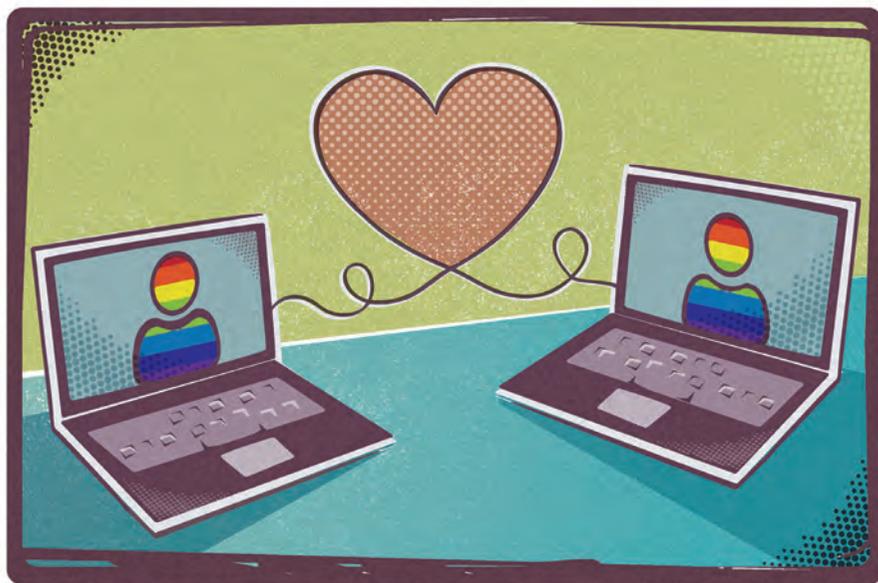


Dates & nuts

Pride, prejudice, and pursuit

How LGBT singles are dating in the digital age

By Stacey Rowe



Several years ago, I was working alongside lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people on the regular as a marketing director for a local nonprofit serving these communities. Like many coworkers, we would occasionally swap stories and commiserate about our wacky dating lives. In fact, the first time I was shown a profile in the Grindr app, I was at a post-work function and became alarmed over its ability to measure the distance in feet to the nearby potential hook-up.

Despite the development of new apps like Growlr, Jack'd, Hornet, Scruff, Daddyhunt, HER, and Wing Ma'am, it's still difficult for LGBT singles to find a suitable match. "I don't even know how people would meet without apps," says Jonathan Jordan, who ended a three-year relationship several months ago. He's ready to date different men but doesn't know where to begin. "I just need someone to get to know my crazy and be okay with it," he laughs and further explains, "I'm either super shy—where I come off as abrasive or bitchy—or too forward—where I come off as clingy. I have learned to balance letting them know I'm interested and backing off." He says he hasn't gone on what he'd call a "real date" in a few years. Aside from meeting someone out or through friends, he indicated OKCupid would probably be the best app for people who actually want to go out to dinner.

Jordan is more commonly known in the

community under his drag name, Kyla Minx. Performing in drag can present a slew of additional dating challenges. "I think people have preconceived notions of already knowing who you are because they see you on stage," he says. Jordan also acknowledges his appearance offstage is more feminine, and he's not shy about it, "I have long hair and paint my nails. So, I look more gender fluid, and someone would have to be comfortable with that." While only thirty-three, he's cognizant that his age and being a person of color might deter prospective men who prefer a certain type. "People look at you differently—whether it's subconscious or not—their demeanor changes," he adds, "I might be too old for someone in their early twenties or too young for someone in their early forties."

"It's a weird balance between being independent and wanting to be loved," says twenty-eight-year-old Scotty Ginett. Also newly single and getting back into the swing of dating, he's been using Tinder to meet people. "There's a lightness to it. I've had some nice chats and local dates planned," he says. While Rochester's LGBT population is higher than the national average, Ginett remarked that LGBT singles still have fewer options than straight people. Like Jordan, he mentions the age issue, but also that distance can be a turn-off for some—even if it's Buffalo or Syracuse. His biggest challenge has been

meeting men who aren't ready to date, "Sometimes a person has a bad breakup and hasn't taken time for himself, and sometimes people aren't ready to be open about their relationships."

For many singles, life is about going out and partying and not growing up. Ginett continues, "There are other ways to build connections and relationships than going out to a bar. You can meet people through volunteering or other activities." Both Ginett and Jordan have noticed more gay relationships tending to be open, and both agree that communication is critical for making such an arrangement work. Ginett is very much a fan of those who are clear about their relationship goals: "If you only want to date, put that in the forefront and go on dates. Have fun. Be safe. Be knowledgeable. But don't flop back and forth."

A woman preferring to remain anonymous humorously describes her experience dating women she met in gay bars during her younger years, "After a few stints, the only thing I learned was how to deal with drama." Wary of people misrepresenting themselves online, but frustrated with limited options to meet other women, she decided to give Match a try. As a new member, she received quite a bit of attention and was flattered when one person wrote her a song after exchanging a couple emails. However, the situation became a little dicey. "That same woman drove two and a half hours and showed up at my place of business without warning." She continues, "I had only talked to her once by phone. It was awkward and scary!"

After a few dates with other women she met online, it became apparent they were not suited for a long-term relationship and were better off as friends. Today, that suits her just fine, and she's optimistic about her current situation. "Not long after I let my subscription expire, circumstances in my life led me to reconnect with a gay friend, and the timing happens to be right. They say timing is everything. We'll see!"

In the end, LGBT singles definitely have unique challenges when it comes to dating and dealing with cultural perspectives about dating, but the desire for companionship and to love and be loved is universal. (S&S)

Stacey Rowe is a freelance writer based in Rochester.

**Names and identifying details have been changed.*

Illustration by Lissa Mathis