# Technocultures of Consent: An Intersectional Lens to Situate Consent-Related Experiences Mediated by Technology

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## Abstract

I use the term *technocultures of consent* to describe the understandings and practices of consent that are influenced, co-produced or expressed by interactions between technology and people. Online dating applications (e.g. Tinder, Lex) are one context where technocultures of consent offers a lens to situate positive and negative consent-related experiences with(in) the online spaces, technology, and broader sociocultural/political context in which they occur. It is important to consider technocultures of consent among gendered and racialized communities to better understand the interplay between identity, technology and interpersonal consent. In this position paper, I discuss preliminary work from a study exploring online dating experiences among the U.S. Arab and Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) diaspora to demonstrate how a technocultures of consent lens can be used to make sense of how identity may interplay with technology to shape interpersonal consent-related beliefs and experiences (positive and negative), as well as contribute to culturally-attuned trauma-informed design.

## Author Keywords

Arab, Southwest Asian and North African Diaspora, Consent, Online Dating, Trauma-Informed, Technocultures of Consent

## Introduction

Technocultures of consent are the understandings and practices of consent that are influenced, co-produced or expressed by interactions between technology and people [1]. Applying a *technocultures of consent* lens considers the interplay between individuals' various identities and social positions, consent-related beliefs and practices, and technology's features when making sense of the positive and negative consent-related experiences mediated by and between technologies and the people that use them. Dating apps have been shown to mediate consent to sexual behaviors and other interpersonal interactions, explicated by individuals' consent-related beliefs and practices [11]. Technocultures of consent for online dating apps are gendered [11, 4] and racialized [3], echoing legal scholarship's finding of the gendered and racialized nature of interpersonal consent processes (e.g. granting consent, seeking consent, judging violations of consent) [6, 5].

It is important to consider technocultures of consent among gendered and racialized communities as doing so will help to better understand the interplay between identity, technology and interpersonal consent. Gender, sexuality and race play critical roles in the racialization of the Arab/SWANA diaspora in the U.S.[9]. As a result, exploring the technocultures of consent that emerge across online dating apps among the U.S. Arab/SWANA diaspora might provide unique insight to the ways that gender, race and other intersecting identities [2] interplay with technologies to shape interpersonal consent-related beliefs and experiences.

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[1] I draw inspiration from Kozinet's definition of technocultures: *"Technocultures are the various identities, practices, values, rituals, hierarchies, and other sources and structures of meanings that are influenced, created by, or expressed through technology consumption"* [8]. I have been intentional to not retain the technological deterministic language by emphasizing the relation 'between' technology *and* people in the production of technocultures *of consent*
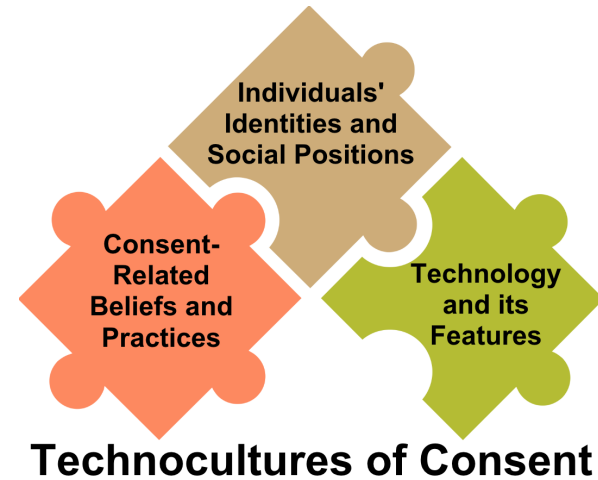


**Figure 1:** Technocultures of Consent considers the interplay between individuals' various identities and social positions, consent-related beliefs and practices, *and* technology and its features to produce the understandings and practices of consent (*technocultures of consent*) involved in individuals' positive and negative consent-related experiences mediated by technology.

Technocultures of consent offers an intersectional [2] lens to situate consent-related experiences mediated by technology within specific sociocultural and sociopolicital contexts, *and* offers one way for trauma-informed design to be more attuned to the myriad experiences and wants of a certain community.

