

Haunted by Tinder

Kira is a young professional who has recently downloaded a dating app, Tinder, hoping to find a romantic partner. In the app, Kira is presented with a seemingly endless number of interesting women. Each profile consists of a few pictures and a short bio. When a profile pops up Kira can either “like” it or “pass” it. A “like” indicates that she is interested in the profile and a “pass” indicates that she is not. If two people “like” each other’s profiles they are both notified and set up in a private chat.

Kira enjoys the app and gets to know various women through light, silly chat conversations. Some pique her interest while others fade away naturally. One particularly good match is with Audrey, a visual arts enthusiast and an avid hiker. The two women really hit it off and after a few days of messaging agree to meet for a date at Smelly Cat, the local coffee shop.

After only a few sips of her coffee, Kira realizes that she is not as interested in Audrey as she initially thought. To Kira, Audrey is a little dull, rambles on about unimportant things, and can’t seem to stay off her phone. After what feels like days, the date ends with a brief “Nice to meet you! Let’s be in touch.” The two go their separate ways.

Kira’s roommate, Cam, is excited to hear about the meet-up. “Audrey seems kind and intelligent, but I didn’t feel anything romantic between us,” explains Kira. “I was bored the *entire* time.” As they are talking, they hear a “ping” from across the room. It’s a message from Audrey. “That was a fantastic date!” Audrey writes, “I feel like we instantly clicked. Can’t wait to meet up again sometime soon!” The roommates both grimace.

“You should totally just ghost her,” Cam suggests. “What do you mean?” Kira asks. “It’s when you cut off all contact without having to explain,” he elaborates. “It’s the perfect way to send a message without actually saying anything or making things complicated.” Kira ponders this option. “I don’t know... that’s a pretty hard cold shoulder.” “No, it happens all the time on dating apps!” Cam urges. “You see a bunch of pictures, share a few lines of text, maybe meet up for a couple of hours or dates, and then move on. You’re still basically strangers. You don’t owe each other anything. Plus, it’s a clean break. No confrontation, no problem.” Kira pauses, sighs, and puts down her phone, effectively ghosting Audrey.

A couple weeks pass and Kira continues to talk to other women on Tinder. Suddenly, she hears a stream of “pings” and opens her phone to a slew of angry messages from Audrey. “I thought you were a nice person but it’s pretty rude to meet someone and then act like they don’t exist! I’m a real person, you know! More than a few pictures on a screen! Plus, it doesn’t take much to send a quick ‘sorry - not interested’ message... Ghosting is pretty cowardly.”

Kira turns to Cam. “I feel like such a jerk. Here’s this nice girl and I’m acting like she’s nothing, all because it’s over an app rather than in person.” “No, no, no,” Cam says, “she’s just being dramatic. Plus, she’ll find another match in no time. There are so many options on Tinder in this city. Don’t worry about it!” Kira shrugs. Cam presses on, “Now, tell me about your other match, Faye. When are you two meeting up?!”

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What values are at play when determining how we should interact with people we meet through online dating platforms? Are these values different from those at play when determining how we should interact with people we meet in other settings?
2. When, if ever, is ghosting someone morally acceptable? Does the morality of ghosting change once you’ve met someone in person? What about if you’ve met the person multiple times?
3. Was Kira justified in feeling “like a jerk” for ghosting Audrey? Why or why not? If it depends, what does it depend on?

