intimate partner violence and rape culture, before presenting how dating advice has been used as a source of data to study dating scripts. Finally, I will show how both neoliberalism and social media have influenced the production and consumption of dating advice discourses.

Dating

Originally emerging as a marital matchmaking process in the 1920s, dating distinguished itself from the previously popular matchmaking process of 'calling', wherein a young woman or her parents would take the initiative of 'calling,' or inviting, a prospective romantic partner to their home (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Illouz, 2012). Dating, on the contrary, involved men taking women out into the public sphere to court them, placing the responsibility of courtship initiation upon men and lessening parents' control over their daughter's romantic partners (Coontz, 2006; Eaton & Rose, 2011).

Expectations about dating have since changed in the West, where dating relationships are no longer necessarily expected to lead to marriage. However, there is still an expectation that they will lead to long-term monogamous relationships (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Eaton & Rose, 2011; Jackson, 2006a). With the popularization of hookups – casual sexual encounters – dating relationships have also lost their role as the predominant mode of access to sexual intimacy (e.g. Bogle, 2007; Reid, Elliott, & Webber, 2011). Additionally, relations between women and men have changed since the 1950s, affected by events such as the commercialization of the birth control pill for women in the 1960s, the increase of women in the workforce and the extension of adults' life expectancies (Coontz, 2006; McGee, 2005).

Many studies have been conducted on heterosexual dating[2], but the concept of dating itself is underdefined in this field of studies, and there is no consensus on its precise definition. Dating is defined by some authors as a set of practices performed when individuals seek further

[2] See the following for literature reviews on the topic: Eaton & Rose, 2011; Owens, 2007; Surra, Gray, Boettcher, Cottle, & West, 2006.

romantic engagement with one another (Braboy Jackson, Kleiner, Geist, & Cebulko, 2011; Eaton & Rose, 2011), but it can also refer to a relationship stage, one that some authors situate before a relationship progresses to courtship or marriage. There is no apparent consensus on when the dating stage ends, when the courtship stage begins, or whether there is a distinction between the two (Surra, Gray, Boettcher, Cottle, & West, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, dating is defined as a mate-selection practice, found in cultures where individuals seemingly choose their own romantic partners[3], such as in Anglo-Western countries, as opposed to countries where arranged marriages are prevalent (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Straus M. A., 2004). The term 'dating' is understood here as meaning both a set of practices as well as a relationship stage. As a set of practices, dating encompasses the activities and social interactions individuals engage in with the intention of deciding whether they wish to establish a more committed relationship (Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007; Straus M. A., 2004). As a relationship stage, dating is understood here as preceding the stage where individuals commit themselves to an exclusive relationship with one or multiple partners (Braboy Jackson, Kleiner, Geist, & Cebulko, 2011). It is noteworthy that none of the articles reviewed for the purpose of this study addressed the possibility of polyamory, revealing an implicit expectation for monogamy in heterosexual relationships, both within the academic community and the objects of their study –sex and relationship advice. The norm of monogamy will be further addressed in the 'Analysis' section.

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[3] Illouz mitigates the apparent "unconstrained, free, and unfettered encounters between people," noting the cultural and structural pressures, as well as the "complex sets of evaluations" influencing the choice of a partner (Illouz, 2012, p. 90).

Dating Scripts

Simon and Gagnon's scripting theory is a popular theoretical framework in the study of intimate relationships, though Simon and Gagnon themselves never applied it to dating (1986). Simon and Gagnon introduced scripting theory as a new perspective to study sexuality, distancing themselves from the existing body of literature that relied heavily on Freud's work. Instead, they proposed scripting theory as an analytical tool that accounts for both individual and sociocultural factors in the development of sexuality (1986). Scripts are the organizational schemas individuals employ to make sense of the surrounding world, to predict others' behaviors, and to inform their own decisions. These scripts are composed of stereotypical behaviors, learned through cultural norms and interactions with others (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994; Laner & Ventrone, 2000).

Simon and Gagnon identify three levels of scripting behavior. The first, cultural scenarios, are abstract and generalized guides for action, flexible enough to be applicable to any situation, allowing room for adaptation and improvisation. The second level of scripting, interpersonal scripts, refers to the use of cultural scenarios "by a specific individual in a specific social context" (Simon & Gagnon, 1986, p. 97). In other words, they are the adaptation of cultural norms by an individual to inform their behavior in a specific setting. The third level of scripting, intrapsychic scripting, refers to the internal dialogue individuals have with themselves, playing out imaginary situations (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). This last level is less used in studies focused on dating, perhaps due to its more psychological orientation, as sociological studies on intimate relationships tend to focus on cultural scripts and their shared meanings.[4]

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[4] Scripting theory will be further discussed in the 'theoretical framework' section.

Scripting theory has been used in sociology to study highly ritualized practices, where cultural scenarios are the strongest, such as in heteronormative courtship practices (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). This framework enables researchers to account for shared meanings, interpersonal interactions, as well as the sociocultural environment upon which individuals draw to inform their decisions and expectations (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Many studies have focused on heterosexual first dates, which are heavily gendered and scripted encounters (e.g. Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007; Rose & Frieze, 1993). These studies use 'dating scripts' to refer to scripts employed specifically in dating situations, in all three levels of scripting (Eaton & Rose, 2011).

Studies have employed dating scripts as an analytical tool in different ways. For example, some studies set out to compile lists of the characteristics of a typical date (e.g. Alksnis, Desmarais, & Wood, 1996; Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994; Rose & Frieze, 1993). Others have compared dating scripts between groups, such as between heterosexual couples and homosexual couples (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994) or between age groups (Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007). Another prominent approach has been to evaluate the stability of dating scripts over time (e.g. Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Papp et al. 2017, Paynter & Leaper, 2016; Schleicher & Gilbert, 2005), and others have observed the role of technology as a mediator in romantic relations (Henry-Waring & Barraket, 2008; Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber, 2017).

While respondents of these studies have demonstrated varying levels of adherence to dating scripts, there appears to be a consensus about the contents of dating scripts themselves (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). For example, in their 2000 study "Dating scripts revisited," Laner and Ventrone administered a questionnaire consisting of a list of 41 possible behaviors on a heterosexual first date, collected through a previous study, such as "asking someone out on a

date," "waiting to be asked out," "eating light," "paying the bill," "initiating sexual situations," "bringing flowers." The questionnaire was administered to 206 university students in a large Southwestern university in the U.S., who were asked to indicate whether they thought each behavior was expected of a man, a woman, either or both. First dates were found to be "highly predictable events" (Laner & Ventrone, 2000, p. 497), where men tend to play the role of the initiator, and women play a reactive role. Additionally, this study found that women and men had the same expectations of each other and of their own gender. The authors argue that the outcome of dates following these dominant, traditional dating scripts is unlikely to be the egalitarian relationship to which contemporary Western individuals aspire. The authors hypothesize that a relationship with an equal distribution of power between partners cannot come out of dates following traditional dating scripts, whereby men are encouraged to play an active role, and women a passive role (Laner & Ventrone, 2000).

Sex and relationship advice literature has been used by some researchers as a "non-empirical cultural source of popular cultural scripts for gender roles in dating" (Eaton & Rose, 2011, p. 845). For example, Rose and Frieze analyzed dating advice books from 1957 to 1983 (1993), while Eaton and Rose analyzed dating advice books from the 2000s to 2010 (2011), and both studies found that the content of these books has remained generally the same since the 1950s, indicating a stability of how gender is constructed in dating scripts in the U.S. (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1993). Eaton and Rose suggest that these highly gendered dating scripts are still employed today because they help reduce the uncertainty of getting to know someone new. Having a script to follow when getting to know a potential partner provides a set of expected behaviors, which reduces the unpredictability of the encounter. Furthermore, demonstrating knowledge of the typical and appropriate cultural scenarios can be an attractive

trait, as it demonstrates social-savviness (Eaton & Rose, 2011). By limiting the number of possible misunderstandings through shared meanings and expectations, following dating scripts has higher chances of leading to a successful interaction (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Additionally, while the improvement of women's condition in the West since the 1950s is often seen as a contradiction to the persistence of traditional dating scripts, there can be little doubt that women still face discrimination, especially women whose identities intersect with other minority groups, such as women of color, disabled women and queer women (Longhi & Brynin, 2017; OECD, 2017).

The general discourse found in mainstream sex and relationship advice is that women want intimacy, while men resist it (Rubin, 2000). Women are often portrayed as having lower sex drives, seeking emotional connection through committed relationships, while men are presented as having an uncontrollable sexual drive that leads them to seek out short-term relationships (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Jackson, 2006a; O'Neill, 2015). Illouz traces the expectation that men should be the initiators of intimate relationships back to the deep-seated belief that women have the natural ability to resist sexual temptation, as well as the moral and religious imperatives of abstinence and purity of the 18th century (2012). In fact, dating advice literature is often grounded in scientistic discourses, using evolutionary psychology theories to justify the supposed natural differences in sex drives and relationship expectations between men and women (McGee, 2005; O'Neill, 2015). Such theories claim that gendered behaviors come from biological and instinctual differences between men and women, rather than from the social pressures and norms that surround them (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Illouz, 2012; O'Neill, 2015).

The double standards apparent in dating scripts grow out of what Connell (1987, 1995) calls "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity." Connell defines these mutually

reinforcing concepts as the idealized expressions of masculinity and femininity at a given time in a society (1987). Hegemonic masculinity is first and foremost heterosexual, and by extension, based on the sexual conquest of women (Connell, 1995, p. 78). It is upheld by the subordination of other forms of masculinity, as well as by the subordination of all forms of femininity (1987). There is no comparable hegemonic form of femininity, as there is no culturally agreed-upon ideal expression of it (1987). Emphasized femininity is one form of femininity among others, characterized by its "compliance with this subordination" and its orientation "to [accommodate] the interests and desires of men" (1987, p. 183).[5] While it is not the only normative form of femininity, emphasized femininity participates in the upholding of hegemonic masculinity through its compliance with the current gender order.

The stability of dating scripts over time indicates that heteronormative dating practices are based on similar hegemonic ideals of gender as in the 1950s. It is important to study their persistence, as contemporary dating practices participate in and contribute to a larger system of gendered power dynamics.

Rape Culture and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Dating practices encouraged by 1950s dating advice were based on men and women's realities at the time. For example, the expectation that men should pay for drinks or dinner on a date came from the large wage gap between men and women (Coontz, 2006). However, contemporary dating advice has generally remained the same since the 1950s, encouraging

[5] Connell originally argued that the ordering of gender in patriarchal societies is centered around the global dominance of men over women (1987), but she later cautioned that such a view did not adequatley represent the complicated relations to hegemonic forms of masculinity among groups of men and of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 846-847).

practices that are no longer grounded in structural realities, but in tradition instead (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Rose & Frieze, 1993). While it is tempting to infer that gender inequalities observed in long-term heterosexual relationships originate from outdated dating practices – such as the unequal distribution of emotional labor – it is important not to ignore the structural and cultural forces keeping the contemporary gender order in place (Jackson, 2006b; O'Neill, 2015). As previously mentioned, shared cultural scripts do have the benefit of providing guidelines of action to follow, in what could otherwise be a highly unpredictable situation (Eaton & Rose, 2011). However, multiple studies have shown that adopting the gender roles prescribed by most heterosexual relationship and sex advice literature is a predictor of coercive behaviors, harassment, and violence, perpetrated mostly by men against women (e.g. Boswell & Spade, 1996; Papp et al., 2017; Strain, Hockett, & Saucier, 2015). Indeed, on an interpersonal level, longstanding dating scripts can lead to difficulties in constituting egalitarian relationships (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). On a structural level however, these scripts have been linked to the perpetuation of rape culture (e.g. Boswell & Spade, 1996; Byers, 1996; Graham, 1995) and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Papp et al., 2017).

The term 'rape culture' refers to "a set of cultural beliefs supporting men's violence against women" (Phipps, Ringrose, Renold, & Jackson, 2018, p. 1). In such a sociocultural context, sexual assault is constructed as an inevitable – and sometimes even a desirable – consequence of men's alleged naturally aggressive sexuality. Women are thought to enjoy being "aggressively pursued, and in some cases, overpowered by men" (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018, p. 23). Victims of assault are thought to have deserved or provoked it,

> by failing to perform a chaste femininity, or for sending out signals to men that they are 'up for it', regardless of how much they protest […]. These so-called 'signals' include staying out late at night, drinking alcohol, flirting with men, wearing 'provocative' clothing, or being sexually active (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018, pp. 23-24).

Rape culture intersects with the phenomenon of IPV, which the U.S. department of justice defines as "a pattern of abusive behaviors, physical or psychological, used by one individual to control or exert power over another in the context of an intimate relationship" (as cited in Papp et al., 2017, p.99). The Canadian department of justice provides a more precise definition of IPV, by listing specific types of abuse, as well as types of relationship in which IPV can occur: "[…] physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, social and financial abuse […]," which "is not limited to those in a former or current legal marriage or cohabitation, but also includes those in a dating relationship" (Northcott, 2008, p. 7). However, these definitions fail to highlight that sexual violence and IPV are often gendered phenomena, in most cases perpetrated by men against women (Kelly, 2007; Papp et al., 2017).[6] Intimate partner violence was the leading type of violence experienced by women in Canada in 2016, according to Statistics Canada: 79% of the victims of police-reported intimate partner violence were women (Burczycka, 2016).

Kelly outlines three distinct definitions of rape in the social sciences: (1) rape as forceful intercourse, (2) rape as nonconsensual sexual acts, and (3) rape as coerced sexual acts (2007). For the purpose of this study, I will be using the last two definitions, as traditional dating scripts tend to minimize the distinction between consent and coercion (Byers, 1996). For example, Boswell and Spade, in a study on collegiate rape culture, posit that rape culture is based on the assumption that men are naturally aggressive, while women are naturally passive (1996), and the same distinction is found in traditional dating scripts. In fact, Strain et al. place consensual sex

[6] The gendered nature of this phenomena is the subject of extensive debates. Many researchers insist that male victims of IPV are underrepresented, and that there is gender symmetry in IPV (see for example (Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, 2006). While I do agree that expectations of masculinity may prevent some men from taking action against female abusers, I am not persuaded that there are as many male victims as female victims.

and rape on the same spectrum of behaviors, ranging from both partners consenting to sex, to one imposing intercourse on the other, which, they hypothesize, can lead to misunderstandings between partners (2015).

The belief that men are naturally more aggressive than women is crystalized in what Byers identifies as the "token refusal." Part of the dominant dating script, the "token refusal" refers to the expectation that men are to continue pursuing or pressuring women after they initially refuse contact or sexual touch (1996, p. 10). O'Neill found a similar strategy in advice given in pick-up artist communities. Known as "last-minute resistance", or LMR, it is the notion that women's resistance to sex is only a last-minute attempt "to protect their reputation," rather than a disagreement to engage in sex itself (2015, p. 97). In fact, Barker, Gill and Harvey found that much sex advice does not cover the question of consent, and when it does, it usually falls under the 'no means no' perspective of consent (2018). The 'no means no' understanding of consent refers to the view that one should not be forced into sex after having expressed not wanting to have sex. However, this perspective has been supplemented more recently by the 'yes means yes' approach, which emphasizes the need for enthusiastic consent to sex, rather than simply the absence of a refusal (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

Papp, Erchull, Godfrey and Waaland-Kreutzer have found that adhering to masculine norms of male dominance can be a predictor of the perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) (2017, p. 100). However, they also found that women with a traditional view of romance generally consider the conventional norms of male dominance and female submissiveness to be attractive. For the authors, this tendency is intensified by the media's representation of cultural scenarios, where abusive relationships are often presented as passionate and romantic (2017). Their study shows that relationship scripts in the media can contribute to women romanticizing

abusive or controlling behaviors, which can, in turn, lead to a failure to recognize experiences of abuse or IPV (Papp et al., 2017, pp. 104-109).

Critical Heterosexuality Studies

Dating scripts are not restricted to heteronormative courtship practices, but heterosexual dating, and heterosexual behavioral scripts more generally, inform the behaviors and expectations of all individuals, regardless of their sexuality, as they are embedded in a larger system of gendered power relations (Johnson, 2005). Jackson argues that the operations of heteronormativity go further than the normalization of a certain sexual preference, as they also influence gender performance expectations (2006a). She points out that even in societies where LGBT+ rights are increasingly recognized, the most socially valued queer relationship arrangements are those replicating the normative heterosexual arrangements: dyadic, sexually and romantically exclusive relationships (Jackson, 2006a). This echoes Klinkenberg and Rose's earlier study on the dating scripts of gay men and lesbians, which showed that the scripts followed by the homosexual respondents in their study paralleled the prominent heteronormative scripts (1994). Heterosexual dating scripts and the heteronormative system in which they are inscribed affect all individuals, and the field of critical heterosexuality studies seeks to expose how heterosexuality intersects with the operations of gender and sexuality in a larger system of power (Fischer, 2013).

For example, in her study of weddings, Ingraham defines heterosexuality as being an institution, constituted by a set of highly ritualized practices (1999). More than a biological fact, heterosexuality is bound up in norms and rules that organize relations between genders, while preserving the hierarchies of race, class and sexuality (Ingraham, 1999). However, the structuring operations of the institution of heterosexuality are concealed by what Ingraham calls

the “heterosexual imaginary”, which depicts heterosexuality as an ahistorical and biological fact (1999, p. 13). Social practices maintain the heterosexual imaginary in place, such as the institution of marriage, which naturalizes the State’s regulation of sexuality and reproduction (Ingraham, 1999, p. 19). Following this definition, heterosexuality can thus be analyzed through scripting theory, identifying cultural scenarios that contribute to the naturalization of certain heterosexual practices. For example, dating scripts participate in the heterosexual imaginary by normalizing men’s domination over women. By assigning men and women with different sets of possible behaviors, dating scripts maintain the illusion that women are naturally passive, and that men naturally pursue them.

The premise of critical heterosexuality studies is that heterosexuality is a social construct, creating specific power dynamics between men and women, as well as between heterosexuality and other sexualities (Fischer, 2013). Jackson proposes a multilevel analytical tool that helps researchers explore various dimensions at which heterosexuality operates. She identifies four dimensions or levels researchers can use when analyzing the intersections of heterosexuality, gender and sexuality: (1) the structural dimension, where heterosexuality is understood as an institution, participating in the macrosocial shaping of social life; (2) the dimension of meaning, which focuses on the discourses that constitute and are constituted by subjective and collective understandings of sex, gender, and heterosexuality; (3) the dimension of routine social practices, where heterosexuality, gender and sexuality are constituted and understood by everyday practices in localized contexts; and (4) the dimension of subjectivity, which focuses on the constitution of the self as an embodied subject with “sexual and gendered desires and identities” (Jackson, 1999, §5.8; 2006a; 2006b; Fischer, 2013). Jackson cites Simon and Gagnon’s scripting theory as part of the inspiration for the elaboration of her analytical dimensions of gender, sexuality and

heterosexuality, and I will be using both analytical tools in my analysis. They are further discussed in the 'Theoretical framework' section.

