

## Heteronormative Wet Dreams: D1 Babies as a Biopolitical Project of the Online Dating Economy

Kay Mulholland

*Chase has liked your photo.*

*Match with Chase.*

*Chase: damn girl, you know you'd make some great D1 babies*

*haha, do you play any sports?*

*Chase: baseball, football, track, you?*

*basketball and volleyball*

*Chase: perfect, I'm not looking to pay tuition*

*athletic scholarship all the way*

*Unmatch with Chase?*

Three years ago, when I downloaded the big three (Hinge, Bumble, and Tinder), I began to document the messages I received, storing them in a special album on my phone. At first, I told myself I was just going to share the most horrendous messages with friends. However, as the album expanded, I quickly realized that I was not solely capturing these messages to share with friends, who had their own collections. Instead, I was making sense of a recurring pattern of dehumanization and disgust as writing to myself and my friends became much more effective than engaging in a one-sided dialogue on a dating app.

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In each iteration of this autoethnographic essay, from the disparate screenshots, journal entries, and texts between friends, to my initial performance of this piece on a queer anti-capitalist conference panel, comedy has been a central throughline to coping with the sheer quantity of shitty messages I received. The following autoethnographic essay explores my location within the online dating economy to demonstrate how the American Dream has evolved and manifests through a Heteronormative Wet Dream, which functions through sexist, racist, and classist logics while also reckoning with failures of the American Dream.

### **Keeping the Dream Alive**

The American Dream, an idea that emerged in the 1930s, purports that all Americans are not only equal but have equal access and opportunity for upward social and class mobility. However, the American Dream has always been centered around white middle class Americans. While the American Dream erases class, amongst other structures, it also works to develop a unique American identity that assigns meaning to social mobility narratives. As class becomes invisibilized, the American Dream rationalizes inequality through a neoliberal logic of *individuals* overcoming *individual* failures (Fisher, 1973). In a rhetorical analysis of the American Dream in presidential rhetoric, Fisher (1973) identified two primary myths through which the American Dream functions: the materialistic myth and the moralistic myth. The materialistic myth suggests that “if one employs one’s energies and talents to the fullest, one will reap the rewards of status, wealth, and power” (Fisher, 1973, p. 161).

*if I hadn't tore my ACL, I would have gone pro*

Whereas, the moralistic myth focuses on “the values of tolerance, charity, compassion and true regard for the dignity and worth of each and every individual” (Fisher, 1973, p. 161).

*little boobs deserve love too*

The American Dream requires constant reaffirmation (Winn, 2003). In a U.S. context in which:

- Student loan debt totals \$1.727 trillion (Hanson, 2024)

- The average federal student loan is \$37,088 (Hanson, 2024)
- Female university students were 7-10% more likely to have student loans compared to male students (Avtar et al. 2021)
- Black students were 8-14% more likely to have student loans compared to white students (Avtar et al. 2021)
- Home prices have increased 54% since 2019 (Schual & Learman, 2024)
- 27% of working adults have medical debt of more than \$500 and 15% have medical debt loads of \$2,000 or more (Collins et al, 2023)
- Over half of working-age adults have delayed or skipped healthcare due to financial barriers (Collins et al, 2023)

the American Dream has had to evolve to remain a living fiction. One of these adaptations I coin the Heteronormative Wet Dream, which is not specific to online dating, but becomes hypervisible in a context that generates explicit conversations regarding romantic and sexual partnership. Just as the American Dream focuses on upward mobility and opportunities that can be passed down through generations, the Heteronormative Wet Dream reaffirms the core myths of the American Dream while also providing implicit commentary on the very economic barriers the American Dream compels individuals to overcome.

