

# Swipe Left to Detain: A Procedural Comparison between Tinder and Papers, Please

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## Abstract

*This paper will compare Tinder, a mobile dating application, to Papers, Please, a video game simulating a checkpoint. The purpose of this paper is to find relevant and subtle similarities in function between two dissimilar applications released within relative close proximity. This paper will explore the meaning of these similarities and discuss potential implications for these connections.*

## Introduction

Digital applications, especially applications designed for mobile devices, have limited interface options. Successful mobile applications require extremely simple and clear designs that allow users to use the application quickly. Designers often choose from a few sets of symbols and mechanics to operate programs and applications to make applications useful to most end-users immediately. The limited number of choices might serve as a shortcut for design and learning, but the introduction of relatively similar mechanics and interfaces could have consequences for the interpretation of software and its relationship to society. End-users are rarely aware of the design choices and implications of choices as they relate to technology, and there are limitations for the expression of software as well.

Understanding human communication requires an understanding of the limits of human communication. Brown (2014) argued that understanding machine rhetorics is critical to understanding the boundaries of communication and human relationships. The argument that Derrida separated animal and machine from human in order to test the boundaries of each requires revision as human integrate more completely and fully with machines (Brown 2014). “Machine rhetorics” are the types of rhetoric used by programs and appli-

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cations which might be unique or different from human rhetorics. Brown's contention was that a machine's ability to create rhetoric might blur the line between what defines the human from the mechanical. If a machine produces rhetoric in the first place, researchers should consider the implications of reproducing rhetoric. Because machines move beyond appliance functions into expressive and emotive functions, the expression of machines must be considered. The interaction with machines and spaces within are divisible from the programmer's intent because the fundamental interaction with a program involves the user-action. Digital games include artistic concepts, but games and applications can include rhetorical concepts as well. Winner (1980) argued that technological artifacts exist to serve establish, enforce patterns of authority, and that bonding practice with technology can serve similar functions. The argument made by Winner (1980) was that machines are not neutral or objective artifacts but could exist to enforce particular forms of power and control, and Brown's (2014) exploration of machine rhetorics helps us understand machine behavior as rhetorical. The combination of Winner's argument about political machines and Brown's about persuasive machines combine lead to the possibility of persuasive machines with political effects.

The importance of machine rhetoric is relevant to the study of both games and digital applications. A situation becomes rhetorical when it requires some kind of action from the audience rather than requiring a simple relaying of information or self-expression (Bitzer, 1968). Moving an audience to action is possible through direct statements, but also through procedures (Bogost, 2007). Lanier (2010) argued that repeated interaction with particular types of systems or computers will make humans behave more like computers and change our interactions. Changes in interactions could happen through both games and non-game applications if they carry similar rhetorics. Because communication habits could be altered through repeated use, there is utility in examining repeated mechanics and procedures to expose their implications. Therefore, it is useful to compare applications with different goals and appearances but with similar functions and designs.

Beyond the idea of habits or functions, games are sites of ideological production and reproduction. Scholarship has focused on productions of violence (Schroeder, 1996), capitalism (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009), and reproductions of postmodernity (Gottschalk, 1995). Through repeated use and play, games persuade users to hold particular beliefs and enforces/confirms existing beliefs. The rhetorical impact of games moves beyond a particular action within a situation to move and shape a worldview or orientation among players. Repeated use and reinforcement changes certain games from rhetorical objects to ideological objects. The use of particular mechanics and ideas within a game or game-like application enforce particular ideologies. The examination of games or applications with similar goals, mechanics, and play allows designers and players/users to consider the ideological ramifications of play/use within those games or applications.

Games or applications with similar designs and mechanics might operate under similar

rhetorics, which might mean these similar games might hold similar ideologies. However, these similar ideologies might be hidden or contrary to the stated purpose of one or both of the compared applications. A combination of design choices and mechanics can produce and reproduce an ideology. This paper will compare Tinder, a mobile dating application, to *Papers, Please*, a video game simulating a checkpoint. Comparing these games uses Bogost's (2006) method of comparative video game criticism which hopes to move beyond notions of descriptions of games to how games intersect with human activity. The description of comparative mechanics and rhetorics helps articulate the relationships between how *Papers, Please* and Tinder have similar rhetorics, which might mean they invoke or confirm certain types of relationships. This paper will add to rhetorical studies of digital objects, and challenge game studies to look at objects as game-like rather than requiring definitions of games to limit the scope of the field.