Neoliberalism

Laner and Ventrone associate the market success of the sex and relationship advice genre to its characteristic promise to success in dating endeavors (2000), while Eaton and Rose attribute its success in part to "the general importance of social connectedness for human well-being," as well as "the idolization of romantic relationships in American culture" (2011, p. 844). However, they also hypothesize that the large quantity of available dating advice resources may be caused by an emerging conflict between egalitarian ideals and traditional dating scripts (Eaton & Rose, 2011)

It is interesting to note a trend appearing in more recent studies on sex and relationship advice media, that attribute their enduring market success to the seeping of the economic theory of neoliberalism into intimate life (e.g. Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; McGee, 2005; O'Neill, 2015). First appearing in the West in the 1940s, neoliberalism as an economic doctrine started to gain traction in the 1970s, spreading both transnationally and across domains of social life (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Gamble, 2016). Though neoliberalism does not represent a uniform set of beliefs, its major tenet is that markets will benefit from the deregulation of economic activity through the reduction of the role of the state, the privatization of state assets, and the minimization of welfare spending (Gamble, 2016). It is increasingly tied to austerity and debt, as well as to the introduction of market logics into everyday life (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). The neoliberal belief that the role of the State must be reduced in favor of economic freedom has translated culturally into the belief that the State should withdraw from all areas of personal life, to allow individual freedom. As a result, individuals are expected to be self-

sufficient, rational actors,

> who are exhorted to make sense of their lives through discourses of freedom, autonomy and choice – no matter how constrained their lives may actually be (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 8).

Individuals are increasingly called upon to become entrepreneurs of the self, constantly urged to self-optimize, creating what McGee names a 'belabored self' (2005, p. 16), operating within what Barker, Gill and Harvey deem a 'makeover paradigm' (2018, p. 9). Constant self-betterment and competition against others are at the core of the entrepreneurial self, upheld by meritocratic beliefs that success is "available to anyone who is willing to work long and hard enough," but whose failures "must necessarily be individual shortcomings and weaknesses" (McGee, 2005, p. 13). Neoliberalism fails to recognize that success in such a competitive environment is built upon previously established socio-economical inequalities, and, in turn, reproduces the unequal distribution of wealth, opportunities and power it fosters (Illouz, 2012; McGee, 2005).

The self-help industry, then, proposes itself as the solution to "culturally shared and socially patterned" problems that are identified as individual issues (O'Neill, 2015, p. 151; McGee, 2005). Consumers of self-help literature are incessantly depicted as inadequately performing in any area of their lives and are advised that constant self-improvement is the solution to these insufficiencies. However, "there is no end-point to self-making: individuals can continuously pursue shifting and subjective criteria for success," resulting in the self-perpetuating and self-serving nature of the self-help industry (McGee, 2005, p. 19). For Illouz, the self-help industry participates in the commodification of emotions under capitalism, by marketing certain subjectivities as ideals attainable through the purchase of certain products and services (2017).

Everyday experts offer their services as guides in a world where "everything seems to

rest upon individual choice" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 15). For example, sex and relationship experts help individuals systematize and rationalize their search for a partner, promoting more efficient methods that are less time- and effort-consuming (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; O'Neill, 2015). Mainly directed at heterosexual women, relationship and sex advice is imbued with a sense of urgency, emanating from the cultural expectation that women must settle for a long-term partner sooner than men. Women's bodies, more than men's, are constructed as "a unit defined by chronology (and thus threatened by decay)," by ageist standards of beauty, dictating that desirable women are youthful women, and by the perceived narrowness of women's fertility window (Illouz, 2012, p. 75; Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

While the commercial success of sex and relationship advice literature points to shared anxieties and issues, they are produced within neoliberal societies, where individuals are held responsible for their failings. Individuals are expected to approach their intimate lives in the same way that they are expected to tackle workplace issues: in a rational, systematic manner that will yield efficient results. Neoliberal discourses pervade the private sphere, influencing individual subjectivities.

Social Media and Mass Media

Ingraham characterizes the media as a provider of "symbols, myths, images, and ideas by which we constitute dominant culture" (1999, p. 73). Sex and relationship advice media provide a series of representations of heterosexual relationships, presented as the norm, though these only represent select aspects of reality (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Papp et al., 2017). The typical dating scenarios presented in mainstream sex and relationship advice demand a level of spending and beauty work that is only accessible to a select minority of women: mostly White, able and upper-middle class (Atkinson, 2011; Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). However, the popularity of

this form of advice indicates that "[rather] than simply *reflecting* class," much sex and relationship advice "*constructs* a desirable affluent lifestyle" (emphasis in original, Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 117).

The scope of possible representations has been broadened by the introduction of social media, which emphasizes participatory culture rather than passive spectatorship (Jenkins, 2006). Unlike traditional media, social media are Internet platforms where any user is a consumer and a producer of content, without the need for large-scale production companies (Jenkins, 2006; Slevin, 2007). These platforms have become increasingly participatory and provide additional opportunities for interaction between consumers and creators, such as with the comment section below YouTube videos (Burgess & Green, 2018; Jenkins, 2006).

One of my hypotheses is that the representations of heterosexual norms and dating scripts on social media are affected by the dynamics of content creation and distribution inherent to social media platforms. Both mass media and social media participate in building popular culture (Rolando, Taddeo, & Beccaria, 2016), but social media is characterized by the interlacing of mainstream content producers, such as television networks, with bottom-up cultural dynamics, wherein consumers make their own content (Burgess & Green, 2018).

Initially created as a platform where personal videos could be shared, YouTube has since become a site where traditional media broadcasters, advertising agencies, 'YouTube stars' and smaller creators compete for visibility, and in some cases, monetization and ad revenue (Burgess & Green, 2018). The lines between professionals and amateurs become blurred, and "the relationships between audiences and experts is further flattened" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 48). However, Jenkins warns that the participatory culture of social media does not guarantee democratic platforms of content distribution (2006). Barker, Gill and Harvey remark that social

media content is created and consumed in the same cultural landscapes as mass forms of media (2018). Despite the greater opportunities for participation and interaction between consumers and producers on social media platforms, they must not be considered as independent from the social and cultural context users find themselves in. Individuals interacting with social media platforms are embedded in relations of power that are reflected in what is consumed and what is created on both social media and mass media (Barker, Gill, & Harvey 2018). Additionally, mass forms of media and social media are increasingly convergent on the Internet, where users can consume and discuss magazine articles, books, and videos in the same space (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

YouTube has become "part of the mix of media we all use as part of our lives" (Burgess & Green, 2018, p. 8). Because the amount of information available in contemporary societies is too vast for a single individual to consume, individuals construct their own narratives of the world out of the information they have gleaned from the available "media flow" to make sense of their everyday lives (Jenkins, 2006, p. 4). YouTube videos, and social media platforms in general, offer an "intensely visual, constantly in reach" source of information on sex and relationship advice, providing the opportunity for advice to be "crowdsourced" through discussions in comment sections – which was impossible with printed books and magazines (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 48). YouTube video consumers, and social media consumers more generally, interact differently with the breadth of discourses and representations available through these platforms than they do with traditional media. In this study, I would like to explore how new modes of consumption and distribution of advice influence the discourses about sex, gender and sexuality, using a relatively historically stable source of cultural scenarios – dating advice – to see how they have been transformed by the dynamics of social media.

Conclusion

Heterosexual romantic and sexual relationships have been an important topic of research in the social sciences for decades. Intimate relationships are sites where men and women still find themselves engaging in conventional gendered practices and where "women are made to accept (and 'love') their submission to men" (Illouz, 2012, pp. 3-4). These gendered practices and expectations constitute and are constituted by contemporary Western dating scripts, which have been found to be extremely similar to those from the 1950s (Eaton & Rose, 2011). However, these scripts participate in the perpetuation of sexist expectations of men and women, based on beliefs about the male sex drive and female submissiveness (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Illouz, 2012). The endorsement of these behaviors has been found to be a predictor of coerced intimate relations and IPV, instigated mostly by men against women (Papp et al., 2017; Strain, Hockett, & Saucier, 2015). Though following heterosexual dating scripts does not necessarily lead to situations of coercion, it is important to understand how they participate in the reproduction of heteronormative expectations of sex, gender and sexuality and, more specifically, the uneven distribution of power between genders (Fischer, 2013).

One way to study these mechanisms is to focus on cultural scenarios provided by the media, as they are a resource upon which individuals draw information to shape their perception of reality (Paasonen, 2007). Researchers have turned to sex and relationship advice to identify the dominant dating scripts used during a certain time in a specific culture (e.g. Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Laner & Ventrone, 2000). While the dating scripts provided in sex and relationship advice books have been widely studied, there are no such studies on the dating advice given on social media. The dynamics of content production, distribution, and consumption have changed with the emergence of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Vast

amounts of information are now available for free, accessible anytime, by anyone possessing an Internet connection, and it is, therefore, important to study the transformations of scripts previously distributed through traditional media. This is an important topic to explore because the ideas and stereotypes dating scripts can be seen to participate in a larger social phenomenon that is rape culture. The ideas and stereotypes dating scripts can encourage contribute to a climate of sexual violence, perpetuated mostly by men against women, regardless of their sexuality. It is paramount to examine the mechanisms maintaining the stability of scripts, in order to better understand those holding rape culture and the institution of heterosexuality in place.

A number of novel and previously unexplored research questions emerge from the literature I have just reviewed: How have the new dynamics of content production, distribution and consumption inherent to social media platforms transformed dating scripts? With my main research question, I wish to see if the conclusions drawn about the stability of dating scripts still apply to those distributed on social media platforms, popularized after the publication of the reviewed studies. Does the medium of content distribution affect the message? Or will the dating advice found on YouTube reinstate the same dating scripts as authors have identified in previous studies about dating advice books? By answering these questions, I hope to make a relevant contribution to the extant literature on dating advice. In the following section, I will present the theoretical frameworks I have drawn upon to answer these questions.

Theoretical Framework

Many studies on heterosexual dating use Simon and Gagnon's scripting theory as a theoretical framework (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Though more recent studies have tended to move away from this theory (e.g. Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; O'Neill, 2015), basing their work instead on intersectional analyses of power, Simon and Gagnon's framework was one of the founding theories of sociological understandings of sexuality (Jackson, 1999). Jackson draws upon scripting theory to propose a multilevel analytical tool of the social, accounting for the issues of power and inequality that Simon and Gagnon's theory failed to address (Jackson, 1999, § 5.9).

My study aims to contribute to the existing body of research on heterosexual dating, and referencing the most prominent theoretical framework in the field is necessary to bring this analysis in conversation with existing studies. As a result, this section will first outline the strengths and weaknesses of Simon and Gagnon's theory, before introducing Jackson's four dimensions of the social as an alternative framework, which calls for a similar approach, but additionally accounts for issues of power and inequality.

Scripting Theory

The central premise of scripting theory is that most behaviors are guided by a form of pre-existing syntax, or scripts, emerging out of social interaction, (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Simon and Gagnon identify three levels at which scripting occurs: at the cultural level, the interpersonal level, and the intrapsychic level. These can all be understood and explained using Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors of human interaction (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

Scripts operating at the cultural level – cultural scenarios – delineate the possible roles individuals can choose and expect of others. Cultural scenarios serve as guidelines of how these

roles can be interpreted by actors, and how they can be exited. These scenarios only function if there is a cast of actors willing to play their assigned roles, or in other words, if individuals are willing to perform available roles according to the expectations outlined by cultural scenarios (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). For example, Illouz historically situates the contemporary norm that men avoid commitment to monogamous romantic relationships. She opposes it to 19th century relationship norms, where "men's social existence depended on being married" (Illouz, 2012, p. 63). Adopting a scripting perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as a transformation of cultural scenarios, as men gradually shirked the roles and expectations with which the previous scenario had provided them.

The guidelines and expected behaviors outlined by cultural scenarios provide actors with the flexibility to adapt them to the localized social contexts in which they find themselves. Cultural scenarios are too vague to be applied to interpersonal interactions without necessitating actors to partially rewrite them, thereby creating interpersonal scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). For example, the cultural expectation that men avoid commitment can serve as a guideline in interpersonal interactions, but individual men have the agency to decide whether they wish to follow it (Illouz, 2012).

The last level of scripting – intrapsychic scripting – can be explained using the metaphor of an actor rehearsing her lines alone, playing all the parts in a scene. This level refers to the internal dialogues individuals have when they imagine interactions, assuming that their peers' responses and behaviors are scripted in the same way as their own (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

The dramaturgical metaphor for social interactions is particularly relevant to the study of heterosexual dating advice, which draws on cultural scenarios and the assumption that individuals follow their assigned roles, providing guidelines for interaction as well as examples

of interpersonal scripts. For example, when sex and relationship advice guides instruct women on how to 'play hard to get', and men on how to push past women's 'last minute resistance' (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; O'Neill, 2015), they are providing interpersonal guides of action based on the widespread cultural scenario assigning the role of gatekeepers of sex to women, and the role of initiators in romantic and sexual interactions to men (Illouz, 2012). If they were to veer off these dating scripts, individuals would risk losing any sort of consensus or understanding from their partner(s) on a date.

Scripting theory was conceived as an alternative understanding of human sexuality to the psychoanalytic theory of innate libidinal drives (Jackson, 2006a; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). This conception of the human psyche is particularly well suited for the field of critical heterosexuality studies, which aims to question what is presented as natural or instinctual, such as men's stronger sex drives, providing a cultural analysis of heterosexuality, while accounting for individual agency in the application of cultural scripts.

Jackson's Four Dimensions of the Social

For Jackson, scripting theory was one of the precursors of critical heterosexuality studies (2006). She situates Simon and Gagnon as part of both the symbolic interactionist and social constructionist traditions,[7] which permitted "the analytical separation of gendered and sexual aspects of the self, seeing them as empirically and contingently, rather than necessarily, interrelated" (2006a, p. 116). The distinction between sex and gender allowed for the influence

[7] These characterizations were common in the 1980s, but are less common in contemporary sociological work. Very simply put, social constructionism focuses on the historical and social processes that sustain "apparently natural or innate features of life, such as gender", while symbolic interactionism focuses on the construction of subjective and shared meanings through social interaction (Brym & Lie, 2018, p. 160).

of socializing processes to be accounted for in the explanation of human behaviors. This also allowed for a consideration of the expression of gender and sexuality as historically and geographically situated phenomena, shaped by the available cultural resources, and where "variability is possible and agency is a factor even in conformity" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 116).

However, Jackson notes that Simon and Gagnon's highly discursive approach does not account for practices, identities, and institutions that shape and are shaped by social interactions, and more importantly, "it [is] not conducive to thinking about issues of power and inequality" (1999, §5.9). What Jackson proposes to remedy this, are four levels or dimensions at which the social can be analyzed. The first three dimensions parallel Simon and Gagnon's scripting levels: (1) the dimension of subjectivity, similar to the intrapsychic level of scripting, which focuses on the understanding of the self as an embodied subject, through cultural norms and routine interactions (Jackson, 2006a); (2) the dimension of routine social practices, corresponding to the interpersonal level of scripting, which, rather than the constitution of discourses through interaction, encompasses all practices through which individuals enact their identities and make sense of the world around them (Jackson, 2006a); and (3) the dimension of meaning, corresponding to cultural scenarios, referring to the broader cultural discourses individuals draw upon to understand themselves and constitute their routine social practices (Jackson, 2006a).

Jackson's fourth dimension of the social, the structural or institutional dimension, refers to the normalization of practices and discourses through institutional apparatuses such as the law or the State (Jackson, 2006a). It is this dimension that allows to situate the scripting and scripted processes identified by Simon and Gagnon within a framework of power and inequality

(Jackson, 1999).[8]

For Jackson, gender, sex and heterosexuality are phenomena of different orders, and her four levels of analysis allow us to situate the analysis of heterosexuality in the wider structuring and structural operations of heteronormativity that affect all individuals (Jackson, 2006a). However, Jackson warns that the four dimensions she identifies are not meant to represent a "total theorization of the social", nor are they meant to come together to "form a unified whole" (2006a, p. 108). As she puts it: "they cut across each other, as well as interlocking, producing disjunctions between and within them" (2006a, p. 108). Additionally, she notes that "it is difficult, if not impossible to focus on all [dimensions] at once" (2006a, p. 108).

Despite Jackson's cautionary claim that it is challenging to address all four dimensions in a single study, this is – in fact – what I try to do in the analysis that follows here. That said, I did not attempt to fully capture how Matthew Hussey's videos inform and are informed by the heteronormative, mononormative and neoliberal cultural norms in all four dimensions. Instead, I used Jackson's four levels as stepping stones, guides to draw my analysis from a very specific case study to the larger structural systems within which it operates. I have not found any studies that approached dating scripts in this way, by not only seeking to identify them, but also to situate them in larger systems of power and domination. I will, therefore, be using Jackson's four levels of analysis of the social, in conjunction with Simon and Gagnon's scripting theory. This will allow me to analyze how Matthew Hussey's dating advice videos address existing cultural

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[8] Simon and Gagnon later credited feminist theorists for adding the discussion of oppression and domination to the analysis of the social construction of sexuality (Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

scenarios and dating scripts, as well as how these videos are situated in a wider system of power relations shaped by heteronormativity, mononormativity[9] and neoliberalism.

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[9] To designate the normalization of monogamous coupledom, Barker, Gill and Harvey use the term ‘mononormativity’ (2018).

Context

It is easy to find dating advice videos on YouTube, and many channels are entirely dedicated to the topic. Matthew Hussey is not the only man giving heterosexual dating advice to women on the platform, but he is one of the most subscribed-to dating coaches, with 1.7 million subscribers (Matthew Hussey, 2019). His videos have accumulated over 280 million views. He has over 460 public videos on his channel, the first one dating back to July 2010 (Matthew Hussey: Videos, n.d.; Matthew Hussey, 2019). I chose to focus on his channel because of its popularity as well as the fact that it is entirely dedicated to giving dating advice to women about men. In addition, I chose Hussey's channel because he is an active content producer, posting one video a week, every Sunday. Having a regular publication schedule is recommended by YouTube to maintain a regular viewer base and grow it over time (How to earn money from your videos, n.d.). In his videos, Hussey gives tips and scripts women can follow to help them find a lifelong partner, or, according to his tagline: 'get the guy'. He justifies his expert knowledge through his previous experience as a dating coach for men, working for the company *PUA Training* (Pick-up artist training) (Lin, 2010),[10] claiming that his knowledge of men's desires and secrets will help women find love.[11] Hussey does not only give dating advice in his YouTube videos, but also on TV, the radio, and in Cosmopolitan magazine. According to his website:

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[10] PUAs, or pick-up artists, are seduction coaches, generally for men, who are known for teaching streamlined methods for 'picking up' women for casual sex. They are often associated with the 'manosphere,' an online hub of antifeminist groups (Marwick & Caplan, 2018; O'Neill, 2015).

[11] It seems that with time, Hussey has gradually shunned his affiliation with the PUA community. I remember watching one of his videos a few years ago where he mentions he used to be a dating coach for men, but he does not mention his former place of employment in any of the videos of my sample. However, the search for "Matthew Hussey PUA" on Google yields results from PUA websites and reddit posts discussing his former employment at PUA Training.

