

---

**2026 REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM NICEAF, AN ANTI-STIGMA PROJECT FROM  
BUILDING HEALTHY ONLINE COMMUNITIES**

---

**NICEAF.ORG**

# **STICKY SITUATIONS**

**PREVENTING + RESPONDING TO  
DIFFICULT MOMENTS ON DATING APPS**

---



- ◉ **BACKGROUND** 3
- ◉ **PARTICIPANT DETAILS** 5
- ◉ **KEY THEMES + FEATURES** 9
  - SCAMS..... 11
  - SAFETY..... 16
  - AUTHENTICITY + INTUITION..... 26
  - SEXUAL HEALTH..... 33
  - A.I. USE CASES..... 36
- ◉ **WRAP UP** 38
- ◉ **APPENDIX** 40



# CONTENTS



# STICKY SITUATIONS HAPPEN WHEN DATING + HOOKING UP—WHAT MATTERS IS HOW WE HANDLE THEM.

NiceAF is a project of Building Healthy Online Communities (BHOC) dedicated to fighting stigma on dating apps. In 2025, we focused on dating’s difficult moments – how we can prevent them and what to do when they occur. From bots and scams to personal safety and navigating sexual health concerns, there are a lot of challenges that apps can address to improve user experience.

- **WHAT ARE THE MOST CONCERNING NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES DATING APP USERS FACE?**
- **WHAT COULD DATING APPS DO TO PREVENT THESE EXPERIENCES?**
- **WHAT ARE DEALBREAKERS THAT WOULD CHANGE HOW—OR IF—PEOPLE USE DATING APPS?**



# METHODOLOGY

Between May and November 2025, BHOC developed a survey and focus group to assess dating app users’ experiences on the apps. We then worked with our dating app and public health partners to recruit 870 dating app users from across the U.S. to take a survey. Based on survey feedback, the BHOC team developed a focus group, which 300 additional dating app users attended. Participants represented a range of identities and used a variety of different dating apps.

The following report summarizes key findings, proposed new features, and recommendations to empower app owners to prevent and respond to harm when it occurs on their platforms.

**1,168**

**DATING APP USERS GAVE FEEDBACK ON SAFETY + HEALTH RELATED FEATURES**

**9**

**DATING APPS JOINED FORCES TO MAKE CHANGES**



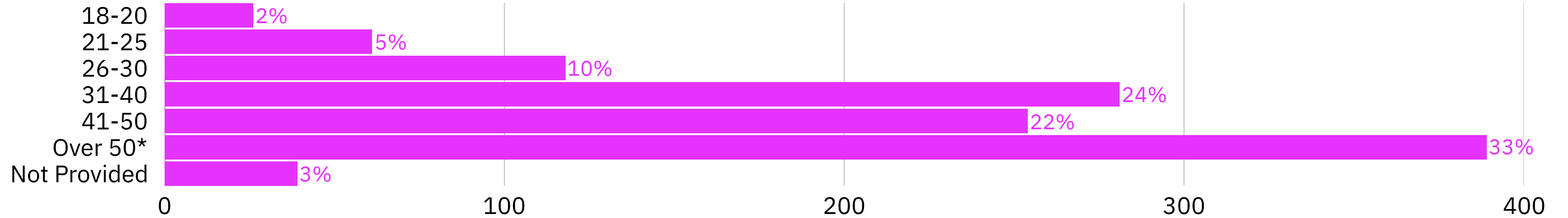
## THE DATING APP USERS WE SPOKE TO WERE...