### Definitions

Before moving to comparisons and critiques, this section will summarize and define the basic operation of both *Papers, Please* and Tinder. After both are summarized, there will be a discussion of various game definitions that will justify the comparison between Tinder and *Papers, Please* as games. Using various and competing definitions shows that Tinder qualifies as a game, or at least sufficiently game-like, to permit a comparison within games studies.

Tinder is what Handel and Shklovski (2012) described as an app for location-based real-time dating (LBRTD). Rather than listing a general area, LBRTD apps are primarily attached to mobile devices like smartphones. The application tracks the movements of users, and Tinder displays a photo, age, last activity, and approximate distance from the user. Blackwell et al. (2014) claimed LBRTD sites draw from existing technology like chat rooms and other dating sites, but the interface also strongly resembles existing message applications like iMessage by using the same color schemes and interface options. The spread of Tinder is difficult to estimate, but Bilton (2014) estimated the user-base was approximately 50 million active users.

Operating Tinder is fairly simple. Pressing on the photo of the other user will reveal a slightly longer description written by the other user and an album of additional photos. If the user decides to connect with the other person, the user can either press the green heart button or "swipe right" by using a finger to move the photo to the right side of the screen. If the user decides the profile is unsatisfactory, the user can press the red "X" button or "swipe left," which resembles the motion for accepting but in the opposite direction. If a user has "swiped right" on a particular profile and the other person swipes right as well (or swiped right previously), Tinder will offer a screen saying, "It's a Match," and allow the user the option to message the other user immediately or return to browsing profiles. Labeling the option "Keep Playing" highlights the game-like nature of Tinder and adds to the playful skin.

Playfulness, at least in its more fun and light-hearted sense, is not the core of *Papers, Please*. *Papers, Please* is a 2013 game released for PC through various online retailers, and a version for iPad was released in 2014. The game is described as follows:

A Dystopian Document Thriller.

The communist state of Arstotzka has ended a 6-year war with neighboring Kolechia and reclaimed its rightful half of the border town, Grestin.

Your job as immigration inspector is to control the flow of people entering the Arstotzkan side of Grestin from Kolechia. Among the throngs of immigrants and visitors looking for work are hidden smugglers, spies, and terrorists. Using only the documents provided by travelers and the Ministry of Admission's primitive inspect, search, and fingerprint systems you must decide who can enter Arstotzka and who will be turned away or arrested. (Pope, 2013)

As players sort the various travelers, the player must decide to admit the traveler, reject the traveler (sending them to whatever fate might await them), or detain the traveler. In the game's relatively scripted story mode, the player receives credits for each traveler successfully and correctly processed. Each day opens with new rules declared, and a large book details all the rules and provides examples of various documents, seals, and procedures. Making an error in processing once will lead to a warning, but subsequent errors will come with fines. Various travelers might add to the player's credit total with bribes, gifts, or through doing various favors. At the end of each day, the player's income for the day is balanced against the expenses required to maintain the household for the player's family.

In *Papers, Please*, successfully processing more people means more credits earned. Earning additional credits allows for diegetic narrative benefits, such as keeping family members alive or adopting an abandoned niece, and diegetic player benefits such as rapid movement through the rulebook or the ability to move multiple documents simultaneously. The challenge in processing travelers quickly is twofold. First, the constantly changing rules and expanding number of required documents means the play must scrutinize more within a short period of time. Requirements to look at numerous details quickly means the chances of making a mistake are higher. Second, travelers will often tell stories about escaping oppression or other dire circumstances. On Day 6, a woman gives the player a note claiming a man behind her named Dari Ludum will likely take the passports of her and her sister, and Dari will force the pair to work in a brothel. When Dari arrives, his documents are in order, meaning denying his entry will result in a citation. The player must choose between letting the man through and earning credits, or the player could deny Dari's entry, thus possibly preventing a human trafficker from continuing his business, and accept a citation. There are other solutions to the problem that present themselves, but the player is put in a difficult position.