> He is a New York Times bestselling author, he has his own national radio show, he's been given his own television show, Rachael Ray, Katie Couric, Ryan Seacrest, Meredith Vieira, Elvis Duran, Match.com and many others frequently invite him to share his advice.
>
> Matthew is also a monthly relationship advice columnist for Cosmopolitan Magazine and the dating expert on ABC's digital series *What To Text Him Back*.
>
> He's had the privilege of working with royalties and celebrities like Christina Aguilera and Eva Longoria. He's also coached over 100,000 women in his live seminars and his training videos have reached over 217,000,000 [12] women around the world. (About Get The Guy & Matthew Hussey, n.d.)

Pick-up Artists and Dating Advice

Hussey's past work for a pick-up artist (PUA) company is unsurprising, given how the format of his branding resembles that of the PUAs O'Neill studied in London:

> Today, a panoply of private companies as well as independent trainers offer fee-based seduction training services that include one-to-one coaching, weekend 'bootcamp' courses and live-in 'residential' programs, the cost of which ranges from several hundred to thousands of pounds. Blogs and online forums provide spaces for men to document their activities, discuss techniques and give advice to one another. Those with established profiles as trainers often host channels on social media sites such as *YouTube*, where their videos can garner hundreds of thousands or even millions of views (O'Neill, 2015, p. 8)

Hussey tends to use his videos as a means for advertising his other products, such as his dating guides, his conferences, his five-day retreat, and subscriptions to premium content on his website. What distinguishes Matthew Hussey from the PUAs described by O'Neill, however, is the stated aim of his videos. PUAs teach men how to 'pick up' women, generally quantifying their success by the number of women with which they casually have had sex (O'Neill, 2015).

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[12] This number appears to come from the total number of views on his YouTube channel, which does not reflect the individual number of women who have watched his videos, but simply the number of times the videos have been played. For example, I have contributed at least 5 views to each of the videos of my sample, even though they were all watched from the same computer and the same Google account.

Hussey's videos are meant to help women 'get the guy,' though the method for finding a lifelong partner involves dating more efficiently, by meeting more men and "diversifying the risk" (transcripts, p.22). However, this distinction between the two supposedly conflicting objectives is not clear-cut. O'Neill found that many of her interviewees tended to "[subscribe] to a kind of 'two-phase masculinity,'" where the first phase of casual sex would eventually give way to a committed, monogamous relationship (2015, p. 34). The differences between the two objectives seem to lie within the ideas and expectations about the intended audience's gender, which are constructed within the same heteronormative relationship paradigm, wherein men are thought to have a higher sex drive which naturally prevents them from settling down with a partner, unlike women who are thought to naturally desire monogamy (O'Neill, 2015).

Many elements of the PUA philosophy identified in O'Neill's study can be found in Hussey's advice. For instance, both rely on evolutionary psychology to justify so-called biological differences between women and men. They both promote the idea that seduction is a skill that can be honed, if individuals are willing to put in the effort to do so. They also support the general "ethos of competitive individualism within the domain of intimate relationships" (O'Neill, 2015, p. 26).

PUAs are often dismissed as an anomalous form of seduction rooted in antifeminist sentiment (see for example: Labarre, 2015; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). However, O'Neill argues that the seduction industry is not "a deviation or departure from current social conventions," but rather "an extension and acceleration of cultural norms" (O'Neill, 2015, p. 7). For O'Neill, the seduction methods used by PUAs are created to be successfully used following existing cultural norms, and are thus a reflection of them. This is what makes it difficult to create a clear distinction between advice in the PUA community and dating advice. They both aim to teach

their audience the most efficient methods to meet a partner, based on the assumption that men and women are biologically and culturally different (O'Neill, 2015). The ideas about gender differences identified by O'Neill within the PUA community are present in more mainstream forms of dating advice – though perhaps less prominently – such as in Hussey's videos. For this reason, I often refer to O'Neill's study in my analysis, even though Hussey does not affiliate his work on dating advice for women with the PUA community.

Methodology

Using a sample of dating coach Matthew Hussey's videos as a case study, I examine the heteronormative expectations and assumptions present in his advice, relating them to broader cultural and structural organizations of gender. I chose Hussey for his popularity, his active presence on various social media platforms, and for his explicit focus on helping women to 'Get the Guy' (his catchphrase). This study focuses on his YouTube videos, which are publicly-available – unlike some other forms of Hussey's dating advice[13] – and how they aim to resolve specific dating problems, relying on common dating scripts.

In this section, I will first describe my sample, before discussing the advantages and limitations of using YouTube as a site of data collection. Then, I will present my research design, which includes Clarke's method of visual situational analysis (2005) and Braun and Clarke's method of thematic analysis (2006).

Description of the Sample

My sample consists of Mathew Hussey's first 30 videos of 2018. I had reached a saturation point at about 25 videos, not identifying any new significant patterns for my analysis, but I analyzed the 5 remaining videos for verification purposes.

The data I collected for each video included: (1) a transcription of the video, a process greatly accelerated by YouTube's relatively reliable automatic transcription service; (2) a description of the thumbnail; and (3) information about the video that is not included in the content itself, but is available on the video's YouTube page, such as the number of views, the

[13] For example, it is possible to purchase access to various dating advice programs on Hussey's website, from downloadable PDFs to access to monthly live chats with him (Matthew Hussey's dating advice programs, n.d.)

number of likes and dislikes, the length of the video, as well as the contents of the description box situated below the video. This data was compiled into tables for each video. Figure 1 is an example of one of these tables, with information about the second video of my sample, "#1 Tip For Finding Love: Go On FEWER Dates". It is notable how much text Hussey writes in his descriptions (the 'Description box' line in the table) – he does so for every video in my sample – a trend I have not observed among other YouTubers.

Title	#1 Tip For Finding Love: Go On FEWER Dates (Matthew Hussey, Get The Guy) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMY8HTphMJU)
Date of posting	Jan 13, 2018
Number of views (date of watching)	170,168 (on 20/2/18)
Length of video	3:35
Number of likes	5k
Number of dislikes	38
Number of comments	480
Category	Film & Animation
Description box	►► Discover the Surprising Ways to Jump-Start Your Love Life. Go To → http://www.AttractAnyMan.com ▼ Don't Miss Out! Subscribe to my YouTube channel now. I post new dating advice for women every Sunday. ▼ Within barely 24 hours after swinging open the doors, all 1207 spots on my Impact program sold out. Congratulations to those of you who were able to get a spot! I can't wait to hear your success stories. Ok, onto today's topic... No one understands me. Just kidding. But there is something that has been bothering me. A misconception that thousands of people who follow GettheGuy have about my advice, so let me finally clear this up. Ready? You do not need to go on more dates this year to find a great guy. Yes, you heard that right. Mr. dating-advice-guru-expert-man (or whatever they call me on those TV shows) is telling you to stop with all the drinks-and-dinner dates. They're long, it becomes dull, and it's a massive waste of your time.

What's an easier way to meet great men? I'll show you on this video.

Directed by JAMESON JORDAN
Written by MATTHEW & STEPHEN HUSSEY
Animation by MICHELLE GARCIA
Music ("Beautiful Growing Natural Theme") by GESTON WREEN

►► FREE download: "9 Texts to Get Any Man" → http://www.9texts.com

►► FREE download: "5 Compliments to Get Him Addicted to You" → http://www.SayThisToHim.com

▼ Get My Latest Dating Tips and Connect With Me… ▼

Blog → http://www.gettheguy.co.uk/blog/

Facebook → https://facebook.com/CoachMatthewHussey

Twitter → https://twitter.com/matthewhussey

Figure 1. Information collected about the first video of the sample. Taken from fieldnotes.

Hussey's videos tend to follow similar, recognizable formats. The 30 videos in my sample were 5:55 minutes long on average, ranging from 1:57 minutes to 14:58 minutes. His videos have a high production quality, and Hussey is assisted by a team that is sometimes credited in the description box. For example, in Figure 1, he credits a director, a second writer and an animator.

Hussey was present in all of the videos of the sample. In eight of the videos of my sample, Hussey is the only person to be seen. In the rest of the sample, however, the shots of him talking directly to the camera are interspaced with other shots. For example, in nine of the videos of my sample, the shots switch between his monologues and scenes played out by actors, which serve to illustrate his points. In seven of the videos of my sample, the monologues are interspaced with clips of animated characters, which also help to clarify his reasoning. In both cases, the illustrations are voiced over by Hussey himself. While he is not the only person the viewer sees in those videos, he is the only person to be heard.

Hussey presents his advice as being for all women, but the only moments where he

creates a semblance of diverse representation are in the videos featuring actors and animated characters. His illustrations sometimes feature people of color – always thin, able-bodied, young – but he never addresses how their racialized identities might affect their dating lives. The diverse representations that sometimes characterize his illustrations stand in stark contrast to what we see on three occasions when Hussey's actual audience is filmed: it is overwhelmingly white. These three videos are behind-the-scenes tours of some of his conferences. They start with shots of the city in which he is presenting (Miami, Dallas and Los Angeles were featured in my sample), then show him interviewing a small group of three to six women, about the specificities of dating in their city. These interviews are interspersed with excerpts from his conference, where he can be seen on stage, addressing a room of mostly white women.

Women are addressed in general terms, their heterosexuality, whiteness and middle-class status taken as an unquestioned norm (these assumptions made about viewers will be further discussed in the analysis section). Hussey never addresses the possibility that his viewers might belong to minority groups, and that this shapes their experiences of the world and, in particular, of dating, in different ways. Indeed, some might face racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and other forms of discrimination or marginalization in their everyday and intimate lives. But none of this is addressed in his videos.

Two of his videos feature short films about love, one of them about the future of dating, which is the longest video of the sample, and the other about the importance of not wasting time. These short films are not produced by Hussey's team, but have a short introduction by Hussey, who presents them as gifts or treats for his viewers.

One of the videos did not conform to any of the formats mentioned above. Entitled "5 Secrets I'd Tell My Daughter," it features a conversation between the dating coach and his

mother, discussing the advice they would give to young women if either of them had a daughter.

Advantages and Limitations of YouTube as a Fieldwork Site

YouTube – like other social media platforms – is a treasure trove of data for researchers. It hosts publicly-available and free content, providing information about videos and their creators such as the number of views, the number of likes and dislikes, the number of comments, and the number of subscribers. While YouTube itself does not publish the variation of these numbers over time, this information can be found on third-party websites such as SocialBlade or StatSheep, which monitor the daily number of subscriptions, the number of subscribers over years, daily views, total videos views, and more (see Figure 2 for the data available about Matthew Hussey's channel on StatSheep). However, a lot of data is not publicly available, such as demographic statistics about the users of the platform. Content creators have access to some information about their viewers, such as their age group, gender, and the country from which they are watching, but the viewers themselves do not have access to such information (Demographics report, n.d.).

As a researcher, I had to contend with the available data and find a methodology that would not be limited by my lack of access to information about the consumers themselves. I wanted to concentrate on the production and reproduction of ideas about heterosexual relationships through the discourse of dating advice and the practices it recommends. Instead of focusing on *who* was watching Hussey's videos and *why* – data I did not have access to on YouTube – I focused on *what* was being said and *how.*

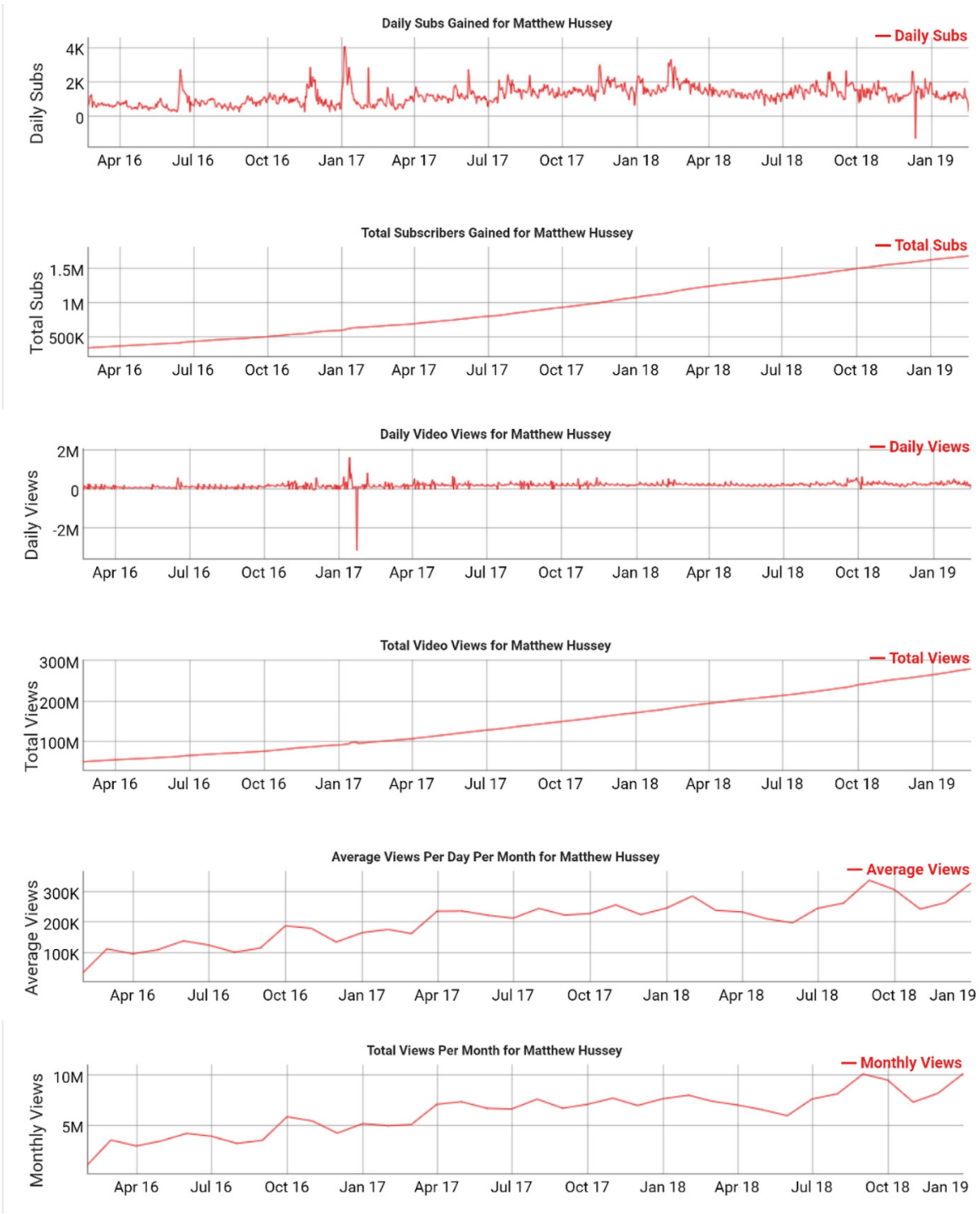

Figure 2. Data available about Matthew Hussey's channel on StatsSheep. Taken from: Social Blade (2019, February 18). Matthew Hussey: Detailed statistics. Retrieved from https://socialblade.com/youtube/user/gettheguyteam/monthly Copyright 2008-2019 by Social Blade LLC.

Research Design

While my theoretical framework is based on previous studies of dating advice and practices, my methodology does not draw on existing studies, as there do not appear to be any studies of dating advice on YouTube. Unlike the studies discussed in the literature review—which tend to employ quantitative research designs—I chose to conduct a qualitative analysis as it would enable me to identify dating scripts and ideas about gender underlying Hussey's advice. I combined this qualitative approach with a four-level analysis drawn from Jackson's theorization of the social. In doing so, I chose to conduct a thematic analysis of my data, by following Braun and Clarke's step-by-step guidelines (2006). These guidelines involve breaking down the research process into six precisely-described phases and they are adaptable to any social science (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, Braun and Clarke's guidelines are more suited for textual analyses, such as the transcripts I collected, the descriptions of the thumbnails, or the contents of the description boxes. To account for the visual component of Hussey's videos, I also followed Clarke's guidelines for visual situational analysis (2005, pp. 205-260). In the following section, I will delve into further detail about how I applied Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis recommendations, as well as Clarke's method for visual situational analysis, to the study of YouTube videos. I will then explain how I categorized the themes and codes created following these two analytical approaches to address Jackson's four dimensions of the social.

Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (2006, pp.16-23).

Braun and Clarke divide qualitative methods into two categories: those that stem from a particular epistemology, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, and those that are independent of theory, such as thematic analysis (2006, p.80). They define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The authors recognize that there are various ways to conduct thematic analyses, making distinctions between theoretically-driven, inductive analyses and data-driven, deductive analyses, as well as between the identification of semantic, or explicit themes and of latent, or underlying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90). These choices are made according to the theoretical framework(s) in which the research is grounded. However, because thematic analysis is such a flexible method, its process is often underdefined. This is what Braun and Clarke propose to resolve with their six phases of thematic analysis (2006).

After having collected the transcripts, the thumbnail descriptions, the information tables and the visual analyses, I started the first phase of thematic analysis: "familiarizing yourself with your data" (2006, p. 112), I read my entire dataset, taking notes about initial ideas for themes. I had started engaging with the literature before this stage, which informed the patterns I wanted to focus on. In the second phase, "generating initial codes" (2006, p.112), I went through my dataset again, noting initial codes by hand, before copying them into NVIVO. Using NVIVO's concept map feature, I organized the initial codes into themes, which is the third phase of thematic analysis (2006, p.112). I found four key themes: Hussey's advice, unquestioned dating norms, strategies of persuasion and descriptive information about the videos.

Moments when Hussey gives explicit dating advice were coded in the theme *'Hussey's advice.'* This theme was subdivided into four subthemes: (1) the type of advice: is he giving practical advice? Is he giving general statements? Is he explaining a theory?; (2) the format of the advice, or how the advice is delivered: using for instance lists of tips, humor, metaphors, or personal stories; (3) the general themes of his advice, the most prominent of which were attraction, value, power and self-improvement; and finally, (4) how he describes the dating process: he most often describes it either as a method, a game that can be won with careful

strategizing, and as a mate-selection process.

The theme *'unquestioned dating norms'* concerns the underlying assumptions about heterosexual dating present in Hussey's videos. For example, he often bases his advice on the unquestioned assumption that men will pursue women. This theme also concerns the emotional labor women must perform following his advice, and the heteronormative assumptions he makes about men, women, and their relations.

The theme *'strategies of persuasion'* concerns the ways in which Matthew Hussey convinces the viewer to listen to his advice, and perhaps to buy his products. This theme includes moments when Hussey positions himself as a dating expert, when he interacts with his audience and creates an impression of exclusivity, as well as the neoliberal discourse that permeates his advice.

The last major theme, *'descriptive information about the videos,'* is mostly composed of the visual analysis data created by applying Clarke's situational visual analysis to the videos, such as moments when Hussey addresses his audience, the general format of the videos or the illustrations that interspace shots of the coach in some videos.

These themes and their subthemes were refined in the fourth phase, during which all data excerpts coded for each theme were re-read to ensure that they were accurately coded. Subthemes were then refined as well.

The last two phases suggested by Braun and Clarke are "defining and naming themes," before "producing the report," which should be structured in the same way as the previously-identified themes and subthemes (2006, p.112). However, instead of following Braun and Clarke's last two suggested steps, I brought the themes and subthemes I had compiled in conversation with Jackson's four dimensions of the social (2006a). I will delve into further detail

after presenting Clarke's method for visual situational analysis (2005).

Visual situational analysis.

