

# THE SHITTY NITTY GRITTY COMMITTEE



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I did it. I joined Tinder after Jess convinced me it would help with my self-esteem, but I think it was a gamble given my issues with what I can only describe as "peacocking" to my therapist. He can't offer a more appropriate term for what is essentially taking selfies because he never does. He just repeats what I say in a sentence posed as a question like, "what's wrong with 'peacocking'?" Sometimes, but rarely, he follows these with a statement: "we all just want to be loved."

I figure he's doing some kind of mirroring thing to get me to trust him, which I guess I do by now because I'm crying—like, sobbing—pretty much as soon I sit down, or thereabouts, over a thing I didn't even know bothered me that much, but I guess being estranged from your family is a big deal to some people. It took me ages to set up the Tinder account because I've never had a Facebook except for the one Gian made me do about seven years ago in Sydney. I was hungover and vulnerable after a forgotten night out on Duty Free Jagermeister and diazepam from the developing world, and it lasted about a week.

I had to search for the activation email from 2009 in my old vagina66 Hotmail address because I couldn't remember which fake name I used—some kind of celebrity. I found it eventually, but I couldn't reactivate the account because Facebook didn't recognise the address anymore. I imagine it was deleted when Lani Billard, the now adult child actor from Canada, realised she was missing out on friend requests from a fan called "Max" and a person called "Paula from Saturday" who were hoping the account was hers. It wasn't.

I guess I had that Facebook account because my best friend Claudia and I were in our "loving childhood TV shows as ironic gesture" phase in Perth where all we'd watch were DVD box sets of *Blossom* and *House Party*, and low-res YouTube



videos of *Ready or Not* where Lani Billard found her fame. It was a Disney production featuring a Toronto-based preteen odd couple where Lani was a tomboy called "Busy" and her friend Amanda was a priss who was jealous because Busy got her period first. Claudia and I had basically the same dynamic before she moved to New York, except I think she was menstruating before me. It's a friendship that succeeded a 20-plus year one with Michael that was a more *Will & Grace* arrangement, with the same kind of 90s fag hag misogyny, except Grace wasn't secretly gay.

I'm thinking now though that the self-esteem boosting quality of Tinder only applies to people who like to pose for photos (i.e. "peacock") and really engage with the process. I try it once, see three people I know and pick about five out of a hundred then feel affirmed that Tinder doesn't work for me because I don't find a match. Fuck it. Two of those people I recognise are lesbians as far as I can tell, but the other one is this pretty feminist writer I know and figured was straight and secretly still kind of do, but who am I to judge? She lists her job title in the Tinder description, which I think is weird and tell Aimee on WhatsApp who responds with "swipe right!"

I send an iMessage to Jess saying I hate people who post travel photos, re my experience of Tinder, and she says to send screen caps, but I say no because it's mean but then there are too many good ones, so I send her a photo of a girl dressed as a clown with a large cone hat and another one of a hairstylist posing sexily behind some diamond fencing. I'm trying really hard to be like "Tinder is a fun thing to take lightly rather than freaking out and feeling exposed and embarrassed," but it's not working. I switch off "Discover" and tell Jess that I'm going to call my next piece of writing—as in, this one—"Too Much Choice" and talk about using Tinder

for a day, which is what I usually do when I feel like something was a waste of time.

Obviously this one isn't called "Too Much Choice". There were other options, including "Pick n Mix", "Dilly Dally" and "Fuck Freedom". But the first two feel dumb and too literal and the last one makes it sound like I'm becoming some kind of fascist, which sometimes I think that maybe I am because these days I'm all about easy answers to complex questions like Donald Trump or TED Talks.

"The Shitty Nitty Gritty Committee" doesn't really mean anything in relation to the theme of "lifestyles", except that I heard it on an episode of *Transparent* as a clever reference to cult lesbian film *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*. Tig Notaro's character sets up the "Nitty Gritty Committee" (I added the "Shitty") at the primary school that Sarah Pfefferman sends her kid to. Sarah later calls it the "Itty Bitty Titty Committee" to belittle Tig at her ex-husband's house when she's being a crazy divorcee who's an almost pathologically selfish mother of two from a super queer kind of nasty rich family who are weirdly close despite how horrible they are to each other. *Transparent* does nothing to mitigate the false perception that LGBTQ lifestyles are a privilege for those with money and white identities and really only an option for Californians. But I like that there are so many low-key LA and New York queers I know on it at the same time as being fully aware that it's only a matter of time before my ex turns up and ruins LGBT[V] for me forever.