The endless modes of *Papers, Please* offers a much less opaque scoring system. A timed

mode asks players to process as many travelers as possible in 10 minutes, with +1 for correct processing, additional time and +1 for detaining entrants, and -30 seconds for every citation. The mode that demands the most careful attention is called “Perfection,” where scores are slightly diminished after the first minute and a single mistake ends the game. The optimal strategy in this case is to scrutinize each paper extremely carefully, thus slowing the entire process down a great deal. “Endurance” allows players to process entries until they receive a negative score balance, meaning the game could go on indefinitely.

Having given a basic outline of both Tinder and *Papers, Please*, this essay will move to define both Tinder and *Papers, Please* as games. Because much of the analysis will focus on ideas related to play and games as play, it is critical to establish both as games and both experiences as primarily about play. *Papers, Please* is more clearly defined as a game and would be recognizable as an experience that seems “game-like,” in that it has limited practical utility. The rules and structure of *Papers, Please* have elements, such as win-conditions or fail-states, that are part of common definitions of games. *Papers, Please* is distributed by game-focused distribution centers like Steam, and Apple’s iOS Store lists *Papers, Please* as a game and play as the primary form of interaction. By its overall feel, structure, and definition based on distribution mechanisms, *Papers, Please* is fairly easy to define as a game.

Tinder, by contrast, appears more like an application to locate people for social connections rather than most common definitions of a game. However, some elements that define *Papers, Please* as a game also help make Tinder a game as well. These elements are user identification, critical identification, and essential activity. Even though this article will cite Arjoranta’s (2014) arguments derived from Wittgenstein about family resemblances, this section will also use what Arjoranta defined as a “common core approach,” which claims that both Tinder and *Papers, Please* share central elements that define them as games. By using both a family resemblances approach and common core approach, this essay will demonstrate that Tinder is sufficiently “game-like” and those qualities are also essential to defining *Papers, Please* as a game.

The first component is user experience. A potential response of someone who believes Tinder is not a game might include the utility function of Tinder. Software that serves a purpose aside from play might be viewed as a tool, thus not fitting the definition of a game. In other forms of media, Syversten (2001) found people participated in television dating games for both the instrumental function of finding a partner and the experience itself. Tinder serves a similar purpose, where some users participate both for finding partners but also the experience of looking, searching, and meeting new people. User accounts reported in journalism (Hakala, 2015; Sales, 2015) report Tinder users describing Tinder useage as a game and in game-like terms. While not all users might participate in Tinder for the experience itself, consistent reporting in mass media indicates a presence of users that treat Tinder as a game-like experience.

The definition by users of Tinder as a game experience is also common among game critics. PBS Game/Show (2014) detailed the many game concepts and resemblances that made Tinder function in using game mechanics, ideas, and aesthetics. The basic elements that make certain types of games function also allowed Tinder to function and thrive. Jackson & Neely-Cohen (2015) go further by defining Tinder within terms of game genres:

It may be tempting to call it a roguelike, but Tinder is more of a free-to-play mobile MMO with RPG, puzzle, and text-based elements. Driven by an ambiguous morality system, it asks you to read and make choices on “profiles” of the characters that populate its sparse world.

The review appeared on Boing Boing’s *Offworld* blog, the space on the technology blog that primarily covers games and is edited by game critics and designers. Even if the review was intended as tongue-in-cheek, the ability to generically categorize Tinder within existing game genres indicates a baseline for critical acceptance of Tinder as a game.

Beyond the user and critical experiences, Tinder can be defined as a game through games studies literature. To explore some essential elements, this essay will use Zimmerman’s (2004) and Juul’s (2003) definitions of a game, Taylor’s (2007) critique of Juul’s definition, and Djaouti et al.’s (2014) definition of a serious game. Exploring these definitions and critiques will place Tinder within the acceptable boundaries of games studies, or at least close enough that Tinder is worth examining as a game.

Zimmerman (2004) defined a game as “a voluntary interactive activity, in which one or more players follow rules that constrain their behavior, enacting an artificial conflict that ends in a quantifiable outcome” (p. 54). Tinder users volunteer to use the app, they interact through accepting or rejecting profiles, there are limits to both contact options and access to information that prevent certain kinds of behavior, and matches are countable. Dating and courtship often contains game-like elements, but applications like Tinder make the gamification of dating and courtship far more explicit (Neilson, 2013). The remaining piece of the definition deals with conflict, which has two possible perspectives. One perspective is that Tinder is a simultaneous competition between all other partners. Another is that Tinder is a game of chance, meaning a user finds a match within numerous profiles and competes against fate rather than a visible or direct opponent. For some users, the experience of having both parties accept a match appears miraculous. The seemingly random circumstances support the idea that Tinder works as a game of chance (Juul, 2013), thus making Tinder a type of game or borderline case.