YouTube videos are sites of visual discourses, especially when they are as highly-produced as the videos in my sample. Stressing the importance of images in contemporary society, specifically with the increase of digital content, Clarke encourages social scientists to interrogate the visual data that appeared in the West alongside the rise of capitalism and advertising (2005). For Clarke, researchers should not just focus on the medium and the content of images, but also on the power relations conveyed through images, by asking questions such as "who gets to look? At whom or what? Who is in control of seeing?" (2005, p. 210).[14] Clarke's method does not only account for the messages conveyed by images, but for how these images are produced, and the sociocultural contexts in which they are found. This method allowed me to focus on the mechanisms of message transmission in the context of a social media platform, where the dialogue between content creator and consumer takes on a different form than it does in the mass media (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

Clarke identifies three main levels of visual analysis: (1) the content (or that to which the image refers); (2) the contexts in which the image appears; and (3) how the image is used (2005, p. 224). To address these levels, Clarke recommends that the researcher write three types of analytic memos about the images she is studying; that is, locating memos, big picture memos, and specification memos.

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[14] These questions are not new (see for example Berger's *Ways of Seeing*,1972), but Clarke translates these queries into a more systematic method that can be applied in the social sciences.

Locating memos.

Locating memos are a description of the context in which the image was found and created, its intended audience, and its intended uses. The researcher is told to describe "how this image fits into the situation of inquiry that is [the] overall visual project focus" (Clarke, 2005, p. 225). In this memo, researchers should also include "the social world(s) that produced this visual" by describing who produced the image, for what audiences, with what intended goals (Clarke, 2005, p. 225).

For example, the following excerpt is the locating memo I wrote for the first video of my sample, "The Secret to Standing Out from Everyone (It's So Much Simpler Than You Think)":

> Video for a general audience, for people feeling like they do not stand out. To me, this video can be taken as a preliminary step to resolve the viewer's problems. Video for the new year, living up to resolutions (Visual analysis, p.2)

In this memo, I identified the intended audience members, the reason they might be watching, as well as information about the context in which this video was published – the start of the new year. In other words, these locating memos helped determine Hussey's intended audience, as well as the general goal of his videos, contextual information for which Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis did not necessarily allow.

Big picture memos.

The second type of memo, big picture memos, consist of the researcher's first impressions and understandings of the data, followed by a detailed description of the image. They are subdivided into three parts: first impressions, the big picture, and the little pictures.

First impressions are the researcher's initial personal impressions of the overall image, to be recorded before the "image can 'resolve' into X or Y such that we cannot recapture our initial visual grasp when it was 'other'" (Clarke, 2005, p. 226). Clarke puts it simply: "[quickly], off the

top of your head, what is this whole thing an image of?" (Clarke, 2005, p. 226).

The big picture is a detailed description of the overall image. The intended goal here is to make the visual data more comparable to other, text-based data, as well as to help the researcher "'see' more clearly, elaborately, and precisely" (Clarke, 2005, p. 226). To do so, the image is transcribed into words through a detailed narrative description of the image, that retains "its distinctiveness as visual and [retains] our interpretations and analyses of it as visual" (Clarke, 2005, p. 226).

Finally, *the little pictures* are also detailed narrative descriptions, but of different sections of the image. Analyzing an image by sections is meant to parallel the analytical method of "taking textual segments one at a time" (Clarke, 2005, p. 226). Clarke suggests static images should be divided into quadrant sections (2005). However, because I was dealing with videos, I chose to divide them into different scenes.

The following excerpt is the big picture memo for the first video of my sample – the same I previously mentioned:

> **First impression:** calm video, chill atmosphere. He has a calm, soothing voice and is not shouting like he tends to do.
>
> **The big picture:** He is in a brightly-lit kitchen, sitting on a chair and the entire video is him talking directly to the camera. Centered shot, a lot of hand gestures, calm, intimate tone.
>
> **Little pictures:** looks like he is in a hotel room. Overdoing the facial expressions. Maybe he is not speaking loudly because he is in a hotel room. Sitting at a white table, in a corner of a hotel room. Behind him, a large mirror to the left and a kitchen area to the right. Reflected in the mirror is a window showing the white sky. Hotel because of interphone on the wall next to the mirror. (Visual analysis, p.2)

My big picture memos are not as detailed as what Clarke's suggestions call for. This is because I was analyzing 30 videos, rather than a few static images. I decided to be more superficial in my visual analysis than her method recommends, by spending less time on

describing the 'little pictures,' or the individual scenes and details, and more time on determining the similarities between these videos, or in other words, the overall visual style, tone and format of Hussey's videos.

Specification memos.

Specification memos aim to "get outside the frame through which we are supposed to view that image" (Clarke, 2005, p. 227). The goal here, is to look at the image in other ways than it was intended to be viewed, to step outside of the role of the intended viewer. Clarke provides a list of 22 topics that can be addressed to deconstruct the image in various ways, by answering specific questions about the image. These topics include, but are not limited to:

- *Selection.* What is represented? Why do you think X, Y, or Z was selected rather than A, B, or C?
- *Framing.* How is the subject framed? What is included, excluded, cut off at the edges? […]
- *Viewpoint.* Is the image a close-up, medium shot, long shot, low angle, high angle? What difference(s) do these make? […]
- *Remediations.* Are there "remediations" wherein new visual technologies such as computer graphics or the Internet present themselves as offering newly refashioned and improved versions of older media while merely reinscribing old content in a newer format? […]
- *Injunctions to Viewers.* What, if anything, are viewers being told to do or think or be? Not to do or think or be?

(See Clarke, 2005, pp. 227-228 for the full list)

I did not address all 22 topics in my specification memos. I only addressed those that appeared most relevant to my research objectives. I was also more thorough in writing the specification memos for the first few videos of my sample, as I found that I was gradually reaching a saturation point. This is why the specification memo for the first video of my sample, copied below, is much more in-depth than those I wrote for the last few videos of my sample:

> *Selection:* focus on the dating coach. Makes you focus on what he says.
>
> *Framing:* he is centered, and the camera is oriented so you can't see it in the mirror behind him.

> *Featuring:* foreground = table (so you don't see his legs), middle ground = him, background = hotel room corner.
>
> *Viewpoint:* alternating close and middle shots to perhaps hide the cuts in the video. Impression of high-quality production with multiple cameras, though it looks like there is only one. Keeps viewer interested. Shot so you feel like you're sitting at a table with him talking directly to you. Close-ups make his face life-sized if he's full screen.
>
> *Focus:* on him exclusively.
>
> *Present/absent:* I would expect graphics or text to appear but no, very simple video.
>
> *Relationship to other work:* similar to his other videos, just quieter and simpler.
>
> *Remediation:* selling dating advice guides/books by replacing them with free PDF downloads.
>
> *Injunction to viewers:* Viewers told to sit down and listen to the expert. (Visual analysis, p.2)

The specification memos I wrote about the videos in my sample uncovered the similarities in the more technical aspects of Hussey's videos, helping to determine more precisely the overall visual style and format of the videos identified with the big picture memos. The data created by writing these memos was then analyzed alongside the text-based data, using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis recommendations (2006).

Jackson's four dimensions of the social as an analytical tool.

The goal of this final analytical step was to create four different stories about the data I had collected, according to Jackson's four dimensions of the social (2006a). To do so, I recategorized the themes and subthemes I had collected from the previous analytical steps into the four dimensions as defined by Jackson, in parallel with Simon and Gagnon's levels of scripting. As mentioned previously, these dimensions overlap, can be contradictory, and are not representative of all aspects of the social (2006a). As a result, in this analytical step, some themes found themselves in multiple dimensions, while others were only present in one. To decide how

to categorize my themes and subthemes, I referred to Jackson's definitions of each dimension, as well as how they fit into my overall research project.

The dimension of subjectivity.

This dimension centers around the constitution of the self as an embodied subject with "sexual and gendered desires and identities" (Jackson, 1999, §5.8). Individuals draw upon desires and emotions, as well as social and cultural processes to "construct, enact, and make sense of everyday gendered and social interactions" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 108). It is at this level of the social that Simon and Gagnon's intrapsychic level of scripting is situated (1986). However, there are no intrapsychic scripts present in the sample, as Hussey never shares his internal dialogue with the viewer. Instead, I used this category for themes and subthemes that reflected how Hussey represents himself as a gendered, embodied subject, and how he conceives of his viewers.

The subtheme of the representation of the audience, taken from the descriptive theme, was particularly useful here, as well as subthemes taken from the 'strategies of persuasion' theme, including how Hussey presents himself as an expert, and the neoliberal discourses shaping the representation of the viewers.

The dimension of routine social practices.

This dimension encompasses the everyday social practices through which individuals make sense of gender and sexuality "within localized social contexts" (Jackson, 1999; Jackson, 2006, p. 108). In other words, this dimension refers to the construction of sexuality through what embodied subjects routinely do (Jackson, 1999). In the same way that Simon and Gagnon conceptualized interpersonal scripts as leaving individuals with a certain freedom to exercise their agency within broader cultural discourses, this dimension concerns individuals' everyday

practices as informed, though not necessarily constrained, by broader cultural discourses and meanings (Jackson, 1999).

This dimension was apparent in the themes and subthemes concerning what Hussey does as a content creator, from the descriptive theme, as well as his practices as a dating expert, from the 'strategies of persuasion' theme. The subthemes about the routine practices encouraged by Hussey through his advice also fall within this dimension.

The dimension of discourses and meaning.

While the previous dimension focuses on practices, this dimension focuses on the meanings and discourses constituted by and constituting these practices. These cultural understandings, or cultural scripts about gender and sexuality (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), are "negotiated in everyday social interaction" (Jackson, 2006b, p. 45). They are general guides for collective life, too generic to serve as predictors for individual behavior (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

The themes and subthemes categorized in this dimension were those that reflected underlying and unquestioned cultural norms and discourses in Hussey's advice. These were mostly drawn from the 'unquestioned dating norms' theme, which encompassed the subthemes of heteronormativity and mononormativity.

The structural dimension.

This dimension "rests upon the assumed normality of specific forms of social and sexual relations between women and men," or, in other words, this dimension is upheld by the norms constructed and maintained by the dimension of meaning (Jackson, 1999, § 5.8). I found this dimension to be the most challenging to address, because of the nature of the data that I had collected, so I proceeded differently than with the previous dimensions. Instead of categorizing

themes and subthemes into this dimension, I chose to focus on three topics that I believe best highlighted the structural inequalities and dynamics of oppressions identifiable in the videos, which I then brought into conversation with some data excerpts: (1) the institutionalization of heterosexualities; (2) the presence of gender inequalities in gendered dating scripts; and (3) neoliberalism and the gendered subject. In the 'results and discussion section,' this last dimension figures more as a return to the findings of existing literature, rather than a true analytical category like the three previous dimensions.

After having recategorized my themes and subthemes within Jackson's four dimensions of the social, I was left with four different ways to look at the data, going from a microsocial perspective to a structural one, all understandable independently, but also interrelated. I realize now that I could have conducted the initial thematic analysis by directly using Jackson's four dimensions as overarching themes. However, my initial research design allowed me to account for the theme of neoliberalism, an element I had overlooked when writing my research proposal for this project, and that I perhaps would have overlooked had I not followed the initial research design.

Results and Discussion

The research questions for this project warranted an analysis on various levels of the social. When conceptualizing this project, I would intuitively think of it as a case study that I wanted to bring into conversation with broader cultural norms, going from a microsocial analysis of Matthew Hussey's YouTube videos, to their intersections with macrosocial operations of gender and sexuality. To support my analytical ambitions, I rely on Jackson's four dimensions of the social (1999; 2006a; 2006b).

In the following section, I did not attempt to address all four levels exhaustively. Instead, I used them as guides that revealed four different stories that could be told about my data. My results are divided into four sections, each corresponding to one of Jackson's dimensions: (1) subjectivity, (2) routine social practices, (3) meaning, and (4) the structural dimension.

The Dimension of Subjectivity

In the following section, I will explore three ways in which the dimension of subjectivity presents itself in my sample. Firstly, I will show how Hussey presents an understanding of himself as a gendered, embodied subject. Then, I will describe how the viewer he addresses is also the product of a subjective representation, defined by the choices made about who to address and who to exclude. Finally, I will demonstrate how these representations are articulated within neoliberal understandings of the viewer as an agent.

In this analysis, I make a distinction between the imagined viewer, or imagined audience, and the actual viewers. I define the imagined audience as the viewers explicitly addressed by the content creator. In Hussey's videos, the social characteristics of the imagined audience are either explicitly addressed or are implied through a series of assumptions that will be discussed below. As previously mentioned, I – as a researcher – do not have access to the demographic statistics about the actual viewers, but content creators have access to some demographic data about them, such as gender, age, and geographical location (Lesson: Who's watching my channel?, n.d.). YouTubers are encouraged to adapt their content to their viewers based on this data. Thus, I hypothesize that Hussey's imagined audience is not too different from his actual audience, though we will see that his imagined audience is much more precisely situated than what YouTube demographic data reveals about the actual audience.

Hussey's representation of himself.

In these videos, Hussey presents himself as an expert on dating advice. The camera is often centered on him, alone in the frame, with his gaze directed into the camera lens, giving the impression that he is holding eye contact with the viewer. He is white, British and in his thirties, with light brown hair, blue eyes and a muscular build. He is, in other words, a conventionally

attractive man.

This "face-to-face interaction" between the viewer and the dating coach is reminiscent of self-help advice found on television, though self-help experts on social media appear more approachable, as they take advantage of the participatory aspects of these digital platforms (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018), such as the comment section below YouTube videos. Hussey also occasionally shows video excerpts of himself on stage, speaking to a room of women during his seminars, and sometimes films himself having a conversation with his mother. The superposition of these images reinforces Hussey's self-presentation as the approachable expert, who is knowledgeable enough to draw large audiences to his seminars but appears approachable and relatable – not to mention the model of a "good boy" – through his relationship with his mother as well as through the intimate one-on-one segments between himself and the imagined viewer.

Like many other self-help content producers on social media, Hussey is a self-proclaimed expert (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). On participatory media platforms like YouTube, "audiences online are becoming producers of content", which fosters a media space for self-made experts to emerge (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 48). Barker, Gill and Harvey note that sex advice is often treated as a topic upon which anyone can offer advice, based on personal experience (2018). In fact, Hussey's 'dating expert' status is not corroborated by any sort of diploma or institutionally recognized qualifications. As a result, Hussey finds himself constantly re-affirming his claim to authority in various ways.

One way in which he positions himself as an expert is by assuming he holds more knowledge about dating than the viewer. This is common in self-improvement literature, where its consumers are depicted as "insufficient, as lacking some essential feature of adequacy" (McGee, 2005, p. 18). In contrast, Hussey puts himself in the role of a guide or a teacher that will

provide the viewers with the solutions they need. Through expressions such as "[get] your pen and paper ready…" (Description boxes, p.50), Hussey assumes that the information provided in the video will be new for the viewer and important enough that she will want to take notes. There is, in other words, a didactic or pedagogical tone employed here which also functions to shore up his expert authority. Similarly, Hussey often presents his advice as if it necessitated effort on the part of the viewer to fully grasp its meaning, such as in his video "Everything You Know About Attraction is Wrong":

> Now, you know that I don't ask you to comment on every one of my videos but I think this message is so important that I want you to understand it on an emotional level, not just a logical one, so do this for me: write in the comments a moment of micro attraction where you either felt drawn to another person because of something they did or they told you they were drawn to you because of something you did. Write it in the comments. (Transcripts, p.21).

Here, Hussey calls upon the interactive features of YouTube to create a sense of connection with the viewer. In this excerpt, Hussey assumes that the viewer will not grasp the full extent of his message until she completes the assigned exercise: commenting on his video. In addition to presuming he knows more than his viewers, Hussey often justifies his expert status by mentioning the number of clients and viewers he has, such as in the description box of his video "#1 Tip For Finding Love: Go On FEWER Dates":

> But there is something that has been bothering me. A misconception that thousands of people who follow GetTheGuy have about my advice, so let me finally clear this up. (Description boxes, p. 4).

By referencing his "thousands" of viewers, Hussey creates a tautological, self-reinforcing loop, wherein his status as a trustworthy expert is based on the number of women trusting him as an expert. However, the constitution of the expert/viewer relationship is not genderless, and this plays into the legitimization of Hussey's advice. It is through his gender that Hussey claims that he knows best and that he can authoritatively tell women what to do. On his website, Hussey

claims that he knows "how men work, their thoughts, their feelings, and what makes them tick and [he knows] how to hook them in for good" (Dating & relationship tips for women, n.d.).

By virtue of being a man, Hussey positions himself as a spokesperson for all men. He essentializes men as a category. This reveals Hussey's subjective understanding of gender, wherein men's desires and experiences are similar enough to be generalizable to all men but must be explained to women from whom they are too different. This is apparent in the description box of his video "How to Flirt with a Shy Guy":

> There are certain dumb myths in dating that women get told over and over:
>
> Men only care about "one thing." (Ok, bedroom time is pretty important to us. But it's obviously not all that men want.) (Description boxes, p.46)

Here, Hussey uses his gender as a source of authority. He claims that he knows what is "important to us": as a man, he knows what all men want. Hussey both reduces the thoughts and desires of all men to his own, and invisibilizes those who do not fit within his worldview, thus erasing the plurality and diversity among men. By doing so, Hussey shows that he believes gender to be a strong determinant for behaviors, making them predictable enough that one man can speak for all men. In fact, the coach even uses his personal experiences in dating as a source of information to give advice that will help any woman 'get the guy,' such as in the video "5 First-Date Moves That Make Him Want More":

> I know so many guys, and I've been in this position before too, where you get to the end of a date and you don't even necessarily know if someone's actually attracted to you. And that's because you go on a date and two people are playing this poker game, where neither one of them wants to reveal their hand. (Transcripts, p.52).

As a 'guy,' Hussey can give his viewers a glimpse into what men think about on a date. By emphasizing the belief that men and women are so inherently different, he reinforces the need for viewers to watch his videos to uncover men's secrets. This is common in sex and relationship advice literature, and in the media more widely, where men and women are often represented as

"'opposite' and 'complementary', exemplified in the bestselling Mars and Venus self-help books" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 206), or the more recent movie *What men want* (Shankman, 2019). This kind of rhetoric presents sexual desire as fundamentally mysterious, the secrets of which can only be shared by experts of a particular gender. Through his videos, Hussey represents himself as an approachable expert, whose knowledge of men will benefit his imagined audience.

The imagined audience.

The following text is found in the description box of every single video in my sample:

> Don't Miss Out! Subscribe to my YouTube channel now.
>
> I post new dating advice for women every Sunday. (Description boxes)

In these few sentences, Hussey states his intended audience, his publication schedule, and the main topic of his channel. However, though he states his advice is for women, the dating coach makes many implicit assumptions that reframe who, in fact, he is addressing. Here, heterosexuality is presented as the unquestioned - and unmentioned - norm while no other possible sexualities are mentioned. For example, he assumes that the women he addresses wish to flirt with men in the description box of his video "Your Foolproof "Flirting Formula" (How to Flirt With Men)":

> For some women, that's a silly question. "Flirting is simple," they'll say. "It's just something you do when you like a guy." (Description boxes, p.11).