*let's make some DI babies*  
*You are tall.*

*how tall?*

*do you play sports... because we could make great DI babies*

*DI*  
*babbieesss*

*our kids would def be DI*  
*Dammnnn, legggss*

*I'm looking for my kids to go DI, lbu?*  
*\*emoji, emoji, emoji\**

*Aren't you curious what our babies would look like?*  
*legs and arms???*

*traps \*football emoji\**

*You ready to go to some little league games?  
thighs  
Has anyone ever told you you'd make D1 babies?*

While utterly dehumanizing, the desire to have D1 babies must be understood as an attempt to keep the American Dream alive, a coping response to capitalist crisis and failure to experience the dream themselves. Thus, the Heteronormative Wet Dream focuses on the opportunities provided to *hypothetical* offspring. In keeping children suspended in the future, the dream cannot die as it cannot be enacted. The Heteronormative Wet Dream extends the materialistic myth of overcoming barriers, particularly related to debt and accessing education as well as the promise of mobility tied to a college degree.

In pursuing matches with the best probability of creating D1 babies (read: tall, athletic women), these messages operate through heteronormative assumptions of monogamous, heterosexual relationships that result in childbearing. These proposed “genetic interventions” reinforce sexist and racist logics and cannot be separated from the violent legacies to which genetic purity, choice, and hierarchies exist. The Heteronormative Wet Dream is neoliberal, it is a dream that cannot truly be shared. Capitalism is built upon racism, a mutually *inclusive* system.

In order to understand the Heteronormative Wet Dream as an extension of the American Dream, which erases structure, I explore how discourses that center the potential for child athletes hypervisibilize a biopolitical project that while engaged by individuals is sustained systemically through the commodification of breeding potential in online dating.

### **Online Dating as Economy**

*November 20xx*

*I'm sitting next to my boyfriend of three months at a bar, a man I met on the internet. We reminisce on what a great match we are and everything that we've done these past 90 days when he sets down his drink and says "You know, when I first saw you, you were much taller than I imagined." At first, it's funny because he was shorter than I thought he'd be, but my heart catches on to what is about to happen. He takes my silence as an invitation, "Yeah, like, I couldn't help but think how tall our kids would be... definitely D1."*

FUCK. *My boyfriend is a man from the internet, obviously I already knew this, but no, he is talking to me as a man from the internet and suddenly, it hurts so much more. The pain in my chest starts to spread as I realize... he didn't love me... and it's not because we'd only been dating 90 days, but because he loved what my body could give him: sex and tall babies. But, no, I put 90 days into this, it'll be fine. I can make him love me more than what I could give him. Maybe I can make him love me enough to ask me if I want children.*

*Eventually, I swipe left on our relationship. The entire time he loves the future my body could make for him. He doesn't love me, I can't even say that he loves my body in its current condition, no, he loves what I can make and what those DI babies can do for him. I am not faultless either because I spend every day trying to get him to fall out of love with the idea of 2.5 children, a dog, and a house in the suburbs. I have worked so hard to make this man love me beyond my thighs and my jumpshot and I am tired.*

Online dating has quickly ascended as one of the most common ways to meet a romantic partner (Rosenfeld et al., 2019), and is “fundamentally different” from traditional dating across areas of access, communication, and matching (Finkle et al., 2012). Online dating offers a higher degree of access to potential partners by increasing exposure to other daters as well as the ability to assess information prior to meeting and investing in communication. Increased access not only refers to expanding geographic reach to connect with people in different locations but to people with different lifestyles.

*91 people liked you! Act fast to see if you're a match!*

Rosen et al. (2008) found that online daters tended to value communication style and attractiveness more than traditional daters, who valued items such as education and personality more. As contact is initiated online, communication style is a significant predictor of whether someone will schedule an in-person date. Finkle et al. (2012) note “the ways online dating sites typically implement the services of access, communication, and matching do not always improve romantic outcomes; indeed, they sometimes undermine such outcomes” (p. 3).