Juul’s (2003) Classic Game Model defined games as:

A rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.

This particular definition partially defines Tinder as a game depending on how the player

interacts. The app itself has defined rules and works on a system, but the rules of effort and influence use existing social rules and norms to influence the outcome. While some might define games by having a closed system of rules isolated from society, there is no game that rejects all social rules or conventions. The app provides enough feedback to show outcomes, matches have different values from non-matches, and players are able to opt-out or negotiate from any swipe. Even if Juul (2003) might classify Tinder as a game-like object or “borderline case,” there is a two-pronged response. First, the resemblance of Tinder to a game should be strong enough to allow critics subscribing to a classical definition of games to find enough relevant elements that allow for a comparison between Tinder and *Papers, Please*. Comparing a liminal case to a certain case allows for an interrogation about the exact space of the border between game and non-game. A more pointed prong, coming from Taylor (2007), is that having popular games like *SimCity* and *EverQuest* fail to meet Juul’s standards might require a redefinition of games. Taylor (2007) argued that excluding popular games, and a popular notion of games by extension, would limit the scope of games studies in unnecessary ways.

A different approach might come from the concept of a “serious game.” While the definition of “serious games” differs, Djaouti et al. (2011) define a serious game as “any piece of software that merges a non-entertaining purpose (*serious*) with a video game structure (*game*)” (p. 120). While Tinder might not appear “serious” because it lacks the educational goals commonly associated with serious games, finding and screening potential romantic partners would certainly qualify as a non-entertaining purpose. Tinder uses and borrows the structure of videogames, as will be shown later by comparing Tinder to *Papers, Please*, but this definition allows for games to have consequences outside of the game world. Potential lived consequences are not automatic reasons to exclude Tinder as a game under this definition of serious games.

The user and critical definitions of Tinder-as-game might not work under some definitions because of a belief that usage in some circles might not qualify, and some might argue the essential elements outlined by either definition are insufficient. Definitions, by their nature, are created through social convention rather than objective facts. If definitions require essential elements that define games and find Tinder lacking in those elements, Arjoranta (2014) argued for a “family resemblances” approach, which claims that definitions should not be either/or decisions but work on a continuum. A version of this approach might say that Tinder is less-game than *Papers, Please*, but that still means Tinder remains on the game continuum.

### Resemblances

Having defined both Tinder and *Papers, Please* as games (or at least game-like) where free-play is allowed, there are additional similarities. First, Tinder and *Papers, Please* share common designs and interfaces. Second, Tinder and *Papers, Please* share similar goal structures.

Thirdly, Tinder and *Papers, Please* both operate using reductive technology. Finally, Tinder and *Papers, Please* both operate under Sutton-Smith's (1997) rhetoric of fate, the idea that games of chance demonstrate and concretize a particular player's favor with or connection to divine power.

Both applications use common symbols and directions associated with procedures. Red is a common symbol for danger or threat while green acts as a low-threat or permission symbol (Smith-Jackson & Wogalter, 2000). Tinder and *Papers, Please* stick to the color scheme for rejection and selection, and both share a common symbol "X" to represent denial or rejection. The rejection stamps in *Papers, Please* are positioned to the left of the acceptance stamps, which shares their positioning with Tinder's swipe directions for accepting or rejecting profiles. Walker (2015) claimed people hold a bias in lateral movement for left-to-right as depicting motion in still visuals, which explains how the scrolling of most video games operate to depict motion. *Papers, Please* depicts motion by having travelers move from the line on the left, enter the checkpoint, and accepted travelers continue moving to the right. The player's character and other important characters enter from the right. Tinder works in the same directions, with the profile moving right if the user wants a relationship to "progress" and left if the user wants to halt the progress of the relationship. The use of design elements and lateral movement to depict actions are shared between *Papers, Please* and Tinder despite myriad design choices available.