Though the title of this particular video states that it will show the viewer 'how to flirt with men,' women are always represented as being attracted to men, and only men, in all videos of my sample. In fact, in the video "Weird: Get Over Him AND Get Him Back?", Hussey assumes that the viewer's ex is a man:

> But the truth is, there are many reasons *not* to get your ex back. For example, if he...

> (a) Treated you badly
>
> (b) Didn't care about your needs
>
> (c) Wasn't able to commit
>
> … chances are this isn't a man you should pursue any longer. (Description boxes p. 20).

By placing the viewer in a situation where her ex is "a man you shouldn't pursue any longer," Hussey reinforces the assumption that his viewers only date men. While Hussey never claims to speak to women of all sexual orientations, he never explicitly states that his 'dating advice for women every Sunday' is for heterosexual women, despite its focus on how to 'get the guy,' and the assumption that his viewers are only interested in dating men. By not explicitly branding his advice as dating advice for *heterosexual* women, he actively participates in the normalization of heterosexuality as the dominant sexual orientation, and invisibilizes the desires and experiences of queer women, as well as those of queer individuals who might also be interested in 'getting the guy.'

Similarly, there is an underlying assumption that women desire monogamous relationships, which is common in sex advice books (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). In these videos, the only represented romantic relationships between men and women are monogamous. Women are taught how to 'get the guy', the man they will spend the rest of their lives with. A monogamous, sexually exclusive, long-term relationship is presented as the only romantic and sexual relationship viewers should desire.

Furthermore, Hussey's imagined audience of heterosexual women is specifically socially situated. This becomes apparent when focusing on the examples he chooses to illustrate his advice. For example, in "#1 Tip For Finding Love: Go On FEWER Dates", he imagines how a woman could flirt with a man ordering a specialty drink at a café:

> I'm starting to believe in the idea of one-minute date. What is a one-minute date? It's the moment in the cafe where you ask the guy who just ordered a turmeric latte whether it actually tastes good. (Transcripts, p.6)

This segment of the video is animated, and the café that is represented has the same color scheme as Starbucks cafés. While Starbucks is a widespread franchise, the "turmeric latte" is a specialty drink, more expensive than the ordinary order of coffee. This recognizable brand can be understood as a sociocultural landmark, participating in the aspirational lifestyle Hussey displays on his channel. This is not the only example Hussey uses that draws upon the cultural landmarks of upper classes. In "Weird: Get Over Him AND Get Him Back?", Hussey uses tennis as a metaphor for how the viewer can move on from her ex. He says:

> Like in tennis, every time you hit the ball into the net, it stops the rally.
>
> Every time you focus on your ex, it halts progress in every other part of your life that makes you attractive. (Transcripts, p.41)

Not only is tennis a sport associated with the upper classes, but in his example, he describes a private lesson with a tennis instructor, which few can afford. In "5 First-Date Moves That Make Him Want More," Hussey summarizes what – to him – is an ordinary date:

> Women think going on a date with a guy is simple.
>
> You dress up, groom yourself, and head to an overpriced bar. Then you talk, ask questions, blah blah blah. Gulp down a few drinks. Maybe a kiss. End of story. (Description boxes, pp. 25-26)

An "overpriced bar" and "a few drinks" are ordinary tenets of a date for Hussey. What these examples show, is that Hussey assumes his imaginary audience has disposable income to spare on specialty coffee-shop drinks, private tennis lessons, and expensive drinks. The emphasis on elite lifestyle practices is in keeping with the fact that he often promotes his five-day retreat, a $4,000 (USD) program, which he claims is a reasonable – and necessary – investment women should make in their love lives (GetTheGuyTeam, personal communication, February 4, 2019). The retreat will later be discussed in further detail.

The lifestyle portrayed in Hussey's videos are only attainable to a fraction of women, giving Hussey's advice a "classed dimension," which is common in most sex advice literature (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 117). However, Barker, Gill and Harvey propose that sex advice literature does not just reflect class. Rather, by presenting a lifestyle attainable only by a minority of women who have the means and the time to spend on "body and beauty work", such literature "constructs a desirable affluent lifestyle, and renders sexual activity as part of a strategy of class distinction" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 117). While Hussey's YouTube videos are available for free, he creates an ordering of social groups, by depicting those following the aspirational lifestyle he promotes as successful, distinguishing them from the women who cannot afford such a lifestyle. So, while not all women are represented in his videos, Hussey presents a lifestyle to which they should aspire, and which he promises they can achieve if they follow his advice. He is not just selling heteronormative romance; he is also selling an entire lifestyle and ethic of living.

Viewers also play a role in their own representation. Drawn in by the catchy titles and thumbnails, viewers, especially regular viewers, must find that at least some of the aspects of these videos resonate with their lived experience. Perhaps viewers find these videos useful or entertaining. They may not all fit the white, abled, heterosexual, upper-middle class imagined viewership, but by choosing to consume Hussey's content, they reinforce Hussey's understandings of gender and sexuality, or at least help propagate them. The YouTube video recommendation algorithm tends to promote videos with higher levels of engagement – measured by the number of views, likes and dislikes, comments and shares – to other users of the platform (Lesson: Search and discovery on YouTube, n.d.). So, by watching Hussey's videos, viewers – including myself – participate in the promotion of his ideas, even if they do not agree

with them.

The neoliberal viewer.

Neoliberalism frames individuals as "rational, calculating and self-motivating" agents, who are admonished to constantly work on perfecting themselves, "through discourses of freedom, autonomy and choice – no matter how constrained their lives may actually be" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 8). Individuals are urged to create "an autonomous, self-sufficient self" (McGee, 2005, p. 16). This is apparent in Hussey's video "Why Being in Love Really Matters (But Not The Way You Think)," where he says:

> So many of the physical parts of life we cannot change. We can't change tragedies, we can't change disaster, we can't change unpredictable events in our lives day to day, we can't change our own aging, we can't change some of the certainties of life which are the uncertainties and the way time moves on, but what we can change is our emotional experience of those things. (Transcripts, p.44)

Hussey uses the discourse of choice to urge his viewers to take control of the parts of their lives they can control or, at the very least, think they can control. The viewer is held responsible for implementing the solutions to her problems. However, she is not alone in this: Hussey is there to help her. Neoliberalism has created space for lifestyle experts to offer their services as guides "on improving and optimizing every aspect of our lives", such as in dating (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 14). Under neoliberalism, self-improvement is a task with no end, and consumers of self-help find themselves continually depicted as always lacking an essential feature that self-help literature promises to provide (McGee, 2005, p. 18).

However, if the viewer does not perform the self-improvement labor required by Hussey, she is blamed for her failings, such as in the video "Everything's "Fine?" Here's Why That's Your Real Problem…":

> The reason I pursued this career was not to help people go from messed up to okay. It was to help people be better every single day, regardless of where

> their starting point is. So, the first antidote to the "I'm fine" mindset is to not wait for the dip, but improve things even when you're in a season that's okay. Remember, there is a fine line between being okay and wasting your potential […]. (Transcripts, p.75)

If the viewer does not work on herself, she is told she is wasting her potential. Though following Hussey's advice is presented as a choice, he depicts those who do not do so as deserving of their failures. Hussey's authoritative attitude in his videos intersects with the gendered setup of his brand, creating an overall tone of 'father knows best' paternalism, or at least of condescending 'mansplaining', demanding trust and obedience on the part of the viewer. Thus, work on the self is presented as an imperative, rather than an option.

In his video "If You're Worried You Invest in a Relationship Too Quickly, Watch This…", Hussey presents a successful life as a choice:

> Successful people, powerful people understand how to use logic and emotion together, and they take the right actions because they know how to actually direct their emotion to where they want it to go instead of being at the mercy of it. All action comes from emotion. The only difference between people is some people know how to manage their emotion to make it work for them, and other people work for their emotions. You have to decide which one of those two people you want to be. (Transcripts, p. 91)

Presented as a false choice, or a false binary, between being at the mercy of her own life, and the choice to take control of her life to become a successful, powerful person, the viewer is instilled with a sense of guilt if she does not comply with the advice. She is left with no choice but to participate in this work of the self. To heighten this sense of guilt, Hussey often speaks about the viewer as if she were in competition with other women, and presents those who follow his advice as better women, such as in the description box of the video "Want More from the Men You Date? Here's How to Get It":

> There is a secret though: Smart, successful women are able to act in a way that brings the best out of the guys they date.
>
> How? I'll show you. Watch this video to learn how to get more from the men in your life. (Description boxes, p.24)

Does the viewer want to be a "smart, successful" woman? Does she want to bring "the best out of the guys [she] dates?" Does she want to achieve success as defined by the dating coach? Again, the blame for bad dating prospects is put entirely on the viewer, rather than, for instance, on the culture of dating apps themselves. Hussey continuously creates an environment where viewers are encouraged to follow his advice to win his approval. Perhaps this emotional dynamic works because of who he is: an attractive, successful man, giving women dating advice that might work on men like himself. Hussey is not only portraying an aspirational lifestyle but is also playing the role of the aspirational boyfriend.

Women are "increasingly positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects", and have historically been the most targeted with self-help, though this tendency has begun to shift (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 10). In fact, work on the self is associated with femininity, and women are often called upon to transform themselves (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). This is apparent in Hussey's advice, where viewers are encouraged to work on themselves, while men are depicted as being more resistant to change. In "Have The Best Sex Ever, With These Words… (What Men Really Want To Hear)", the viewer is given advice on how to help her partner please her sexually:

> Encourage the smallest moments, the hair of a moment that you want. You build on that, you water it, you nurture it. He may have done barely anything, but when he does that small act, building on that, nurturing that, is going to encourage him to go down that route. We all want a roadmap, as men. Guys aim to please. So, when you give them ways to please you, they are always happy about that. (Transcripts, p.104)

Women who seek out Hussey's videos for help with their love lives are told they are responsible for teaching men how to act. Such advice encourages women to take on more emotional labor than their male partners. Women are told they either are responsible for helping the men they wish to be with, or for leaving them to find better options. So, while Hussey's advice follows the trend of self-help neoliberalism, where individuals are told they have the tools to fix their

problems, not all individuals are presented as capable of change. Here, the gendered nature of Hussey's audience intersects with the neoliberal imperative of self-improvement: all individuals are expected to work on themselves, but women are expected to do so more than men.

Summary of findings.

By analyzing the data through the dimension of subjectivity as defined by Jackson (1999; 2006), it is possible to catch a glimpse of Hussey's subjective understanding of the operations of gender and sexuality. These are not intrapsychic scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), but they do inform us on how Hussey constitutes himself and his audience, as well as on his conceptions of gender and neoliberal subjects. For Hussey, gender is an essentializing category of being, enabling any member to be a spokesperson for all. The dating coach ignores the diversity among men, presenting them instead as a unified whole, giving advice on how to seduce men who resemble himself. Through the assumptions he makes about his viewers and their lifestyle, he creates an aspirational lifestyle, depicting those who can attain it as successful, and those who cannot as deserving of their failures. In his videos, Hussey is not just normalizing heterosexuality. He is normalizing a particular way of doing heterosexuality, one that is articulated in and through a white middle-to-upper class bourgeois lifestyle and that remains unattainable for a majority of women.

The Dimension of Routine Social Practices

For Jackson, there are two ways of 'doing' routine social practices: interpretive actions, which create a "social intelligible reality," and practical actions, constructing a performance of gender and sexuality (Jackson, 2006a, p. 114). These two ways of 'doing' inform and are informed by the subjective understanding of the self and sexuality, identified in the previous section, as well as by more generalized social processes. It is within this dimension that interpersonal scripts can be situated, as they are adapted from cultural scripts and applied to localized contexts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Interpersonal scripts require both aspects of 'doing': the interpretation of a specific situation and their adaptation, based on chosen cultural scripts.

These routine practices are apparent in Hussey's own actions as well as in his advice. This section will present the social practices encouraged through his videos, focusing first on Hussey's own actions, then on the actions he advises his viewers to take. Finally, I will examine the intersections between Hussey's practical advice and conceptions of the neoliberal subject identified in the previous section.

Hussey's social practices.

I have previously explored how Hussey presents himself as an expert on dating, and his conception of gender as two distinct but uniform categories. These subjective understandings of himself and others inform the practical activities undertaken by Hussey as a content creator on his YouTube channel. As a YouTuber, Hussey's content is influenced by the norms of the platform. YouTube is a platform that encourages creators to have a regular upload schedule to maintain a strong viewer base (Lesson: Keep your channel fresh with uploads and playlists, n.d.). Hussey posts every Sunday, and often signs out of his videos by saying "I will see you next

week", reminding viewers of his upload schedule. The videos in the sample are rather short (5:55 minutes long on average), the titles are intriguing, describing the content of the videos without revealing any of the solutions provided by the self-help coach. They often either begin with an interrogative pronoun, announcing the question the video will answer or a number, indicating the number of tips that will be provided in the video:

- What Makes You Undervalued by Men… (Matthew Hussey, Get The Guy)
- Why Love Advice Doesn't Work For You… Yet (Matthew Hussey, Get The Guy)
- 5 First-Date Moves That Make Him Want More (Matthew Hussey, Get The Guy)
- 3 Steps To Make Him Commit To You (Matthew Hussey, Get The Guy)

Hussey provides bite-sized content every week, that is easy for viewers to consume. Additionally, viewers are often encouraged to watch the video until the end, as the dating coach promises free downloadable excerpts of some of the dating advice guides and programs he sells, such as in the description box of the video "The Secret to Standing Out from Everyone (It's So Much Simpler Than You Think)":

> By the way, make sure you watch to the end of the video, because I'll be giving away my top 6 techniques of communication to unlock your unique, powerful charisma and get your voice heard (trust me, you won't want to miss this gift) ;) (Description boxes, p.3)

These 'free gifts' are forms of promotion for his other platforms and products. To download these 'gifts', viewers must provide their email address, which is then used to send them daily newsletters, which contain more links to Hussey's products. Additionally, every video ends with an end card that encourages the viewer to click on links with catchy names, all redirected to his main site, HowToGetTheGuy.com, such as:

- Want to know what to say to a guy online AND in real life? Go to → http://www.SayThisToHim.com (Description boxes, p.18)
- Your Foolproof "Flirting Formula" (How to Flirt With Men) →

http://www.GetTheFreeChapter.com (Description boxes, p.10)

- Stop Suffering Over Your Ex. Learn the 4 Steps to Get What YOU Want → http://www.GetHimOrGetOverHim.com (Description boxes, p.20)

Hussey's free videos seem to primarily be advertisements for the services he sells. In fact, his YouTube videos are not even monetized.[15] To make money off their videos, YouTubers can allow the platform to play ads at before, during, and/or at the end of their videos (How to earn money from your videos, n.d.). There are no such ads on Hussey's videos, indicating that he is not making any money from his YouTube videos directly, but that he perhaps profits from the publicity they provide for his other services. The most frequently advertised product is his five-day retreat, held in a hotel resort. Here is how he describes it on his website:

> Occurring only a few times a year in the most luxurious locations around the globe, Matthew reserves this programme for life's truly exceptional people. People who are committed to living extraordinary lives that most people couldn't dream of. Away from the packed out seminar rooms on his Matthew Hussey Live tour, this is a completely immersive experience, tailored to dramatically increasing your success, whilst restoring true balance in every aspect of your life.
>
> This is the ultimate gift you can give to yourself. If you know there's another level for you, and you want the tools to get there, we invite you to be part of this life-changing experience (The Matthew Hussey Retreat - Live Event, n.d.).

This "ultimate gift" sets his clients back 4,000 USD (close to 5,300 CAD), which does not include expenses such as flights, hotel rooms, or food. For less affluent clients, there is an option for an "At-Home Retreat", done online, for 2,700 USD (over 3,500 CAD) (GetTheGuyTeam, personal communication, February 4, 2019). Regardless of the exorbitant price, Hussey often argues that participating in the retreat is the only way for viewers to truly

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[15] At the time of writing, in March 2019.

benefit from his advice, such as at the end of the video "If You're Worried You Invest in a Relationship Too Quickly, Watch This…":

> I'm gonna leave a link right now *(MatthewHusseyRetreat.com appears at the bottom of the screen and stays until the end card)*, click that link find out more about it for yourself, because I promise you, no matter how many of these videos you watch, until you understand this, you will never be able to take the action that is going to change your life, because this is the holy grail. Learning how to do this is everything. Click the link, I will see you on the inside and thank you so much for watching, I can't wait to see what you think of this video. (Transcripts, p.92)

The viewer is once again depicted as inadequate, and incapable of change without the guidance of the dating coach and his 'Holy Grail' retreat (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; McGee, 2005).

The classed and aspirational dimension of the advice identified in the previous section is heightened here, where only a select few viewers can afford to buy the products Hussey advertises, while the others are warned that his free content will never be enough to transform their lives. Hussey quantifies success in terms of what his viewers can afford. Through his practices as a content creator, Hussey reinforces who his imagined audience is: women who can afford the products he advertises. However, despite mostly being advertisements for his other programs, Hussey's videos still contain dating advice, which I will analyze in the following section.

Hussey's advice as social practices.

Hussey's advice is constructed around the general goal of finding 'Mr. Right' – finding a man to spend the rest of your life with. Through his videos, Hussey provides what is framed as practical advice to achieve foreseeable results. In *Mediated Intimacy,* Barker, Gill and Harvey observe the following:

> A key issue with the vast majority of sex advice is that – given these assumed normativities – it can only present 'solutions' in the form of *what* people do sexually, rather than *how* they do it. Thus we have page after page of sexual positions, techniques for improving orgasm, technologies for spicing up sex, and practices for addressing dysfunctions. All these provide people with *what*

> they should be doing, because *how* they engage with sex and relationships cannot be addressed without potentially troubling the underlying normativities. (Emphasis in original, Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 104)

Hussey's advice follows this trend, as it is based on normative assumptions about his imagined audience, as well as his understanding of gender and sexuality explored in the previous section.

In his video "Do You Worry He's "Not Sure" About You? Do This...", more than a lifelong partner, 'Mr. Right' is described as a soulmate who is "deprived" of the viewer's presence until they can be together:

> There is someone out there waiting for you who will be sure of you. They won't think you're seventy percent of what they want. They'll be absolutely certain of you. You are depriving yourself of that person by hanging around with someone who's not sure about you, and by the way, you're also depriving that person of you. (Transcripts, p.97)

Before she even breaks off her current, unsatisfactory relationship, the viewer is told she must think about her future soulmate's needs – a man she has not yet met. The "social intelligible reality" created by Hussey here, is one where the only successful love life is achieved once a lifelong, heterosexual partner is found (Jackson, 2006a, p. 114). The influences of heteronormativity and mononormativity – discussed in the next section – are never questioned by the dating coach.

