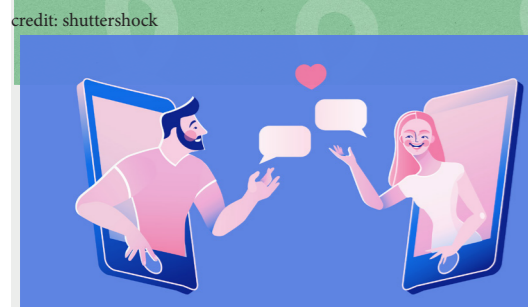


UnHinged Dating in the time of a Pandemic

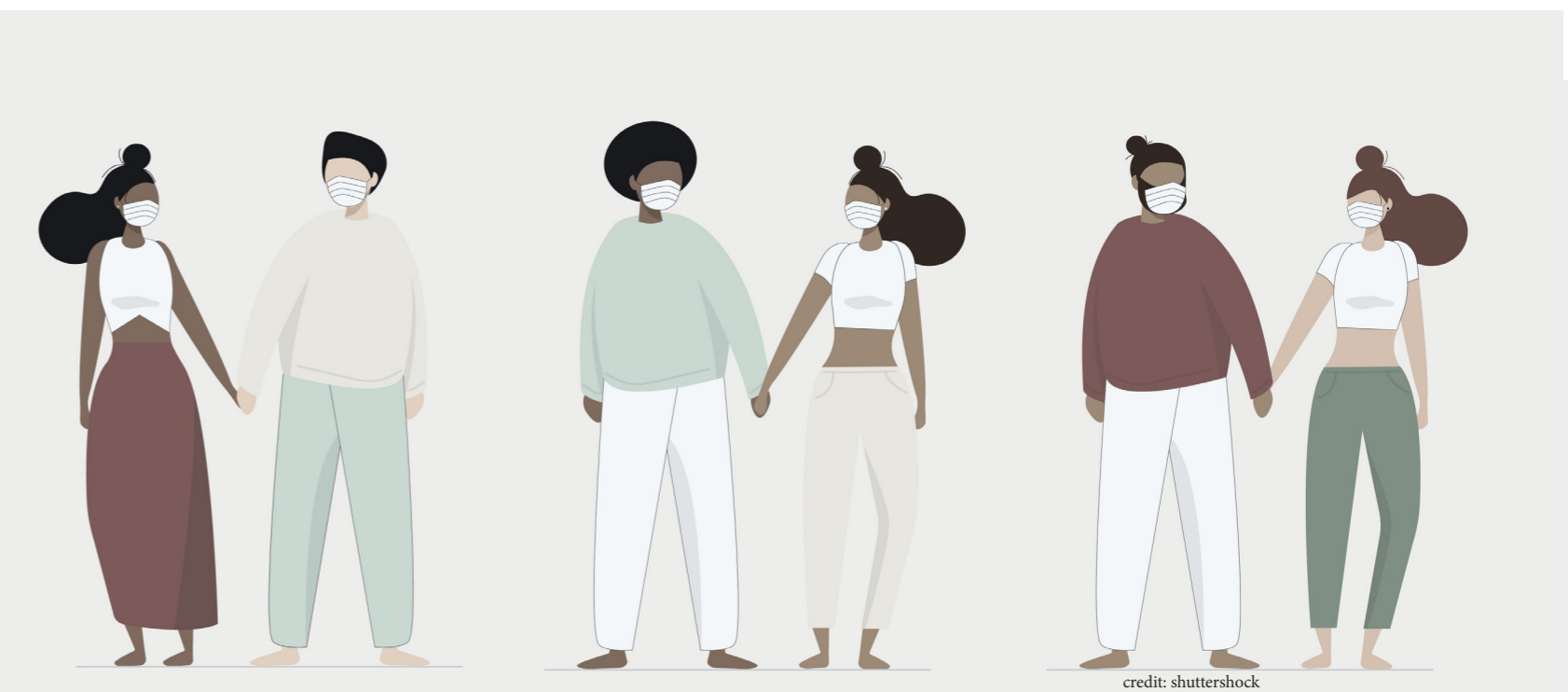
"He ghosts me, UNMATCHES me on hinge, and when I see his profile come up again in my swipes he's changed his entire profile"



After weeks of equally fervent and frustrating messaging over Hinge, 22-year-old Sarina decided to battle against her COVID-induced anxieties and invite her Hinge eligible bachelor on a date at the end of last June. The was one slight problem however: their first date had to be chaperoned by her mother in the comfort of her family home. As a self-proclaimed "boss of the dating game", naturally having her mother and aging dog interrogating her potential suitor over her dining room table was far from an ideal first date scenario; "my uncle is vulnerable and he was in my support bubble at the time" Sarina told me "and [her dates] flat had already had Coronavirus, so