In addition to basic design and motion similarities, reporting features in both games have similar positions and functions. For example, Tinder allows for people to report users engaging in uninvited or obnoxious activity, such as spamming. The option allows for additional investigation of members based on repeated reports of abuses, perhaps even banning accounts from the network. Each user acts as a low-level moderator by reporting violators for further review. *Papers, Please* has a similar in-game mechanic of detaining travelers. If a traveler presents documents that appear to be forged, they bear a resemblance to wanted criminals, or they refuse to leave the booth, an option to "detain" travelers is available to the player. Letting them go rarely results in a penalty so long as the traveler is denied admission. However, detaining travelers results in a small "kickback" from the guards, meaning the player earns additional credits in the story mode. The additional credits means they player's family benefits from sending more people to uncertain fates in prison for minor offenses or unclear crimes. A scripted event in the game has a wanted criminal claim he or she was unaware of any charges or issues, meaning it was possible the player was frequently jailing political prisoners in addition to suspected murders and sex traffickers. In *Endless Modes*, players earn additional points or time for detention. In all cases the player in *Papers, Please* is encouraged or rewarded for using the detain option.

Resemblances between the detain option in *Papers, Please* and the report option in Tinder have two major resemblances. The first is the physical position and activation. Tinder allows a user to report anyone, but the user must first press on the picture (an additional step).



Detaining options only become available in particular circumstances set by the game after the detection of discrepancies. In both cases, additional work on the part of the player/user is required to unlock the detain/report option. After the activation conditions are met, the button appears under the picture or main screen in the same position, slightly to the lower right of the display.

The setting of *Papers, Please* attempts to simulate a button hidden under the desk, which Tinder emulates. In both cases, the touchscreen-based procedure mimics an existing physical procedure of a hidden button. If the profiles and travelers are visible, the button to report them is “invisible” to the picture. Although the user at the other end will never see the report button being selected, the position of the button attempts to preserve the feeling of secret reporting. The mechanical action of checkpoints is maintained and preserved through haptics and mechanics, even if the reporting is to different effect or carries different narrative weight.

The similarity between detaining in *Papers, Please* and reporting in Tinder is the removal of the player/user from any consequences or forcing them to see the result. Davis (2002) claimed the lack of accountability contributes to bad behavior in digital spaces, but reporting without cause could also qualify as bad behavior. In *Papers, Please*, there is some ambiguity as to why a person is being detained. Tinder’s reporting options include explicitly defined behaviors, but there is a space for “Other” which allows users to fill in an unlisted reason. In either case, the consequences for the reported person are unknown to the player or user. Moral debate and weight are removed from individuals and handed over to authorities, which alters the player and reduces their choices.

The reduction of choices is a major function of Fogg’s (2003) ideas around persuasive technology, specifically reductive technology. Reductive technology takes complex tasks and reduces them to simple computations. When evaluating a particular match, the determination begins as a simple yes/no transaction based on limited information. Rather than deciding to initiate contact based on several cues, Tinder reduces the decision to limited cues. All dating apps work on reductive technology because they need to maintain search functions and attract new customers. Lanier (2010) argues that social applications are reductive in order to attract users with low skills, meaning dating apps resemble most social applications. Few, if any, social digital applications can mimic the physical world in their richness and detail. Tinder acts as the current extreme of social technology; it reduces initial romantic encounters to a binary checkpoint.

*Papers, Please* acts to question reductive technology. By examining relatively simple pieces of technology, such as stamps, seals, and printed documents, the game shows the problems of over reliance on reductive technology. When a document is misprinted, some characters will claim the document was a mistake and ask to be rejected rather than detained. The player often faces the choice of receiving a small bonus for detaining the person, nothing for re-

jecting them, and a penalty for ignoring the mistake and letting them through. The systems in *Papers, Please* reduce people to collections of documents and seals, and the game rewards players for examining people as interchangeable pieces of technology. However, the act of doing so has moral consequences.