In self-help literature, and in society more generally, women are expected to take on more emotional labor than men (McGee, 2005). Barker, Gill and Harvey found that in sex advice literature,

> [w]omen are called on to be emotionally responsible for their own and their partner's pleasure, the communication in the relationship, and for reassuring and protecting what is often depicted as a very fragile male ego (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 124)

This tendency can be found in Hussey's advice as well. For example, in "What Makes You Undervalued by Men…", the dating coach advises his viewers to communicate their standards in a "beautiful, elegant way":

> See, I think that really, what it comes down to, is that we each have a personal standard and we have to figure out how to communicate that standard to somebody else who we've barely met in a way that is fun and playful and serious at the same time, but not afraid to be confrontational with it. We have to figure out a way to communicate our standard in a really beautiful, elegant way, that actually gives someone a clue as to how to please us. So, how well do you think you guys communicate what it is you're attracted to and what it is you want in a way that gives a guy guidelines as to how to be with you? (Transcripts, p.15)

Not only are women expected to teach men how to please them, they are expected to do so in a way "that is fun and playful and serious at the same time, but not to be afraid to be confrontational," "a really beautiful, elegant way." The main message behind these qualifiers is that women must tiptoe around men's feelings, with no instructions on how to protect their own. Women, more so than men, are expected to be self-managing neoliberal subjects, taking on the responsibility for their relationships.

In another video, "5 Dating Hacks That Make Him Fall For You," women are also told not to interrupt someone when they are telling a story:

> Number Two: Let someone finish their story. When someone else is telling a story many of us take the opportunity to think, "Oh! I have something that connects to this story." Or, "The thing that you're talking about right now..." "I also have a story like that." Or, "I've done something like that." So mid-way through their story, and we've all done it. We say, "Oh my god. I have something I have to tell you." A story, when someone is telling it isn't a moment for us to be impressive, it's a moment for us to be impressed. It's not a moment for us to be significant, it's a moment for us to make them feel significant. That's why they're telling the story in the first place. So, when someone is telling a story allow them to finish it before you jump in. (Transcripts, p.84)

Women are told to not interrupt men when they are telling a story so that they can make them feel significant. However, the coach never advises women to avoid or call out men who might interrupt them. The seduction process portrayed in these videos seems to revolve around men's feelings, rather than women's sense of pleasure and security. The influences of both neoliberalism and heteronormativity are at play here, as women are expected to be self-managing

subjects, but not so much that they undermine men's hegemonic identities. Additionally, in the same videos that portray women as insufficient when single, women are told they must perform additional emotional labor for their partners when in a relationship – from whom they cannot expect the same in return.

Another double standard in the practices promoted by Hussey's advice concerns the possibility for an individual to change, to transform their behavior. Women are given the possibility of changing – if they sign up for the retreat – while the men in their lives are depicted as either being or not being Mr. Right. Change, for men, is not presented as an option or an expectation, unlike femininity which demands constant maintenance. For example, in the description box of his video "Want More from the Men You Date? Here's How to Get it", Hussey says:

> I traveled with my mom to Dallas to hear from women about their difficulties with finding Mr. Right, and here you'll get to enjoy some exclusive behind-the-scenes conversation and on-stage footage with real women. (Description boxes, p.24).

According to the dating coach, the difficulties he addresses do not stem from relationships themselves, but rather from women pursuing the wrong people. The role of the coach is to help women find this right person more efficiently. Once they find Mr. Right, it seems that viewers will no longer need the dating coach's services. However, Hussey conveniently never mentions how his viewers can be certain they found their soulmate, thus justifying a continuous need for his services, such as in the description boxes of the video "One Second That Changes Your Love Life Forever":

> You might think it's crazy.
>
> But I've seen it: one moment. One second. One tiny little word that leads to someone finding the love of their life.
>
> And so many women miss that chance every single day.

> It's so simple, so blindingly obvious, but without doing this you can hold yourself back for literally years before you meet your ideal guy. (Description boxes, p.27)

Hussey presents himself as the guide in the search for the 'ideal guy'. There is a sense of urgency embedded in his advice, which stems from an implicit normative timeline about when individuals must find their lifelong partner (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), though no age is ever mentioned, which allows Hussey to always frame the viewer as running out of time. For example, in "One Second That Changes Your Love Life Forever", he says:

> Are you worried that you will never meet the love of your life? If you are, you are not alone because so many people in this world are afraid of the same thing, and they feel like time is slipping away. Well, I believe that there is a way to slow time down. (Transcripts, p.55)

Through his advice, Hussey constructs a reality where the viewer's quest for a successful love life is framed as a race against time. Though the stated goal of Hussey's advice is to help women find the love of their lives, he does not give advice on how to distinguish the 'right guy' from the 'wrong guy'. Instead, he focuses on scripts and techniques that women can follow in specific situations to "get any man", in guides entitled: "9 Texts to Get Any Man," and "5 Compliments to Get Him Addicted to You" (Description boxes). These literal interpersonal scripts draw on cultural shared meanings of gender and dating. For example, in his video "How to flirt with a shy guy", Hussey provides the viewer with a literal script to follow when asking out a 'shy guy':

> So, you might start talking about movies that you both like, and if he says "I really want to go and see that film," you go "oh my god I've been waiting to see that for weeks," I'm dying to go see that we should go!" But you can be certain about that. Don't do the whole "so do you maybe, we should go together." Like that, you don't want to create the awkwardness. Instead, just say "oh we should go!" (Transcripts, p.94)

The viewer is taught how she can encourage a man to initiate a date with her. Again, she is undertaking the emotional labor needed to make him feel at ease and avoid awkwardness.

These very specific interpersonal scripts draw on the cultural expectation that men should pursue women. In Hussey's videos, women are shown how they can circumvent the cultural norm that men should ask women out first (Laner & Ventrone, 2000), while still respecting it. With these specific interpersonal scripts, women are taught how to perform their gender and sexuality in a certain way, and the expected response is based on their partner performing the appropriate gendered reaction. Hussey often provides such specific scripts, which bear resemblance to the very specific techniques taught by pick-up artists (O'Neill, 2015).

The belief that any individual of a certain gender can be seduced or 'picked up' using a specific set of words betrays an essentialist view of gender. However, O'Neill argues that these specific scripts are a systematization of interpersonal scripts, removing the flexibility, but also the uncertainty, from the adaptation of cultural scripts (O'Neill, 2015; Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

By assuming that the viewer is searching for 'Mr. Right,' but by promising that his techniques work on any man, Hussey paints a contradictory picture of the dating world. If men are so similar and predictable, how could one of them distinguish himself enough to be Mr. Right? Gender is presented as a reductive category, that can be used to craft scripts that will work on any man, much like those pick-up artists teach men to get any woman (O'Neill, 2015). However, this representation intersects with the neoliberal discourse of competitivity and productivity, where certain members of each gender are deemed valuable. Among men, the valuable individuals are the elusive 'Mr. Right', while among women, the valuable individuals are those who follow Hussey's advice, and distinguish themselves from other women. The next section will explore how Hussey presents the self-labor required to become a woman that deserves to meet her 'Mr. Right'.

Dating advice and the neoliberal subject.

Viewers and consumers of contemporary sex and relationship advice are encouraged to think about their love and sex lives in a rational way, following the logics of consumerism and investment (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). In Hussey's videos, dating is presented as a mate selection process that yields better results if viewers follow his advice. To do so, viewers are told they must date more men, to increase the chances of finding their lifelong partner. This method is based on the assumption that every individual can potentially find a lifelong partner within their social circle. For example, in the video "Your Foolproof "Flirting Formula" (How to Flirt With Men)", Hussey states:

> I know that there are so many women who come to me who don't have options in their love life, precisely because they are not flirting in their everyday lives. Now, if you want to be someone who's a really great flirter, someone who knows how to create attraction right off the bat, stay till the end of this video because I have a free gift for you that you're gonna love. This is gonna allow you to do exactly that. (Transcripts, p.22)

Hussey wants women to create "options" by flirting with more men – or, in other words, by "diversifying the risk". If women have unsatisfying love lives, he assumes, it is because they do not have enough romantic prospects. The dating coach presents dating as a rational method, that leads to success when it is implemented correctly, such as in the description box of the video "Why Love Advice Doesn't Work For You… Yet":

> This is difficult for me to admit.
>
> But the truth is, the average woman who reads dating advice (yep, even mine, sadly) will never make it work.
>
> Maybe she'll try a couple of lines on that cute guy at work when she's had a glass of wine or two, but then she'll soon retreat back to her default behavior.
>
> That fun, confident, attractive woman she dreams of being will always feel out of her reach.
>
> Why?

> Because this kind of woman doesn't have a system to make herself feel in an attractive mindset when the right guy does come along.
>
> […] She's just winging it. A little burst of motivation here, a flash of confidence there, but not a truly, effective method for having her confidence grow over time. (Description boxes, p.13)

Dating, for Hussey, is a system, a rational endeavor, that will deliver results if implemented seriously. Women are told to systematize their approach to men, so that they will not miss out on "the right guy". For Hussey, finding love is not a question of luck, it is a question of strategy. For example, in the description box of the video "How to Break Out of Your Dating Rut", he says:

> So even if you've been through heartbreak and loneliness, I'm going to give you my top 3 strategies to get back in the game and find love again... (Description boxes, p.56)

Dating is presented as a rationalizable method that the viewer can control, that will only yield satisfactory results if she puts in sufficient effort. Hussey often tells his viewers that working on themselves will increase their personal value, but always in the perspective that these efforts will make women more attractive to potential partners and help them attract better men. Viewers are expected to conform to the neoliberal imperative of constantly working on themselves, while abiding by the heteronormative imperative of doing so for a male partner. The overarching goal of finding Mr. Right is never questioned; women are never told that work on themselves could benefit them in any other way than within the framework of achieving a long term, monogamous, heterosexual relationship.

The following excerpt is from one of Hussey's animated videos, "The REAL TRUTH: Why Men Stop Chasing You":

> Isn't it true that when you come back from doing something that you're passionate about, when you come back from working out or any of those things, you feel more confident and in control, and sexier when you come back to your man, isn't that true? […] So, when you feel more like that, you come back and you're feeling great *(animated woman drinks a green*

> *smoothie)*, you're feeling… You're either excited about life, you can't wait to tell him about something, you can't wait to have sex with him because you feel sexy *(Woman comes home, passes through the living room where the man is sitting on the couch, watching TV. She passes behind him, she touches his shoulder and he blushes)*. Whatever it is, you feel good about those things, and he goes "wow, I'm really with a great woman here". (Transcripts, p.62)

This advice was given to a viewer asking the dating coach how she could keep her boyfriend interested in their relationship. Hussey tells her she must do something she is passionate about outside of her relationship, to "feel more confident and in control," to become more attractive to her boyfriend, without questioning whether this effort is reciprocated. In fact, Barker, Gill and Harvey report that "the emotional work of heterosexual relationships is disproportionately women's work", as they "are called on to be emotionally responsible for their own and their partner's pleasure" (2018, p. 124).

In Hussey's videos, the empowering effect of self-improvement is acclaimed, but it is always assumed that women are the ones undertaking it. In another excerpt, from the video "How to Finally Stop the Agony of Waiting for His Text", women are given the following solution to distract themselves from constantly checking their phone for a man's next text:

> The cure is find something meaningful for you to do right now. Go deeper on something. Now that could be to read a book that brings meaning to you, or that is really teaching you about something that you're curious about. It could be deepening a skill set you have by focusing on something difficult and practicing it. It could be losing yourself in a project, or something that's related to one of your passions. If you can lose yourself for an hour in something that gives your life color and meaning outside of that relationship... Now you're into a better state, because I know there can literally be a thirty minute to a one hour difference between feeling despairing that someone isn't reaching out to you, and actually feeling pretty great, because you did something meaningful with the last hour that has made you feel full, that has given you purpose, and allows you to come back to that person with a great energy. (Transcripts, p.108)

Hussey follows up this statement with an offer to go on his retreat program where he will help women find their sense of purpose. Here, he assumes that the women he addresses have the free time to work on a new skill or read a book, which is a luxury for many individuals. Women who

are too hung up on a single man are told they must work more on themselves, not only to give themselves "purpose", but to "come back to that person with a great energy" for the benefit of a potential partner.

Hussey – and other sex and relationship advice literature – presents gendered expectations of constant self-improvement as "moments of freedom, choice, empowerment and pleasure" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 119). However, this labor on the self is also presented as normal and "essential to the success of heterosexual relationships" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 119). Neoliberal subjects are pressured with the imperatives of constant self-improvement to stay relevant in the labor market and in their personal lives (McGee, 2005), but women, more so than men, are tasked with the self-work and emotional work required to sustain a romantic relationship under neoliberalism.

Summary of findings.

Hussey's videos target viewers as potential consumers of his products and services. His free content is presented as insufficient to fully transform his viewers' lives, while his expensive retreat is depicted as instrumental to the true revolution his viewers' love lives need. In the advice given in his free videos, Hussey encourages women to "create options" for themselves, by dating as many men as possible, in order to find their Mr. Right more efficiently. In a similar manner that pick-up artists provide precise strategies for men to 'pick up' women (O'Neill, 2015), Hussey provides women with specific scripts to "get any man". However, he does not completely subvert the gender order, as his advice still tasks women to take on much of the emotional labor and the work on the self, presented as necessary and essential to the success of heterosexual relationships. The imperative of constant work on the self pushed by neoliberal self-help literature intersects with heteronormative expectations placed upon women. They must

constantly work on themselves to maintain their femininity and are tasked with taking on the emotional labor to maintain a relationship. Hussey's videos add an additional layer of aspirational consumerism to these normative systems. Not only do they portray a lifestyle only accessible and affordable to a minority of women, but they present the purchase of his expensive services as a necessity to attain success.

The Dimension of Meaning

I have shown in the previous sections how Hussey's videos can be analyzed as conversations between himself and the imagined viewer, about specific situations in localized contexts. In this section, I will explore the broader cultural scripts and discourses his advice draws on and is embedded in. The processes of meaning creation inform and are informed by subjective understandings, practices, and the structural context in which gender and sexuality are constituted (Jackson, 2006a). The most prominently featured cultural discourses in the sample are the intersecting discourses of heteronormativity, mononormativity (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018), and neoliberalism, which all inform the practices encouraged by Hussey.

Heteronormativity.

Heterosexuality is the only sexuality represented in Hussey's videos. The imagined viewers, women, are assumed to be attracted to men, and these two genders are presented as different but complementary. The normalization of heterosexuality to the detriment of other sexualities is one way in which heteronormativity regulates the social. However, for Jackson, heteronormativity is a "double-sided" social regulation, that "regulates those kept within its boundaries as well as [marginalizes] and [sanctions] those outside them" (2006a, p. 105). Heteronormativity does not only normalize heterosexuality as a sexual attraction, it also normalizes specific forms of heterosexuality, especially "a very particular form founded on traditional gender arrangements and lifelong monogamy" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 105). Heteronormativity does not just regulate normative sexual practices; it also defines "a normal way of life" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 107). This is apparent in Hussey's videos, where he does not only promote monogamous, long-term heterosexual relationships, but also portrays a specific lifestyle – one that follows upper-middle class sociocultural norms – as successful and desirable.

For Jackson, the normative effects of heterosexuality become evident when analyzing the forms of understanding wherein "they appear natural or inevitable" (2006a, p. 112). Self-help books on heterosexual sex and relationships contribute to the constitution of localized cultural and historical representations of gender and sexuality, often depicting heterosexuality as a natural phenomenon, emerging out of the supposed stark biological and cultural differences between women and men (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). Men and women are presented as two very biologically and psychologically different beings. Men's sex drives are often depicted as higher than women's, and this stereotype is often used to justify why men tend to seek out multiple partners (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

In "3 Steps To Make Him Commit To You", Hussey explains to the viewer why men put women in 'relationship limbo' by avoiding committing to an exclusive relationship:

> [Understand] that the chances of him committing by you staying in limbo are close to zero. It's literally the worst plan of action you can have because all it does is reward his behavior. It teaches him consciously or unconsciously that when he keeps you in this no-man's land of not quite a relationship but not quite single, it will actually pay off for him. He can pick you up and drop you whenever he wants, he can have his cake and eat it. (Transcripts, p.68)

In his videos, as in heterosexual sex and relationship advice more generally, men are depicted as commitment-phobic individuals, who prefer pursuing multiple uncommitted relationships, rather than one exclusive, monogamous relationship. In contrast, women's sexuality is depicted as in "potential conflict" with the male drive, as women are often represented as needing intimacy with a single partner (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 119; Jackson, 2006a). For example, in "If You're Worried You Invest in a Relationship Too Quickly, Watch This…", the viewer is taught how to hold back on investing "too much too soon" in a relationship:

> There is a comment that I read an awful lot in our community from women who say, "Matt, my problem is that I invest too much too soon. My emotions get the better of me, I get carried away and because I really like someone, I give a lot in the beginning." (Transcripts, p.87)

This is presented as a common problem for women, who comment about it "an awful lot" to Hussey.

In these videos, both men and women's 'natural' tendencies are presented as problems. Men's high sex drives and fear of commitment are counterproductive to the cultural project of creating long-term relationships, while women's tendency to want to settle must be tempered, as being too eager might scare off a potential partner. This cultural representation of 'natural' sex drives is found in popular dating scripts, according to which men are expected to be the initiators of any form of intimate contact, and that they mush "chase" the women they are interested in. For example, in the description box of the video "The REAL TRUTH: Why Men Stop Chasing You", Hussey provides the link to a free guide addressing this issue:

> ►► Discover the Surprising Reasons Men Stop Chasing You... Download Your FREE Guide Here → http://www.WhyHesGone.com (Description boxes, p.105)

The man-chases-woman trope stems from the idea in evolutionary psychology that men are biologically programmed to be hunters, needing to chase prey as well as women (Johnson, 2005; O'Neill, 2015). Women on the other hand, are told they must resist men's attentions at first, in the hopes of sustaining the interest of the ever-chasing man (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Johnson, 2005), and must be the gatekeepers of sex, by 'playing hard to get' (Laner & Ventrone, 2000).

Hussey addresses the necessity for women to play hard to get in the video "What Makes You Undervalued by Men…":

> Perceived challenge. People need to see us as a challenge. If we come too easily, we will not be valued. It doesn't matter what your actual value is, don't expect people to value it if it comes to them too easy. (Transcripts, p.14)

If women do not fulfill their role as a 'challenge,' they risk not being perceived as a person of value, or, in other words, risk not being seen as a worthy long-term partner. However, Hussey

distinguishes himself from the what he perceives to be the general advice given to women, by stating that “playing hard to get” “builds the excitement around the chase, not around [the viewer]”. It is notable that Hussey uses this very technique when he promises a ‘free gift’ if the viewer watches his videos until the very end, thus making his content appear more desirable by temporarily withholding it from his viewers.