#509B

[seemingly AI generated generic white man]

*Age: 35*

*Height: 6'1*

*Dating Intentions: Still figuring it out*  
*Family Plans: Want Children*

*Gym date?*

While this autoethnographic collage attends to experiences of online dating, the biopolitical project that can be traced across DI discourses, the ideologies that circulate the online economy, continue that which was established in traditional dating but provides a material form (e.g. screenshotted messages on a dating app) to these beliefs. Thus, just as Heteronormative Wet Dreams are an extension of the American Dream, the online dating economy makes the dating ideologies present in traditional dating visible.

### **The Biopolitical Heteronormative Imperative**

*November 20xx [+ 3 years]*

*Kay: Do you think it's bad if I match with people who have "want children" in their bio?*

*Christina: You have "don't want children" in your bio, right?*

*Kay: Yea*

*Christina: Hmm, I think it's fine, but it could be an issue down the road.*

*Kay: I just don't get it. Like did they not read my bio? Or do they actually not care about having kids?*

*Christina: Maybe they just think that's what girls want to hear*

*Kay: I just don't want to have to explain myself (again) or have him try to change my mind (again)*

Although most online dating platforms allow users to describe their gender, sexuality, relationship goals, and desire to have children, the heteronormative imperative that pervades traditional dating is sustained in the online dating economy. Heteronormativity assumes individuals will (1) identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, (2) adhere to gender roles, (3) be attracted to and (4) have a monogamous relationship with a person who is the opposite of their assigned sex at birth, which is (5) institutionally and socially validated via marriage and (6) results in procreation. Thus, when users do not make their preferences visible, heteronormativity becomes the default. YET, even when these

preferences are made visible, heteronormativity labors to bring queer bodies back into a heteronormative narrative.

Heteronormativity functions as a biopolitical institution as “sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet. And so it is a matter for discipline, but also a matter for regularization” (Foucault, 2003, pp. 251-252). We (me and the men of the internet) labor in different ways within the online dating economy. The labor of bearing children, hypothetical or otherwise, has historically been excluded from being considered labor, as it is naturalized under capitalist logics (Mies, 2014). Regulating sexuality becomes the labor of the individual who seeks a breeder. They (the generalized man of the internet) labor to keep the Heteronormative Wet Dream alive,

*which cannot be too much work as it has been copied and pasted for the past century,*

by assigning value to bodies that are not yet in existence. The online dating economy reinforces capitalism through the reaffirmation of the American Dream that hails bodies back into a heteronormative narrative. However, it is not simply through the erasure of queerness and the desire not to have children but the erasure of structures that designate certain bodies as better breeders than others.

*Height + hips = baby (athlete) maker.*

It is not simply that my height and muscles can provide a healthy baby, it is the design for a future linebacker. In this way, my hypothetical D1 athletes are always deemed male as “humanness is identified with maleness” (Mies, 2014, p. 52). It is not just that internet men want tall babies, they want tall male babies to live out their collegiate sport dreams.

*Dear Men in my DMs,*

*I must say, I regret swiping left, cha cha sliding past you so fast that I never got the opportunity to tell you how fucking horrible your messages, the sum of them, made me feel. My body was made to do more than carry the weight of your Dreams. White-picket-fencing in my uterus with your Heteronormative Wet Dream of building your own basketball team and having a child who can throw a ball and win state championships will not make your daddy proud. My uterus is not a tool for you to achieve the dreams your daddy placed on*

you. Your request for me to see the life you have so carefully constructed around a seventies sitcom demands labor.

I do not want children. I do not want them with you. And I do not think I want them at all. My body can do more than make a first string athlete. I am tired of trying to tell men that by placing value on the length of my legs, the circumference of my thighs, the height of my traps, and the distance between my fingertips, they make me feel so fucking worthless. That I feel like they love the idea of DI babies more than me. I don't hate my hypothetical children but I hate the way they make me invisible.

So to answer your question, yes, I have heard that I'd make great DI babies. I have labored to envision lives with men who wanted to get to know me, to put a ring on it, and fuck me, all so he wouldn't have to pay his children's college tuition.

After all, with these shoulders, these thighs, there's no way our children wouldn't be getting a full ride.

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