Based on Juul's (2013) typology of games, *Papers, Please* has three goal structures. It is possible to complete the game (a completion goal), but the multiple possible endings allow for some flexibility in defining completion goals. Different possible endings allow for improvement goals, meaning someone could decide to beat a personal best by earning credits for an upgraded apartment, avoid fines, or collect various tokens. The transient goals include allowing people to get past or following certain narrative objectives such as reuniting a family or stopping a suspected sex trafficker. There are also transient goals in each encounter, making sure the right things are measured to prevent receiving fines. *Papers, Please* works by making the transient goals seem important and weighty, thus diverting the player from completion goals. Rather than having goals work harmoniously, *Papers, Please* works by constantly distracting the player from meeting their goals by throwing in new wrinkles and complicating the goal structure through narrative consequences.

Tinder, as a game, might also have certain goals. Unlike *Papers, Please*, Tinder has no completion goals. Players in Tinder will find it impossible to "win" because a win state is mostly defined by the player. However, what qualifies as a win state in *Papers, Please* is also ambiguous. Escaping from the country or helping the resistance might qualify as a "win" to some players, just like finding a sex partner or long-term relationship might work for others. Defining completion goals is trickier in open-games, but Tinder favors transient goals in extreme. Minor failures are meant to be ignored and tossed aside in favor of the new person. Because there is always another profile or set of profiles to view, each swipe is a potential to meet the transient goal. Improvement goals are less likely in Tinder than in *Papers, Please*, but Tinder players might believe they are improving if they receive more/better messages or matches after making changes to their pictures or profiles.

Even without clear standards for improvement goals, Tinder works by preventing completion and focusing on transient goals. In theory, completing Tinder would eliminate parts of its user-base. The application should connect enough users to enough people to function, but not connect them so well or make it so simple that users abandon the application. Users are encouraged to view more profiles and extremely attractive profiles to remind them that indefinite potential partners remain. The transient goal of locating another person or getting another match might replace the goal of settling down with a single person. Offering people numerous choices prevents the completion of Tinder in a socially common way. Tinder's design lacks clear win conditions, but it also limits a player's ability to create the kinds of win conditions that would remove them from the app. Infinite variety means lots of transient contests, and the transient goal confounding the completion goal is something Tinder shares with *Papers, Please*. Both Tinder and *Papers, Please* share the common thread of making goals

elusive and the means for achieving them unclear.

The lack of clarity and obvious directions leave both *Papers, Please* and Tinder to understandings through Sutton-Smith's (1997) rhetoric of fate. Sutton-Smith (1997) found that most studies of chance-based games focused on gamblers looking for external rewards. Juul (2013) claims games of chance are roughly egalitarian over multiple plays because of the elimination of skill, but chance within a single game is libertarian, meaning players completely accept unequal distribution.

Tinder works, in part, as antithetical to previous dating applications. Rather than focusing on detailed questions or long profiles, Tinder works on the idea of sparks from simplicity. Through the application, meeting partners is not a deliberative act but a matter of playing the game and hoping someone else matches. Advertising produced by Tinder (2014) depicts the app as functioning "like real life," but mostly through chance encounters. There is no depiction of effort, and both meet simply because they saw each other, "matched," and then decided to meet up. The narrative of the commercial depicts meeting people through Tinder as a game of chance that works out. Tinder works by luck and encourages people to swipe because someone could be "the one."

*Papers, Please* lacks literal gods or magic forces, but it places the player at the mercy of large and oppressive forces. Failing to let enough people through means the player will not earn enough to pay the rent, thus sending the player to prison and ending the game. Even if events are scripted, they are intended to feel spontaneous. Terrorists will disrupt the checkpoint through suicide bombing, ending the player's ability to make additional money. Although the complexity of documents increases as the story progresses, the types and sequence of errors is randomly generated. The random and random-seeming acts serve to remove the player's sense of agency and escape, making it extremely difficult to do the "right thing." The choice to make events feel random simulate a totalitarian state's caprice and severe consequences for those who fail to adapt.

### Implications

The similarities between these applications require some exploration. The two major implications about this comparison are interpretations of technology, reduction, and fate versus progress. Second, there are practical concerns about human relationships through technology.

One concern about reductive technology comes from Lanier's (2010) concern about dating sites and the web in general. Lanier claims human people relating through technology and through computers will make humans relate to each other more like computers. The more our interactions are mediated through limited channels, the more our interactions become less humane and more computerized. Reductive technology serves to simplify tasks, but

there are concerns that simplifying tasks uncritically could have poor consequences. *Papers, Please* forces players to relate mechanically and as if the player were a computer. Discernment and computation are rewarded, while compassion and nuance are punished.