- **61%** QUEER MEN
- **40%** PEOPLE OF COLOR
- **19%** TRANS + NON-BINARY PEOPLE



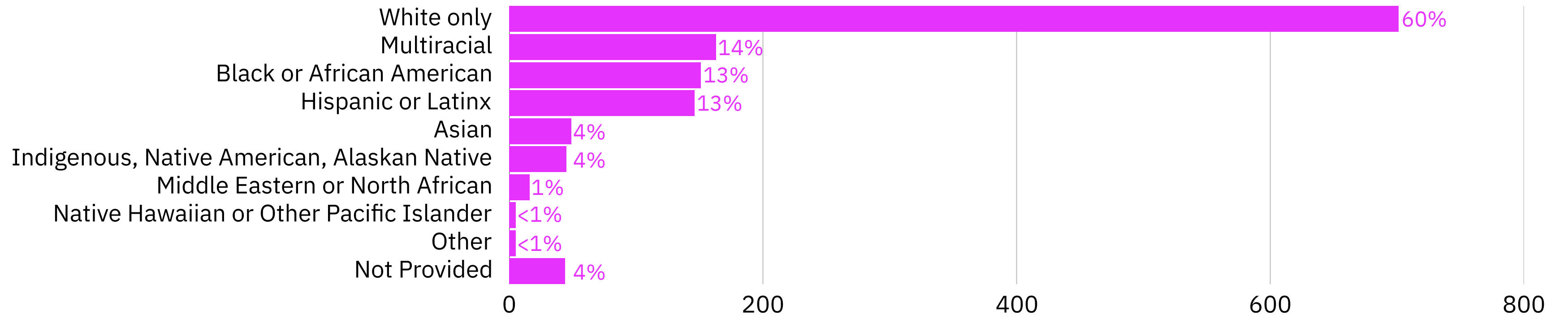


## AGE



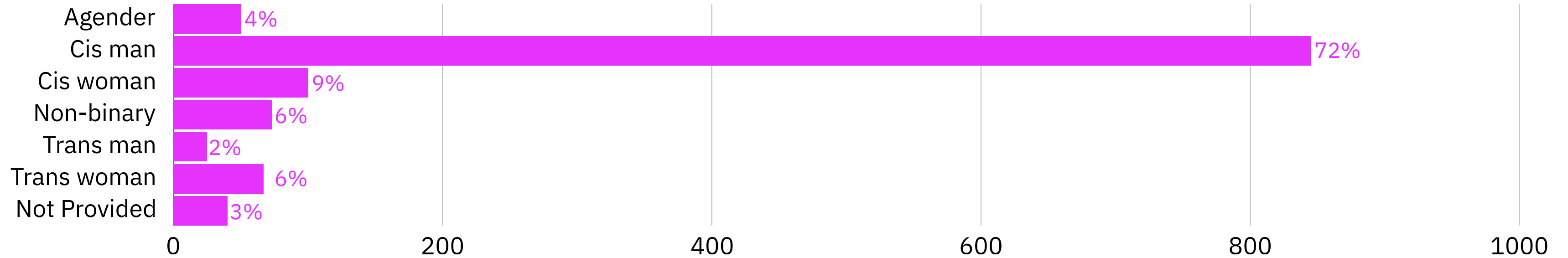
*\*People over 50 were overrepresented in the survey (42%), not in the focus group (9%)*