In the description box of his video “What Makes You Undervalued by Men…”, Hussey writes:

> You’ve been told the answer is: I have to make him chase…
>
> But there’s a problem with that.
>
> Think of a cat playing with a string. You hold it high up, just out of reach, and the cat leaps in the air, eager to grab it.
>
> Then you let go. It falls to the floor. Within a second, the cat looks bored, uninterested; it doesn’t care anymore.
>
> This is what happens with men when you play hard to get.
>
> How do you make yourself a challenge that a guy wants to keep chasing, without playing these games? How do you naturally make a man value you for weeks, months, and even years?
>
> Join me in party capital Miami where I’ll be showing 3 women (and you) the answer... (Description boxes, p.8)

In the very first sentence, “you’ve been told the answer is,” Hussey shows that it is a well-enough circulated trope for him to assume that any potential viewer has been given such advice in the past. The way he distinguishes himself from other sources of dating advice is by criticizing the technique, offering instead “the answer” that will make a man “naturally” value the viewer for “weeks, months, and even years,” opposing his “natural” technique to the chasing technique. However, he still advises women on how they can encourage men to approach them, such as in “Your Foolproof “Flirting Formula” (How to Flirt With Men)”:

> [She] could start by simply looking at him until he sees her, then when they catch eyes, she could look away as if she's just been caught out, then she could

> look again and start building that tension a little bit. […] Think about it: for a guy at that point he's got to have the courage to think of something to say and then walk across the room and open his mouth to this woman. (Transcripts, pp.23-24)

According to studies assessing the historical variations of dating scripts, men are still expected to approach the women they are interested in, ask them out, and pay for the date (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). In Hussey's system, as in neoliberal and heteronormative systems more generally, value stems from scarcity and exclusivity. Women are told they will become more desirable if they make themselves more unattainable. The lifestyle promoted by Hussey is aspirational because it is so difficult to attain. Hussey's content itself is made more valuable by the time and money that must be invested into it to be able to consume it. Here, desirability is equated to unattainability, which might lead us to question the sustainability of relationships built upon these cultural scripts.

Hussey presents his dating advice to women as ways in which they can "take control of their love lives". However, his goal is not to subvert the existing cultural scripts. Instead, he teaches women how to use them to their advantage, without stepping out of the man-chases-woman trope, such as in the description box for "How to Flirt with a Shy Guy":

> Smart women realize that any guy who likes them can be led to make the move, so long as she gives him some simple, subtle clues. (Description boxes, p.46)

Simon and Gagnon define cultural scripts as general guidelines for action, that give individuals the flexibility of adapting them to suit the situations they find themselves in (1986). It becomes apparent here how Hussey creates interpersonal scripts that may help women take some control of the 'chase', all the while remaining within the framework defined by broader cultural scripts. Because women are culturally encouraged to play a passive role in dating, Hussey provides advice that works within that system of normativity. Thus, while Hussey helps women

gain some agency to pursue the men in which they are interested, they are still constrained by culturally-defined gender roles. In fact, Eaton and Rose (2011) associate the perpetration of traditional dating scripts to them being used to gage 'social-savviness,' indicating that the individuals who follow them are socially-skilled. Therefore, if women were to depart too much from existing scripts, they would risk being negatively socially sanctioned, which would be counterproductive to Hussey's promise to help women find 'Mr. Right' more efficiently.

Mononormativity.

Much like Connell conceptualizes gender as being organized in a hierarchy, with some expressions of masculinities and femininities being more socially accepted than others (Connell, 1987), Seidman proposes the idea of a hierarchy of heterosexualities (cited in Jackson, 2006a). Like hegemonic expressions of gender, the most socially-valued forms of heterosexuality vary by historical and geographical context. The current hegemonic form of heterosexuality "no longer necessarily requires marriage, but nonetheless privileges monogamous coupledom as the ideal" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 110).

While Barker, Gill and Harvey do not necessarily consider mononormativity as a function of heteronormativity (2018), Jackson argues that the most socially-accepted forms of queer relationships are those that follow the current hegemonic form of heterosexual relationship arrangements (2006a). Mononormativity will be understood here as the expression of heterosexuality currently reinforced by current Western cultural scripts, as well as in most sex and relationship advice literature. In such contexts, monogamous couples are depicted as natural and morally superior to other forms of heterosexual relations, especially when compared to casual sexual encounters which find themselves "at the bottom of a hierarchy of value" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 127). Thus, the search for 'Mr. Right' is seen as a necessary endeavor,

as individuals are expected to find a lifelong partner (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

Hussey's videos play into this normative cultural landscape. While he proposes to "transform" his viewers' love lives, his advice only centers on how to find 'Mr. Right', presenting the monogamous couple as the ultimate goal of a successful life. He does not present any alternatives to a successful love life, such as in "#1 Tip For Finding Love: Go On FEWER Dates":

> Make this year the year that you meet your Mr. Right quicker, because you're generous with your minutes and selfish with your hours. (Transcripts, p.7)

In fact, being single is not presented as a deliberate choice, but rather a transitory state between partners. In "The REAL TRUTH: Why Men Stop Chasing You", Hussey explains:

> When people are single, what do they do? Many times, they think "I want a partner, so I'm going to go to the gym, and I'm gonna work out, and I'm gonna get some definition in my abs, and I'm gonna make sure that someone is attracted to me, and they'll be more attracted to me if I'm in nice clothes, so let me buy a nice outfit." They do all of these things to make themselves attractive. (Transcripts, p.61)

Being single is not presented as a desirable relationship status. Instead, Hussey's videos depict being single as an opportunity to work on the self, in the hopes of attracting a new partner.

Individuals who do not partake in the constant search for Mr. Right – those who choose to remain single – are represented as being unreasonable, such as in the description box for the video "How to Make Dating Apps Human Again…":

> I'm not against dating apps. But I know the frustration that causes so many women to just give up. They decide there are *zero good men* out there and throw in the towel. Or they spend their lives complaining and finding ways to justify their belief that "men just suck." (Description boxes, p.19)

Single women who decide to put a temporary or permanent stop to their dating lives are presented to the viewer as unpleasant, undesirable individuals. Women are pressured simultaneously by neoliberalism and heteronormativity: they are told to avoid being single for too long, and to settle down rapidly with a lifelong partner. In other words, they are told to 'make

haste slowly,' by dating as many expendable men as possible in a short amount of time, before finding 'Mr. Right' with whom they are expected to construct a lifelong relationship.

The conceptions of mononormativity intersect with the heteronormative assumptions that men and women are different but complementary (Illouz, 2012). While long-term, heterosexual, monogamous coupledom is the most socially valued form of romantic relationship (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Jackson, 2006a), men are often portrayed as reluctant to commit to a single partner (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018), a topic to which Hussey dedicates an entire video: "3 Steps To Make Him Commit To You."

Women are instructed to undertake the emotional labor of making a man 'settle down' with them, something to which men are depicted as being reluctant. In Hussey's advice, men are shown to prefer instead the ambiguous and non-exclusive stage of dating, that Hussey calls 'relationship limbo.' One video, entitled "When A Guy Traps You In 'Relationship Limbo'" features a song dedicated to mocking that exact situation:

> *Jesse, singing: (Chorus)* LIMBO LIMBO KEEP IT SIMPLE SIMPLE
>
> No need to meet your Mom and Dad like ever again!
>
> In LIMBO LIMBO KEEP IT SIMPLE SIMPLE
>
> Nighttime lovers, Daytime friends. Isn't Limbo just the bestest?
>
> Also, you forgot your necklace- that's not your necklace. Stacy, I bought you a necklace- surprise! It's green like your eyes. Did I say green? Because I meant blue. I always get those two colors confused.
>
> Hey here's a puppy, I named him Limbo! Limbo, stay there! He is the cutest. No other person will know we exist. (Transcripts, p. 65)

The video features a couple, Jesse and Stacey. Jesse constantly finds excuses to not commit to Stacey, and in the end, she is forced to put an end to the relationship:

> *Stacey, singing:* Jesse, I really like you. We've got chemistry, it's true. But you won't invest in me. And I've got better things to do. You flake on me then blame work, but that's not always fact. Is your Mom on Tinder? Cuz you've

> got a new match. I'd love to stay but sadly I've got other plans tonight... Drinks with a friend from work, he's pretty cute. So goodbye. (Transcripts, p. 65)

Jesse is portrayed as profiting off the ambiguity of the situation, unlike Stacey, who must put an end to it in her best interest, while still protecting Jesse's feelings, reassuring him that she does like him, nevertheless. There is a double standard here in terms of the benefits of monogamy for each gender. However, the struggle between men who refuse to settle down and women who wish to enter long-term monogamous relationships does not stop once a committed relationship is formed. In fact, Hussey gives advice to his viewers on how to keep their partners interested, even once they have committed to each other. For example, in "The REAL TRUTH: Why Men Stop Chasing You," he says:

> So, the key question is this. If the chase, the part where we were trying to get each other was really exciting, and now we have each other, how do we continue that excitement now that we have each other? (Transcripts, p.60)

Of course, the answer lies in constant work on the self and in the imperative for women to constantly self-improve to stay attractive to their partners, as he later says in the video:

> Isn't it true that when you come back from doing something that you're passionate about, when you come back from working out or any of those things, you feel more confident and in control, and sexier when you come back to your man, isn't that true? (Transcripts, pp.61-62)

The search for a lifelong partner is presented in these videos as one of the signs of a successful love life. Mononormativity and heteronormativity together, instill the sense that men and women must resolve their natural differences to work on creating long term partnerships together. However, this intimate work demands intensive emotional labor – especially for women – but the alternative, being single, is presented as a worse outcome than having to convince a reluctant partner to commit to a lifelong relationship.

The rationalization of emotion and intimacy.

Barker, Gill and Harvey found that

> work is a dominant framing for discussions of sex and relationships, using a variety of analogies from finance, management, marketing, science, and even military campaigns (2018, p. 109).

Hussey is no exception here. In "The Secret to Standing Out from Everyone (It's So Much Simpler Than You Think)", he says:

> Now, I believe that we have a problem today, and that problem is an overcrowded marketplace. And I believe that's true both in our love lives and in our business lives. There are no barriers to entry anymore. It used to be the case that the barrier to entry was that you had to actually go out and walk up to someone and take a risk to ask them out. These days, people can sit in front of the TV watching their favorite show while simultaneously setting up a dating profile and begin talking to people whilst barely lifting a finger, and the same is true in business. (Transcripts, p.2)

In my sample, Hussey repeatedly compares his viewer's love lives to the world of finance, rationalizing emotion and intimacy. Hussey makes it seem like successful love lives and lifelong partners, can be achieved following a rational plan, much like a business plan. For Hussey, the quality of a relationship can be quantified by the time, money, and effort both parties invest. The best relationships are those where both partners invest about the same amount, such as discussed in the video "3 Steps to Make Him Commit to You":

> Number two: listen to your training, not his logic. And what is your training? Hopefully the years you've been watching this channel *(Matthew smiles, showing his teeth, and you can hear a *ding*)*. Your training is valuing investment over his logic. Some men will try to get around giving you genuine investment by providing you with logic. They'll convince you that you're crazy for wanting what you want, and they'll try to have it as easy as they can, simply by persuading you with their words. The truth test is always how much is someone actually investing, and not investing simply with their words, because investment is about more than words, not investing by buying new things because that's too easy, not even investing with the odd grand gesture that shows you how much he cares. Real investment needs to be measured on how much time and energy and thought someone puts into your relationship together. (Transcripts, p.68)

Relationships are depicted as something into which individuals must invest quantifiable time and effort. Hussey refers to his videos as the 'training' needed to be able to measure investments in relationships, and to avoid falling into the traps of "men's logic". Individuals are

taught how to apply a “cost-benefit analysis to interpersonal relationships” (Hochschild, as cited in McGee, 2005, p. 21).

Feelings are rationalized, and true love can be obtained more efficiently, especially if the viewer purchases Hussey’s services as a dating coach. For example, in a video teaching viewers to take control of their emotions, “If You’re Worried You Invest in a Relationship Too Quickly, Watch This…”, Hussey says that he cannot fully explain how to do so in one short video:

> This is a longer video right now, and it's a longer video because there are some things I can't cram into two minutes, and this concept that I'm talking about right now I can't even cram into the length of this video. It’s something that it takes me five days to do over the process of my retreat, or for the people that do my at-home retreat, it takes the same length of time, they can just do it at their own pace, but it takes me a long time to actually show people how to do this. But once you get it, it's a powerful tool that you'll use everywhere in your life. (Transcripts, p.91)

The viewer is encouraged to participate in Hussey’s retreat to learn how to take control of her emotions. Once she learns to do so, she is promised success in her love life, personal life, and work life.

By selling an almost guaranteed happy ending to his viewers, Hussey participates in the commodification of emotions under capitalism (Illouz, 2017). This commodification of emotions intersects with the pressures of mononormativity and heteronormativity (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). Barker, Gill and Harvey identify “a sense of urgency” in the sex advice literature they analyzed, accompanying the sense that finding a lifelong partner is not a time for “pleasure and exploration”, but rather a moment of “careful strategizing and meticulous time management” (2018, pp. 109-110). For example, in “5 First-Date Moves That Make Him Want More”, Hussey advises the viewer on how she can make her dates more efficient:

> Number five: defer the nightcap. Now, I know the temptation when a date is going well is to drag it out as long as possible because you're enjoying being with that person, but that's not always productive […]. So, when someone says to you after you've already had a great time, “hey, you want to get like one more drink over here?” Don't be afraid to be like “you know what,

> it's 11 o'clock, it's getting a little late. I'm gonna get to bed, but we should do something tomorrow or sometime this week." What I like about deferring the nightcap, is it almost gives you a license to see the person sooner. I'd rather cut this date a little short on a first date and see them tomorrow, than have a really long protracted date now, and not see someone I feel like I'm not entitled to ask them to see them for five more days. (Transcripts, p.53)

Even when the viewer is on a date, she is urged to make them as productive as possible. Too long a date risks being a waste of time in the long run – in other words, a low yield investment – as there are dating scripts dictating the appropriate amount of time to wait before going on a second date. Additionally, neoliberal self-help literature singles out the consumer as responsible for their own issues. Women are enjoined to

> work on the self in order to develop a desirable new subjectivity – a confident self, with none of those pesky needs, insecurities, or vulnerabilities, that are – apparently – so grotesque to men. (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 130)

Barker, Gill and Harvey call this the "confidence cult", where the blame for the failure of heterosexual relationships falls within women themselves (2018, p. 130). Women are told that their relationship problems stem from their subjectivities that have not been worked on enough; they must become more confident. In the video "5 Dating Hacks that Make Him Fall For You", the viewer is told that intense work on her appearance is sexy in some contexts – on a date – but signals deep insecurities in others – when she just woke up:

> Stop trying to look perfect all the time. Remember that scene from *Bridesmaids*, the movie? Where she's in bed with the guy, and then while he's asleep she rushes to the bathroom to put on her make-up and get dolled up to then get back in bed and pretend that she woke up looking like that.
>
> Now, the problem is in real life, instead of showing someone that we just look hot all the time, what it really does is show how insecure we are. Remember, the you that goes out on date night, and puts a ton of effort into getting ready... Yeah, she's gorgeous, she's beautiful, she's sexy, and it can be fun, right? […] But also understand that there are moments where the opposite is just as fun.
>
> Where waking up in the morning, and embracing the way you are in the morning without having to rush to hide yourself, or put on make-up... That's a really sexy quality. That actually a lot of guys... I would wager the majority

> of guys love that moment where he's like, "Do you wanna go get coffee?" […] And she's like, "Alright, screw it. Let me just shove on this hoodie. Let's go."
>
> That moment of care-free, low-maintenance, having fun, being in the moment spirit is actually a very attractive, and sexy quality. It shows that you're confident, and it shows you don't need to be perfect in order to feel great about yourself. (Transcripts, pp. 85-86)

Having a dating coach tell a woman she looks sexy without makeup can be immensely reassuring. However, it does nothing to address the social pressures put on her to look presentable whenever she is in public (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018; Illouz, 2017). Rather, it reinforces the scrutiny on her appearance, by qualifying a nude face by an aesthetic adjective – 'sexy' – as opposed to 'unimportant', or 'comfortable'. Here, having a nude face is presented as an acceptable and necessary act because it is done for a man, to appear confident and attractive for him, rather than as a source of relief from intense work on the self for her. Furthermore, Barker, Gill and Harvey point out the delicate balance that the 'confidence cult' requires from women. They are not to show their insecurities, which are not 'sexy' to men, but cannot demonstrate too much confidence either, as this "can equally generate hostility and anger from men" (2018, p. 130).

Women are urged to invest in their love lives to find success and happiness. They are told they must work on themselves to build up their confidence, but not to show too much of it either. For McGee, self-help holds a promise of power, but this power is situated in individual actors (2005), and women must contend with the cultural scripts within which their gender is confined.

Summary of findings.

Hussey's advice and the cultural scripts and discourses in which they were created are mutually constitutive. Despite being aimed at women, his videos still tell women to respect perennial dating scripts, according to which they must play a more passive role in the pursuit of a relationship. The struggles associated with the myths of the male sex drive are presented as

expected obstacles women must deal with in order to achieve the lifelong monogamous partnership they are told to pursue. However, viewers are told they can only achieve this goal efficiently if they consume Hussey's products. Hussey's advice draws on these dominant Western discourses about gender and sexuality, without questioning them or appearing to subvert them. His advice does not challenge them, reinforcing these cultural norms and double standards instead, placing a large amount of responsibility for emotional labor, work on the self and body work solely on women.

The Structural Dimension

It is in this dimension that the intersection of gender, sexuality, and systems of power and domination are the most apparent. When, in other dimensions, gender is understood as an identity, shaping and being shaped through discourses, practices, and subjective experiences, on the structural level, it "figures as a hierarchal social division" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 110). It is solidified in society through institutional apparatuses such as marriage, law, and the State. However, these social structures "are not monolithic, but consist of unstable patterns of interrelations and reciprocal determinations" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 110). In other words, just like the other dimensions, the structural dimension is subject to change and transformation.

This section is far from providing an exhaustive overview of the structural operations in action in Hussey's advice. Instead, I will focus on three structural issues often discussed in the extant literature, bringing them in conversation with data excerpts. First, in a literal interpretation of Jackson's definition of the structural dimension, I will present how the hierarchy of heterosexualities is institutionalized by the state. I will then discuss how gendered dating scripts can reproduce gender inequality. Finally, I will address the intersections of neoliberalism and the gendered subject.

The institutionalization of the hierarchy of sexualities in Canadian law.

Hussey's videos promote the most socially valued form of romantic relationships in contemporary Western societies: long-term, heterosexual, monogamous relationships, without necessarily requiring marriage (Jackson, 2006a). The Canadian law recognizes 'common law partnerships': monogamous relationships between two non-married, cohabiting individuals. Common law partnerships benefit from many of the same rights as married couples, but are not, for instance, required to divide their property if they separate, unlike divorced couples (Married

or common-law — does it make a difference?, n.d.). However, the government does not consider polyamorous relationships to be eligible for a common-law partnership status:

> A common-law or conjugal partner relationship cannot be established with more than one person at the same time. The term conjugal by its very nature implies exclusivity and a high degree of commitment. It cannot exist between more than two people simultaneously. Polygamous-like relationships cannot be considered conjugal and do not qualify as common-law or conjugal partner relationships. (Assessing a common-law relationship, n.d.)

Even within the law, it is considered impossible for polyamorous relationships to have a "high degree of commitment". Much like in Hussey's videos, individuals are expected to settle and build a life with one, and only one partner. Additionally, while Jackson notes that the current hegemonic form of heterosexuality "no longer necessarily requires marriage" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 110), marriages are still more valued in the eyes of the Canadian law than common-law partnerships. For example, to immigrate to Canada as a couple, common-law partnerships are "evaluated on a case-by-case basis", while marital relationships, "established in law" are not under as much scrutiny (Assessing a common-law relationship, n.d.).