The reductive use of Tinder raises some concerns about destabilizing traditional relationships and thinking about the nature of online social connections. Paul (2014) found that couples who met online were less likely to be married and more likely to break up when compared to couples who met offline. Finkel et al. (2012) came to similar conclusions, and went further by stating complex matching algorithms have limited actual effectiveness in creating compatible couples. Online dating might not cause limited connections or relationship destabilization, but Tinder might help facilitate immediate encounters uncommon among heterosexual pairs, and meeting becomes a matter of fate rather than merit or social skill.

Djaouti et al. (2009) introduced a “purpose-shifting” use of serious games where the position and context of an entertainment game could have non-entertainment purposes. *Papers, Please* could be used to talk about immigration, terrorism, or other issues and become a serious game. However, purpose-shifting is a bigger issue when done in reverse. Tinder, as a game, shifts the process of finding and screening potential partners into entertainment. Purpose-shifting has consequences because some Tinder users will not interpret Tinder as non-symbolic action. Reading Tinder as a game, especially a serious game, means videogame elements must be examined critically and exposed to remind people of the potential harmful effects uncritical Tinder use might have on individual. *Papers, Please* represents a bureaucratic system, and its serious effects could work if players transfer their experiences outside of the game, but Tinder users turning the application into entertainment might dehumanize others for their own amusement.

The failure of complex, rational systems enforces the struggle Sutton-Smith (1997) articulates as rhetorics of fate work at odds with rhetorics of progress. A rhetoric of progress works through development and growth through effort and focused training. Social structures designed with rational, systematic operation must function according to discernable patterns. *Papers, Please* demonstrates how a rhetoric of fate can crush someone, but Tinder’s mechanics are undecided. *Papers, Please* becomes dystopic because humanity is removed from a circumstance, but the removal of humanity from Tinder is not predetermined.

Journalistic accounts debate the effects of the gamification and resulting dehumanization on Tinder and similar applications (Sales, 2015; Ramzy & Rogers, 2015), but some of these debates include social concerns about “hookup culture,” a practice of casual dating and sexual contact that some see as disruptive to establish romantic arrangements. Tinder users certainly use Tinder to facilitate hookup culture, and perhaps Tinder enables the spread of hookup culture to different kinds of people. However, critics of Tinder’s dehumanization that connect Tinder to hookup culture should be cautious in linking the dehumanization

functions of Tinder's mechanics to negative assumptions about hookup culture. While Tinder and its use comes with ideological and political commitments, criticizing behavior enabled by Tinder might force some critics to support narrow and particular models of romance and sexuality. Winner's (1980) concern about technology enforcing particular power dynamics related to sexual politics are worthwhile considerations when looking at Tinder, and the enforcement of hookup culture could work as a valid problem only if hookup culture itself is a problem. If someone views hookup culture as not a necessary component of Tinder use or as something other than negative, the issues of dehumanization need to be examined as problems by themselves rather than problems related to a culture. This line of reasoning enforces the concerns about examining machine rhetorics (Brown, 2014) and the need to divide the machine from the human while looking at the politics of the artifact itself (Winner, 1980).

There are also challenges in looking at the boundaries of the artifact. Tinder might have more boundary issues because its users might translate their interactions into actual spaces. Interactions on Tinder might be considered non-symbolic because they are connected to the user's self-perception outside of the application. All dating applications require users to place themselves at emotional risks, and all dating applications work on associations with larger social structures.

Unexamined mechanical concerns and procedures are problematic. Bogost (2007) argues changes to aesthetics without changing underlying procedures mean the persuasive message remains the same. Communication through words and thoughts matter, but actions carry significant weight. Repeated actions, such as swiping through a series of profiles as rapidly as possible using a system similar to a dehumanizing checkpoint, could have consequences for how people relate to machines and through machines. A critical examination of how our relationships function is necessary if people will continue to meet through machine-based applications and define their expression through procedures. Comparing a game like *Papers, Please* to a dating application and discovering similarities should move beyond comparisons of industrial design and consider how two procedurally-similar programs emerged during a time of increasing-yet-ineffective information and rationality.