One girl on Tinder lists "Google" as her description. I don't know the context exactly, but I can only assume she's working there. Swipe left. I'd rather play Words with Friends with Claudia like it's 2010 but we've got three games going and she hasn't moved on any yet, so I'm randomly playing with someone called Ewelina47 who isn't very challenging





but maybe exactly the ego boost I need. I'm about 100 points up and she's used words like "MAT", "ED" and "DER" but it's less boring than aimlessly swiping across iPhone apps instead. Twitter. Instagram. Gmail. Twitter. Instagram. Gmail. Sometimes I accidentally swipe too far to the personalised Sky News section where the curated headlines are all like, "Trump: 'Maniac' Kim Jong-Un Deserves Credit", "Istanbul Bomb Blast Caught On Tourist's Camera" and "CBB's Angie finds out David is dead, all hell breaks loose". The last one is followed by a slideshow of Twitter reactions to sad loon Angie Bowie talking on camera about her pop star ex-husband dying of cancer in the Big Brother diary room.

"@rhianmarie You couldn't write this 🤔👨 #CBB"

I joined Tinder on my fourth hand-me-down iPhone, a 5c, after having the better 5. Corinna told me not to lose that one, but it's snatched from my hand by a boy in Hackney while I'm walking home from the station and DM-ing Cristine on Instagram complaining "I'm depressed." I run after him until I pull a muscle and use the Wi-Fi of a couple from Vienna smoking on their porch who see me so I can Find My iPhone with my MacBook Pro Retina. They give me whiskey and a charger in the lounge room where they each have an iMac. They must work in media too.

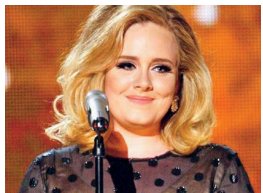
My bike tyre's flat and the nearest Police Station is too far because the closer one's closed, so I file a crime report online listening to a recording of a cover of Celine Dion's "Alone" by some woman and a symphony orchestra in Vilnius. Katie recorded it for me because she got free tickets from her Airbnb host, and I wouldn't say I'm a fan but an admirer that's in awe of Queen Celine as a diversified brand. The performance apparently also included Adele covers, which feels a little un-

seemly but it makes sense in terms of Adele and Celine Dion's shared ability to express an apparently universal emotional state endlessly through a lifetime's worth of recordings that can only be described as a single unending love song. Although Celine deals more in love, with some kind of future while Adele is just stuck in the past.

Filling out the crime report seems pretty pointless to me but I do it anyway, and in the "Incident Details" they ask me to describe the suspect without specifically asking me their race—like these things usually do—so I don't even get the privilege of being affronted by that fact. Instead I offer it unprompted in the same way that I write "GAY" in an application where giving an answer on "sexual orientation" is optional because I figure it might win me diversity points, but I don't think that's even how it works and I regret it.

I'm telling Ulijona this while we're walking around Hackney being sad about nothing in particular, and I'm taking photos of things I think are funny like shampoo bottle label art and a Dita Von Teese multimedia assemblage made mostly of rubber gloves in a charity shop. I have to save the photos as #latergrams for when I have the Wi-Fi because I haven't unlocked my iPhone 5c for the network and the data I'm still paying for to work. We spend some time looking at acrylic paints, one pound tracksuit pants and beanies with huge emojis on them at a store called "Risky" before going to McDonald's. I feel cheated because I order a double cheeseburger but am given a single, and the free Wi-Fi won't work on my phone.

At first I don't feel so traumatised about having my iPhone snatched, although I call it getting mugged because it sounds more interesting and worries people, including Hannah whom I don't really know that well but seems anxious about it when we DM on Twitter, and at first I feel confused but then I tear



up and really want to talk to my therapist. He's cancelled today, but I don't find out till I get to the clinic because they tried to call, but I got mugged and lost my iPhone.

Although my personal Facebook is new and for the purposes of Tinder-ing only, I have a work one that I use and get my news from the "Trending" box. I sometimes get confused between the sponsored ads for how a couple can help you make a lot of money in like a week and a video post of a Syrian boy asking his uncle for food. My empathy reflex catapults me straight to a *how you can help* page, but it doesn't include electronic transfer donations, so I drink more wine and block it out.

It occurs to me that competing with a faceless selection of characters with no context, Ewelina47, on Words With Friends is like a realisation of my childhood fear that my life is a stage and the rest of the people just actors. This predates *The Truman Show*, FYI, and the actors are granted no subjectivity outside of my own, unlike Jim Carrey's. My therapist doesn't disagree that's basically existence, which really sucks to know but is potentially an antidote to the sense of aloneness one develops growing up half hidden in a homophobic household. That's essentially why I'm crying—like, sobbing—in front of my therapist, which makes me more upset because I know it's the last time we'll speak.