Hussey's videos reflect this systemic pressure to form a monogamous relationship. Furthermore, studies such as DePaulo and Morris' have reported the institutional and social discriminations against single adults, a phenomenon they coin "singlism" (2005). DePaulo and Morris compiled a list of studies revealing that institutional benefits for married couples are discriminatory towards singles. To cite a few of these: married men tend to have higher salaries than nonmarried men, and spouses are offered subsidized benefits in some companies; singles face housing discrimination, and "are also treated less favorably with regard to estate taxes and capital gains breaks on the sale of their homes" (DePaulo & Morris, 2005, p. 64)

In the same article, DePaulo and Morris point to the influence of age and gender on singlism. Young single adults are less socially stigmatized, as there are cultural norms

surrounding the age by which individuals are expected to have found a lifelong partner (2005). This expectation is found in Hussey's advice and sex and relationship advice more generally, where a sense of urgency pervades women's search for a partner, but men are held to a two-phase development of their masculinity, allowing them more time before they are expected to commit to a single partner (O'Neill, 2015).

In "Do You Worry He's Not Sure About You? Do This…", Hussey argues that the viewer must find their lifelong partner as fast as possible:

> Number Three Life is short enough with the right person. When you find that person that you're sure of who's sure of you you're already gonna feel like there isn't enough time in the world to love each other. So why would you spend a portion of that finite, precious time with someone who's not even sure about you?

Hussey never mentions the expectation that women should have children, but he constantly tells the viewer how to make her search for 'Mr. Right' more efficient and productive. The rush to find a partner to form the most socially-valued romantic relationship arrangement reflects the institutional privileges granted to certain relationship arrangements over others. This is an example of the institutionalization of a hierarchy of romantic partnerships and, arguably, of heterosexualities. While same-sex partnerships are recognized and accepted in Canada, this is not the case everywhere. Furthermore, for Jackson, the most socially-accepted queer relationships are monogamous couples, which, she argues, reflect heterosexual relationship norms (2006a). Thus, the institutionalized hierarchy and divisions between married and nonmarried couples, monogamous and polyamorous relationships, and singles and non-singles rest upon the assumed normality of these arrangements, borne out of the discourses of heteronormativity and mononormativity (Jackson, 2006a).

Dating scripts and gender inequality.

Another way in which the assumed normality of social norms contribute to gender

inequality is through commonly used dating scripts. These behaviors and expectations are present in Hussey's advice, where it is assumed that men must plan dates for women. For example, in "5 First-Date Moves That Make Him Want More", Hussey says:

> Now look, it's nice when a guy has a plan for a date and you don't necessarily want to disrupt the plans that he's got, but if you happen to be doing something, where nearby is something you want to do, don't be afraid to say it. (Transcript, p.53)

Or in "The REAL TRUTH: Why Men Stop Chasing You", Hussey assumes that women should be chased by men:

> Discover the Surprising Reasons Men Stop Chasing You... Download Your FREE Guide Here → http://www.WhyHesGone.com (Description boxes, p.30)

While Eaton and Rose highlight the uncertainty-reduction power of culturally-shared dating scripts, for Laner and Ventrone, the gender roles they encourage are unlikely to lead to egalitarian relationships (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Laner & Ventrone, 2000). The gendered attitudes and behaviors suggested by dating scripts encourage men to play the role of the initiator, and women to play a reactive role, such as what Hussey describes in "Your Foolproof "Flirting Formula" (How to Flirt With Men)":

> Example number two: let's fast-forward this night he's now asked for her number and they have parted ways. An hour later, he texts her saying: "Hey, it's Jason." She says: "Who?" He's like: "Jason from the bar!" She says: "Hmm… I don't recall unless you're that handsome guy with the nice shoes, winky tongue face." (*The guy mouths along:)* Love that winky tongue face. (Transcripts, p.24)

In this example, the man, Jason, both asks for the woman's number and initiates a text conversation, while the woman simply responds to him. This might seem harmless, but Papp, Liss, Erchull, Godfrey and Waaland-Kreutzer found that adhering to the gender norms prescribed by dating scripts can be a predictor for intimate partner violence, because they are a reflection of the conventional norms of male dominance and female submissiveness (2017). It is important to

note that Hussey does give women advice on how to set boundaries with their partners, such as why stating their opinions is important for a healthy relationship, in “If You’re Worried You Invest in a Relationship Too Quickly, Watch This…”:

> The problem is, sometimes us never having an opinion, or never stating what we want as a person, doesn't make someone happy. It actually makes them confused as to what we really want, as to who we really are as a person, as to how to make us happy, right? And also, what it does is, it starts to create a partner that isn't now worrying about our feelings or our emotions, but instead, is always doing what they want to do, so we wind up in a selfish relationship that we have created. (Transcripts, p.89)

when to break off an unsatisfactory relationship, in “3 Steps To Make Him Commit To You”:

> I have 3 powerful secrets (watch this video to learn what they are...) that will teach you how to stop wasting time with the wrong guys, and finally get commitment from the right ones. (Description boxes, p.35)

or how to identify emotionally manipulative behaviors, in “Do You Worry He's "Not Sure" About You? Do This...”:

> In his weak moments where he's lonely and needy, and wants to be connected to you... He'll come back to you. You'll have a great time together, but in his strong moments he'll be questioning again whether this is the right relationship, whether you're the right person. So, you'll be on a loop with this guy where this pain will come back to revisit you over and over again. Every time you think you've got past it... It'll come back. You have to cut it off, because there's a very good chance he never will. (Transcripts, p.96)

While these are important boundaries to set, Hussey’s advice still does promote gendered behaviors, such as the man-chases-woman trope, and the need for women to perform more emotional labor than their male partners, as discussed in earlier sections. Laner and Ventrone argue it is difficult to transition from using such gendered dating scripts to an egalitarian longer-term relationship (2000). In fact, Knudson-Martin and Rankin Mahoney found that even among married couples who seek egalitarian relationships, their efforts are hindered by the traditional gender patterns most are unaware they have adopted (2009). While the authors recognize an imbalance of power within heterosexual relationships, they identify its source in the

"unacknowledged preeminence of men's desires" (Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009, p. 19).

I am not arguing that following Hussey's advice will lead women into abusive relationships. However, his advice was created within and for a culture where male dominance and female submissiveness are normalized (Papp et al., 2017). Hussey wants his viewers to succeed in their love lives, and thus, must give them tools to navigate the dating culture in which they find themselves. The dating advice he provides is in accordance with Western cultural scenarios, imbued with heteronormative and mononormative assumptions (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). It reflects many gendered patterns that can lead to situations of power imbalances in heterosexual monogamous couples, which have been shown to be conducive to abusive situations, or predictors of IPV (e.g. Boswell & Spade, 1996; Papp et al., 2017; Strain, Hockett, & Saucier, 2015). Knudson-Martin and Rankin Mahoney's study shows that even when couples try to actively counter this trend, the traditional gender patterns they have internalized can remain unquestioned (2009).

The responsibilization of the neoliberal subject.

Throughout this analysis, I have tried to show that the dating problems faced by Hussey's viewers are embedded in broader cultural structure that influence individuals' subjective experiences of their dating lives. However, the neoliberal understanding of individuals' agency locates viewers' problems within themselves, dissimulating the structural forces contributing to these issues, as well as their collective nature (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). McGee associates the withdrawal of welfare programs, as well as the decline of lifelong marriages and lifelong employment security to the pressure faced by neoliberal subjects to constantly work on themselves to remain "marriageable and employable" (McGee, 2005, p. 12). This has created a

market for self-help experts, who promise to alleviate the risks faced by individuals in all aspects of their lives, including the intimate, through strategies of self-improvement and self-promotion (McGee, 2005). This philosophy influences Hussey's advice, as he situates his viewers' problems within themselves (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). For example, in his video "The Only 2 Answers You Need for Every Dating Problem," Hussey blames his viewers' dismal dating prospects on their "social habits":

> Are you one of the many women who feel like they just never meet great guys? Like the whole dating scene where you live is completely impossible?
>
> Do you ask yourself, "How the hell do normal people ever fall in love?"
>
> It's hard when you don't have the right social habits. (Description boxes, p. 40)

In the video, he tells his viewers that the reason they are having difficulties meeting new men is because they do not have enough friends and opportunities to go out. He suggests they should organize regular happy hour drinks and invite anyone they know. Instead of addressing the cultural and social pressures that might lead viewers to form fewer friendships, such as long work hours, Hussey localizes both the blame and the solution within the viewer.

Illouz notes that "consumer capitalism has increasingly transformed emotions into commodities," by normalizing certain emotionalities and subjectivities, and selling commodities that help consumers create these affective states, such as self-help guides (2017, p. 26). Hussey's videos, taken as advertisements for his other services as a dating coach, are a prime example of the commodification of emotions under capitalism. He addresses common dating issues faced by women and frames these problems as a failure on their behalf. By doing so, he places the power to solve their issues in his viewers' hands and offers the purchase of his products as a solution. However, these issues are not, in fact, situated within the individual, but are embedded in broader social and cultural structures and cannot be fully solved with the purchase of a $4,000 retreat

(McGee, 2005).

Summary of findings.

Jackson identifies the structural dimension as the least addressed of the levels of analysis of gender and sexuality (2006a). I found this dimension the most difficult to address in this study, as the structural influences appeared to be the most elusive in my collected data, perhaps because the institutionalized hierarchies of gender and sexuality seemed far removed from self-help YouTube videos. This section has strived to show that they are nonetheless present but are perhaps more difficult to pinpoint. The three topics I chose to address here are to be taken as examples of how "structural constraints impinge on everyday life, differentially enabling and/or constraining our patterns of existence" (Jackson, 2006a, p. 111).

The institutionalization of heteronormativity and mononormativity solidify and inform the hierarchy of heterosexualities present in Hussey's videos. The cultural framework within which his advice is constituted has been shown to lead to power differentials in heterosexual relationships, which tend to be most detrimental for women. However, these structural realities tend to be invisibilized on the subjective level, through the neoliberal pressures for individuals to be rational, self-motivated agents, encouraged to consume products to remedy issues that cannot be solved on the individual level. Though these structural realities are not to be taken as determinants of individual realities, they contribute to the cultural resources from which individuals draw on to constitute their gendered and sexual selves (Jackson, 2006a).

Conclusion

The primary goal for this project was to contribute to the ongoing documentation of the stability of dating scripts over time, by exploring their expression on a medium that had not yet been accounted for: dating advice on a social media platform. I wanted to explore whether the dating advice found on YouTube diverged from the dating scripts collected in sex and relationship advice books in previous studies. I set out to better understand the dynamics of content creation and distribution inherent to social media platforms and their influence on the messages broadcast by creators.

My hypothesis was that the increased possibilities for interaction between content creators and content consumers – thus flattening the distance between experts and audiences (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018) – as well as the opportunity for any consumer to become a creator of content, would influence the dating advice found on YouTube. Instead, I found that the advice in Matthew Hussey's videos not only repeats the themes and tropes previously encountered in studies on sex and relationship advice on mass media, but also further entrenches dominant dating norms by providing consumers with literal scripts to follow and specific products to buy to succeed in dating.

Of course, this thesis is only a case study of one dating coach on YouTube. That said, Matthew Hussey's following over 1.7 million YouTube subscribers (Hussey, n.d.) on a channel of unmonetized videos promoting his other costly services and products, point to the continued commercial success of and demand for dating advice following traditional dating scripts. So, while Hussey's videos are not representative of all dating advice available on YouTube, his videos reveal that traditional dating scripts are still reproduced in newer forms of media, and still constitute a lucrative market for self-help experts. This echoes Barker, Gill and Harvey's remark

about social media: while these platforms have democratized access to the means of content distribution, content is still embedded in relations of power, and is not to be considered independently from the sociocultural contexts in which users and creators find themselves (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

I attempted to address the articulation of Matthew Hussey's videos within broader systems of power in this thesis, by using Jackson's four dimensions of the social as four different analytical lenses for my data. In the section addressing the *structural dimension*, I have suggested that these dating advice videos value the same type of heterosexual relationship that is institutionalized by the state: the long-term monogamous couple. This specific relationship arrangement is depicted in the law as an ahistorical and natural arrangement (Ingraham, 1999). Additionally, longstanding dating scripts, based on the belief that men are naturally sexually aggressive and that women are submissive, contribute to the normalization of power differentials in heterosexual couples. However, despite observable patterns of inequality *between* relationship arrangement types and *within* monogamous heterosexual relationships, the structural nature of these issues is dissimulated by the introduction of neoliberal marketplace logics into intimate spheres of life (Illouz, 2017). Scholars in a range of fields, spanning from medicalization studies (e.g. Crawford, 1980; Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006) to gambling studies (e.g. Cassidy, Pisac, & Loussouarn, 2013), have spoken of the responsibilization imperative under neoliberalism, and my findings are in keeping with the contemporary trends of the critical social sciences with respect to neoliberalism. The collective nature of relationship issues is obscured by the neoliberal tendency of the self-help industry to hold individuals responsible for their successes and to blame them for their failures (Illouz, 2012). Hussey's videos present constant work on the self – with an emphasis on body and emotional labor for women – as solutions to

problems stemming from structural power imbalances.

Instead, as discussed in the *meanings and discourses* section, Hussey's videos frame shared relationship and dating issues as individual failures, presenting self-improvement as a solution to collectively-shared issues (O'Neill, 2015). The quest to find 'Mr. Right' is systematized and rationalized, and love is treated as a commodity that is valued by its scarceness. Women's dating pools are treated like marketplaces in which they must invest time and effort to yield the best return – investments they cannot expect in return from their male dates. The neoliberal discourse underlying Hussey's advice intersects with heteronormative and mononormative pressures around women's relationship status. These normative systems are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. The videos present heterosexual, long-term monogamous relationships as the most desirable relationship arrangement towards which viewers are expected to work. In addition to this particular form of heterosexual relationships, Hussey's videos depict an aspirational lifestyle, one based on consumerism and sociocultural landmarks that only a minority of upper-middle class women can attain. Thus, in these videos, women's successes and failures are not just measured by their relationship status, but by their ability to partake in the lifestyle promoted by Hussey as well.

Dating scripts and the underlying power dynamics they create were analyzed in further detail in the section addressing the dimension of *routine social practices.* In his videos, Hussey advises women on the routine social practices they should follow in their dating lives, by providing them general as well as literal dating scripts to follow. Hussey's dating advice follows the popular interpersonal heterosexual dating scripts identified in previous studies, such as the man-chases-woman trope, or the expectation that men should be the initiators of romantic and sexual encounters. Additionally, the aspirational lifestyle Hussey promotes through his routine

social practices as a content creator, contributes to the social division between those who can afford the coach's services and those who cannot, who are then blamed for their failures.

Hussey's business model rests upon the neoliberal assumption that collectively shared issues can be solved with individual solutions (Illouz, 2012), such as encouraging his viewers to attend his 5-day retreat as a solution to the widespread difficulty to find a partner. Hussey's dating advice addresses widespread dating problems, thus attracting a large audience, but proposes solutions situated at the level of the individual. As discussed in the section covering the *subjective dimension,* Hussey's viewers are urged to take control of their dating lives and are portrayed as inadequate and unworthy of success if they fail to do so. Furthermore, while Hussey states that his advice is to help any woman seduce any man, his videos betray a much more reductive account of his imagined audience. He does not address issues faced by women of color, disabled women, queer women, or even of women who cannot afford to take on the time and additional expenses his advice warrants. Viewers are encouraged to trust Hussey, as he presents himself as an expert on his own gender, and as an aspirational boyfriend, an example of the type of man his viewers can seduce if they follow his method.

The general ideas underlying expectations about men, women and their intimate relations are congruent with the findings of previous studies (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Laner & Ventrone, 2000). However, it is not insignificant that these studies, characterized by their use of Simon and Gagnon's scripting theory as a theoretical framework, do not address the pressures of neoliberalism – unlike the studies which move away from scripting theory, such as Barker, Gill and Harvey (2018), McGee (2005), and O'Neill (2015). The limitations of scripting theory regarding analyses of power and structural pressures were an unexpected finding of this study. Simon and Gagnon's theory is useful when comparing dating scripts between different groups,

different eras, and different cultures. However, it cannot account for the implications of these scripts in individuals' lives and the gender order more generally. Using Jackson's four dimensions of the social rather than solely relying on scripting theory has helped to reveal the underlying operations of power embedded within dating scripts and the medium through which the advice is given – an element that has not been accounted for in previous literature on dating advice.

Jackson's four dimensions of the social are a helpful tool in research on gender and sexuality. This methodology could be used as an analytical tool to help produce analyses at levels of the social that had previously remained unaddressed, as I have done in this thesis, by drawing a microsocial approach towards a more structural level of analysis. This analytical tool seems especially suited for intersectional analyses, in keeping with the tendency across the critical social sciences to try and account for multiple domains at the same time, as can be found in work informed by intersectional frameworks (e.g. Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 2015; McCall, 2005). However, one of the difficulties with Jackson's approach is that it generates large amounts of data, which can become unwieldy.

Scripting theory and Jackson's dimensions of the social account for individual agency within a system of norms and structural constraints, yet the data I collected did not allow for the observation of viewers' responses and opinions about Hussey's videos. The decision to focus solely on Hussey's content was deliberate, in order to limit the scope of my study. However, future research could be done on consumers' reception of dating advice, perhaps by analyzing the comment section of Hussey's videos – and of other sex and relationship advice videos – or through focus groups recruited within various dating coach's subscriber bases.

Importantly, my research did not uncover a transformation of heterosexual dating scripts,

which is alarming in the light of the recent resurgence of the #metoo movement. The systemic issues linked to dating and dating advice put women at a greater risk of violence and abuse (e.g. Boswell & Spade, 1996; Papp et al., 2017; Strain, Hockett, & Saucier, 2015), but they are disguised as personal issues under the guise of neoliberal self-help advice. Hussey's videos paint a bleak picture of heterosexual dating, especially for women – one that does not seem capable of changing. However, they are not representative of all dating advice available on social media, and it is useful to consider alternative ways of imagining dating advice.

There are already examples on various platforms that value women's pleasure, safety and consent over dating scripts, strategies and seduction: (1) Sarah, creator of Do You Consider Yourself a Feminist on Instagram and Facebook (@dycyaf, n.d.; @douconsideryourselfafeminist, n.d.), (2) dating coach Imani Yvonne, creator of the Twitter, Instagram and YouTube accounts ActualBlackMermaid (Yvonne, ABMTALKS, n.d.; Yvonne, @actualblackmermaid, n.d.; @imani_yvonne2, n.d.)[16], (3) and blogger Chidera Eggerue's Instagram account The Slumflower (Eggerue, n.d.)[17]. These women all focus on the importance of pleasure, safety and consent in relationships and provide intersectional feminist dating advice that accounts for socio-economic status, race, sexual orientation and the gender identities of those who follow it.

I will end this thesis with a quote about dating by Sarah from Do You Consider Yourself a Feminist:

> Repeat after me to save a life.

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[16] These accounts have been deleted several times, thus, the URLs provided in the reference section might not be valid at the time of reading. At the time of writing, @douconsideryourselfafeminist's Instagram profile has been deleted.

[17] Eggerue also published *What a Time to be Alone* (Eggerue, 2018), a self-help book celebrating the power of being alone, rather than endlessly pursuing relationships.

Fuck playing it cool. #TeamNoChill
Consistency or die.
Clarity or choke.
If they wanted to, they would have.

Read that again.
Memorize it. (@dycyaf, n.d.)

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