## Methods

Since May 2023, I have been recruiting and working with participants who are self-identified second- and subsequent Arab/SWANA diaspora generations in the U.S for guided reflective writing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews about their online dating experiences, taking a

trauma-informed approach to ensure trustworthiness and transparency, safety and empowerment [10]. For example, participants were consistently reminded of actions taken to protect their privacy in data collection throughout the study phases.

## Early Findings

While this work is still ongoing, I have met several participants sharing personal encounters mediated by dating apps, ranging from positive and affirming conversations around physical intimacy to negative and concerning experiences with coercion and unwanted advances online *and* in-person. Their experiences speak to values central to consensual interpersonal interactions as explored in prior work in CSCW and HCI such as *Agency and Autonomy* [7]; and *Safety and Trust* [4, 1]. Within these conversations about their experiences with people and dating apps, trauma-informed principles [1, 10] such as safety, trust, enablement, and intersectionality are also present.

One primary theme emerging in the data collected is dating apps are imagined as tools by some members among the U.S. Arab and SWANA diaspora to assist with 1) meeting people despite perceived constraints (e.g. inter/intracommunal dynamics, social stigma), 2) seeking out desires beyond what they understand as socially permitted—both within and outside of their communities, and 3) learning how to engage in intimacy (physical, emotional) and communicate wants, needs and boundaries to potential partners. Participants have also demonstrated the ways identity, specifically racialization of Arab and SWANA individuals in the United States, intertwines with gender and sexuality in the context of dating apps to produce reputational concerns for themselves and those who share their identities, shape negative experiences with others encountered through online dating (e.g. race-based harassment), as well as prompt (internalized) feelings of shame and embarrassment due to social stigma.

Within these imagined uses of dating apps as *tools for positive experiences* like meeting, learning and enacting desire, *sites for general concerns* around safety and reputational harm (e.g. harassment, context collapse, on-to-offline harms), *as well as* sources of trauma (anticipated and experienced) through their general usage of online dating apps, technocultures of consent may be used as a lens to parse through the many moving parts culminating into these experiences with online dating apps. For example, a participant expressed concerns about reputational harm given the potential for privacy breeches and nonconsensual screenshots and sharing of their dating app profile with members of their family, explaining: *"Sometimes [dating apps] can feel safe, sometimes it can feel not as safe because like you don't trust...the fact that like somebody could be blackmailed, somebody could be shamed in the community, like somebody's reputation...honor is really important in our communities."* A technocultures of consent lens might explore the ways reputations' valuation among the U.S. Arab and SWANA diaspora *and* one's personal wishes to safeguard their reputation may prompt certain protective behaviors within dating apps' technological affordances. This helps contextualize one's behavior to prevent nonconsensual profile sharing within the technological landscape of dating apps, one's social identity, intracommunity dynamics, and consent-related practices (e.g. setting a filter on a dating app to prevent being seen by those they perceive as a risk for nonconsensual profile sharing).

Principles of trauma-informed design might also be applied to protect one's safety, well-being, and healing while being attuned to inter- and intracommunity dynamics where racialization, gender and sexuality heavily shape individu-

als' experiences mediated by online dating apps. For example, how might the design of dating apps be re-imagined as a tool for learning how to communicate wants, needs and boundaries to others in ways that are trauma-informed to mitigate harms *and* improve individuals' intimate (e.g.physical, emotional) experiences when an individual harbors internalized feelings of shame around physical intimacy? Using a technocultures of consent lens, how can technology and its features be tweaked to inform individuals' consent-related practices around communicating boundaries while being responsive to the experiences of a certain community? I do not offer answers to these questions here, but aim to show how a technocultures of consent lens can inform future work working to prevent harms associated with the absence of consent and encourage consensual, positive experiences in sensitive ways, while also drawing from trauma-informed design and its principles [1, 10].

## Conclusion

Technocultures of consent provides a lens for making sense of understandings and practices of consent in online spaces that culminate from the interplay between individuals' identities and social positions, consent-related beliefs and behaviors, *and* technology and its features. This lens offers an intersectional approach to understanding the experiences individuals have in online spaces with regards to consent and its relation to technology and its users who hold a myriad of identities, and varying experiences with stigmatization and marginalization. By illuminating this relationship, tecnhocultures of consent also contributes an opportunity for trauma-informed design to be attentive to the unique experiences and needs of a community.

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