Before concluding, this essay will examine the issue of definitions and the key differences in the moral weight of the two applications. Definitions of games are always contested, and this essay will not attempt to resolve or impose a single definition as correct. In fact, this essay uses several different definitions to demonstrate that Tinder is, at minimum, game-like enough to allow for a comparison with a similar medium and to be examined as a game system. A definition of games that excludes Tinder could be a sound definition, but critics of games should be careful that they are creating meaningful boundaries. Very few, if any, games can meaningfully fit a majority of scholarly or professional definitions of games, which is why a constant examination and comparison of definitions is important. Ajoranta (2014) claimed the act of redefining games will highlight new aspects of games and game-

ness, which can expand the options for game scholars. This essay hopes to contribute to the expansion of options, but it certainly is not the last or definite word in defining games.

While both Tinder and *Papers, Please* exist in moral situations where characters or users are manipulated by systems of control, Tinder users are willing participants while the characters in *Papers, Please* are victims of an oppressive government. Although Tinder users might encounter negative or difficult experiences, Tinder users participate to the extent they choose and have the ability to see parts of how the system operates. *Papers, Please* presents a situation where game characters are compelled to participate in a dehumanizing system in order to preserve shreds of their humanity, meaning the characters face an unfair dilemma. While some Tinder users certainly experience unpleasant experiences or harassment, the danger faced by characters in *Papers, Please* is much more severe.

Another important distinction between the systems of control in *Papers, Please* and Tinder comes from the reporting function. While the basic mechanics of the systems are similar, the position of the two systems is radically different. *Papers, Please* uses a detain option to preserve an oppressive state. While the detain option might prevent dangerous and immoral actors (such as human traffickers) from, the detain system is held against extremely vulnerable populations for the benefit of an autocratic state. Tinder's reporting function, by contrast, is about shared agency and control. Tinder users mostly police each other, which diffuses power and the potential for long-term damage. Reporting functions in Tinder put all users in the exact same state of vulnerability by giving them the same tools. Inequality is enforced by the detain function in *Papers, Please*, while the report function in Tinder allows for relatively equal power between users. The report and detain functions are mechanically similar, but their position in a larger social system influences their morality.

Assuming critique is inherent to the experience of *Papers, Please* requires an awareness of certain level of empathy with the digital characters from players. Not every player experiences the same degree of empathy, meaning the critique is not always necessary to play or "win" *Papers, Please*. Empathy is an important step in finding the critique of *Papers, Please*, and not everyone empathizes with digital characters. Critiques of systems are an important part of *Papers, Please*, but assuming that Tinder lacks critical self-examination doesn't undermine the utility of comparing the two systems. In fact, the routinizing of systems through repeated use of applications like Tinder serve to strengthen the need for systemic critique and examination. While the narrative structure in *Papers, Please* shows the results of dehumanization, it is worthwhile to find how a system with much less severe consequences, like Tinder, could erode our concept of human relationships. Tinder is not a border crossing of life and death, but its growing centrality in social interactions requires understanding how the system operates.

Playing *Papers, Please* is an experience of the banality of evil. Rather than a dehumanizing procedure coming from monstrous acts or demons, our inhumanity comes from a lack of

critical examination and careful thought. Tinder's mechanics strongly resemble procedures designed to process quickly with minimal information, but dehumanization remains one option among many. By exposing the mechanical similarities, users can make new determinations about how they approach the application, online dating, or their relationships in general. Tinder works on fate, but that doesn't mean dehumanization is destiny. Tinder's current expression is dehumanizing, but interaction with the application could alter its expression and use. Games are defined both through interaction and systems, meaning the interaction that takes place within Tinder's game could change the dehumanizing aspects.

*Papers, Please* depicts a system of reductive technology that dehumanizes everyone who participates. To a certain extent, the mechanics of *Papers, Please* were embedded within the game's society and would be difficult to dismantle without changing the fundamentals of that society. Tinder shares mechanical similarities with *Papers, Please*, but a critical awareness and examination of how the mechanics function can help Tinder users, and people copying Tinder's systems, minimize or avoid dehumanizing other users. This essay hopes to change the possibility spaces within Tinder, but also to encourage the examination of those who might copy Tinder's reductive technology for other purposes. Uncritical borrowing and use can be just as dangerous as malicious intent, and this comparison hopes users and developers intending to mimic aspects of Tinder consider the ramifications of copying a system that resembles a dehumanizing tool of oppression.

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