I said look, as you've had Coronavirus you should come down to me, which he did, so he had to meet my mom on the first day, which I would never ever want to happen". Akin to the revered words of Chris Morris in Brass Eye, "this is the one thing we didn't want to happen", so why then was Sarina's valiant decision so necessary? Well ever since Boris Johnson announced the first coronavirus lockdown on March 23rd 2020, every waking moment has been like reading an a-level history book written in the year 2130. The COVID restrictions bestowed upon the nation against IRL social interactions has precipitated a collective anxiety combined with yearning for a time when someone was able to have a day

they could aptly describe as "precedented". "normally I would go on like four dates before doing anything like going back to the house" Sarina told me, however consequently to COVID restrictions making the prospect of meeting anyone so rare, many young people like Sarina have been forced to make decisions hitherto irrational in the name of love/social intimacy/a shag. Due to fears of passing COVID to her family, Sarina "ended up moving in with him for a couple of weeks" after their second date. This abrupt bypass of traditional dating-stage etiquette turned out to be a calamitous decision: she told me how they "settled into the routine" of overfamiliarity and ungrounded comfortability wherein



"As cheesy as it sounds, maybe it was meant to be"

the incompatibility of the couple became more pertinent with each day being in such isolated close-quarters together.

The situation ultimately concluded with Sarina "resenting him...because it got too comfortable too quickly". Like many others, the yearning for someone to help mitigate pandemic loneliness pressured her to make decisions she previously would have scorned at with someone she moved too quickly with to actually get to know. If, however, there is one winner coming out of this affair it is Hinge. According to Buisness Insider, MatchGroup, a company that owns and operates 45 popular online dating services including Hinge and Tinder, had an average revenue per user (ARPU) that surprisingly surpassed pre-coronavirus levels, with Hinge global downloads increasing 2.2mm from the 1st Half to 2019 to 1H of 2020.

Likewise to Sarina, Tife, 22, discovered that Hinge's pandemic luck fails to necessarily trickle down to its userbase. As a black woman and Londoner, even before the pandemic Tife was accustomed to navigating the perilous waters of the systemically racist dating world. After having exhausted the ostensibly eligible Tinder connections through the initial lockdown, Tife decided to see what Hinge had to offer. Spoiler: all it had to offer was a "miserable experience of dating".

While she thought she had found her ideal "cuffing partner" on Hinge at the end of lockdown 1, Tife was in for a shock when, af-

ter 2 "really good" dates, after a third being proposed by him and replied to by Tife, he goes completely AWOL. "He ghosts me" she said, "UNMATCHES me on hinge, and when I see his profile come up again in my swipes he's changed his entire profile from what it was when we first met, like job, age, height, where he lives, everything".

"I have never felt more violated" she told me, and unfortunately malicious ghosting such as this is a prevalent feature of modern dating. According to a BankMyCell survey 82% of women have experienced some form of ghosting on dating apps, and with the pandemic making it far easier to quietly never see someone again, this emotionally abusive technique seems to only be growing more ubiquitous.

The dating apps world is not all doom and gloom however; many who have utilised the full paying extent of the apps, such as Michal, 23, have found that distance can really make the heart grow fonder. Michal created a tinder profile at the start of pandemic back in April due to lockdown "making it difficult to meet people and socialise". While he decided to go all out and purchase Tinder Gold, Michal told me how he "was not expecting to go on dates and find "love"" and merely wanted to suppress lockdown-induced ennui by conversing with people globally. However Michal lucked out when he matched with a girl from Poland who he not only "connected strongly with", but moreover discovered that

she lived in the same hometown as him. It has been a couple months since they matched and they have since made plans to meet; as Michal told me, "the only thing keeping us apart is the pandemic and closed borders".

Michal has always planned on moving back to his hometown Warsaw, so once he is able, he intends on moving back to start his career in journalism; fortunately for him his Tinder beau will be there waiting for him. "As cheesy as it sounds, maybe it was meant to be" Michal said, "and tinder can be a good place love". If this Black Mirror meets Jane Eyre story fails to reignite a belief in the transcendental power of true love then I have no idea what will.

COVID's blitz attack on physical social interaction has created a vacuum for social twenty-somethings that only the dating apps could solve. While the apps are far from perfect, as Michals' story proves, there can be love found in a hopeless socially-distant place.