## RACE + ETHNICITY

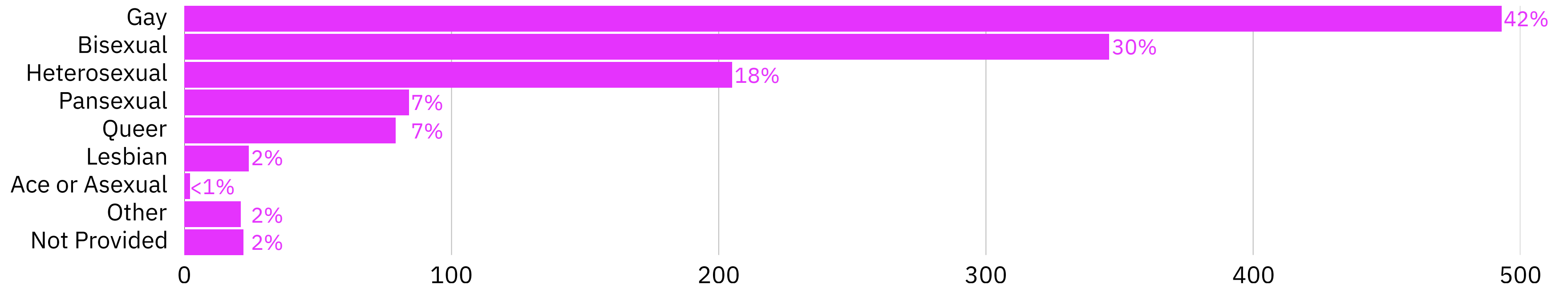




## GENDER



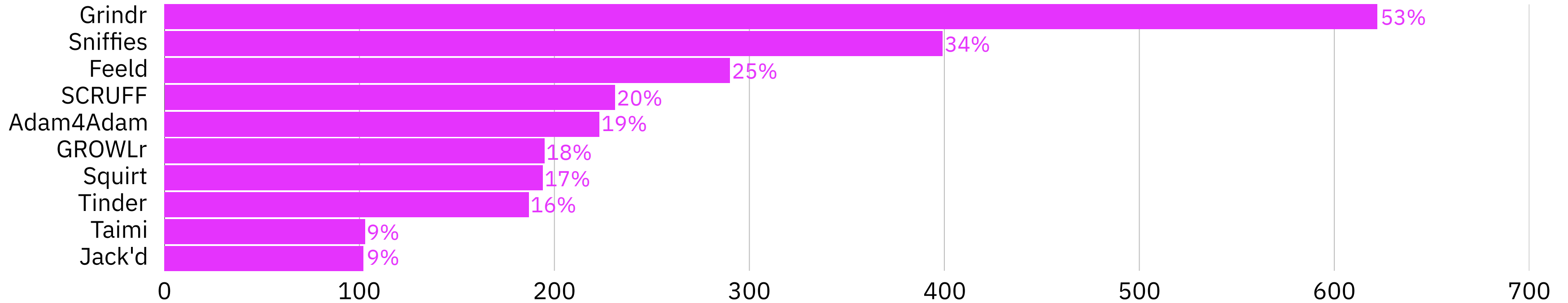
## SEXUAL ORIENTATION\*



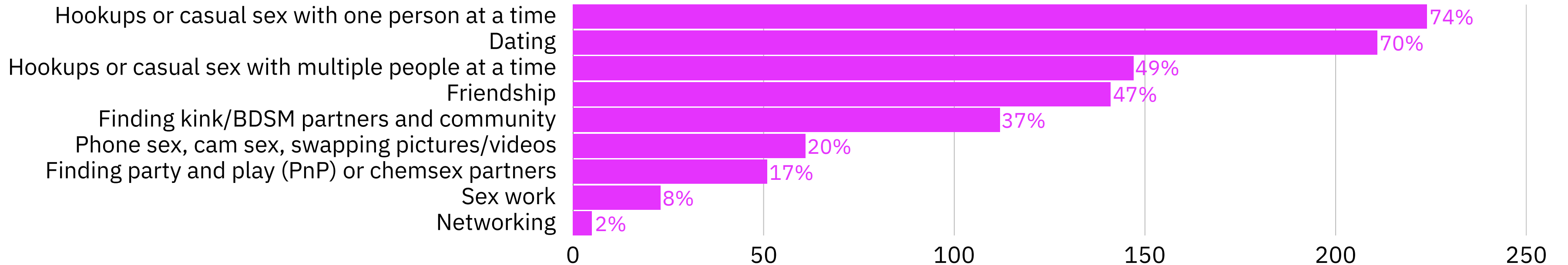
\*Multiselect not possible in focus group



# WHAT APPS DO YOU USE AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH? TOP 10



# WHY ARE YOU ON THE APPS?\*





## USERS PRIORITIZED THEIR BIGGEST CONCERNS ON THE APPS.

**BOTS + FAKE PROFILES HAVE AN OVERWHELMING PRESENCE**

**APPS FAIL TO ADEQUATELY RESPOND TO HARM**

**USERS FACE VIOLENCE + HARASSMENT—PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, FINANCIAL**

**USERS STRUGGLE TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO AUTHENTICITY + CONNECTION**

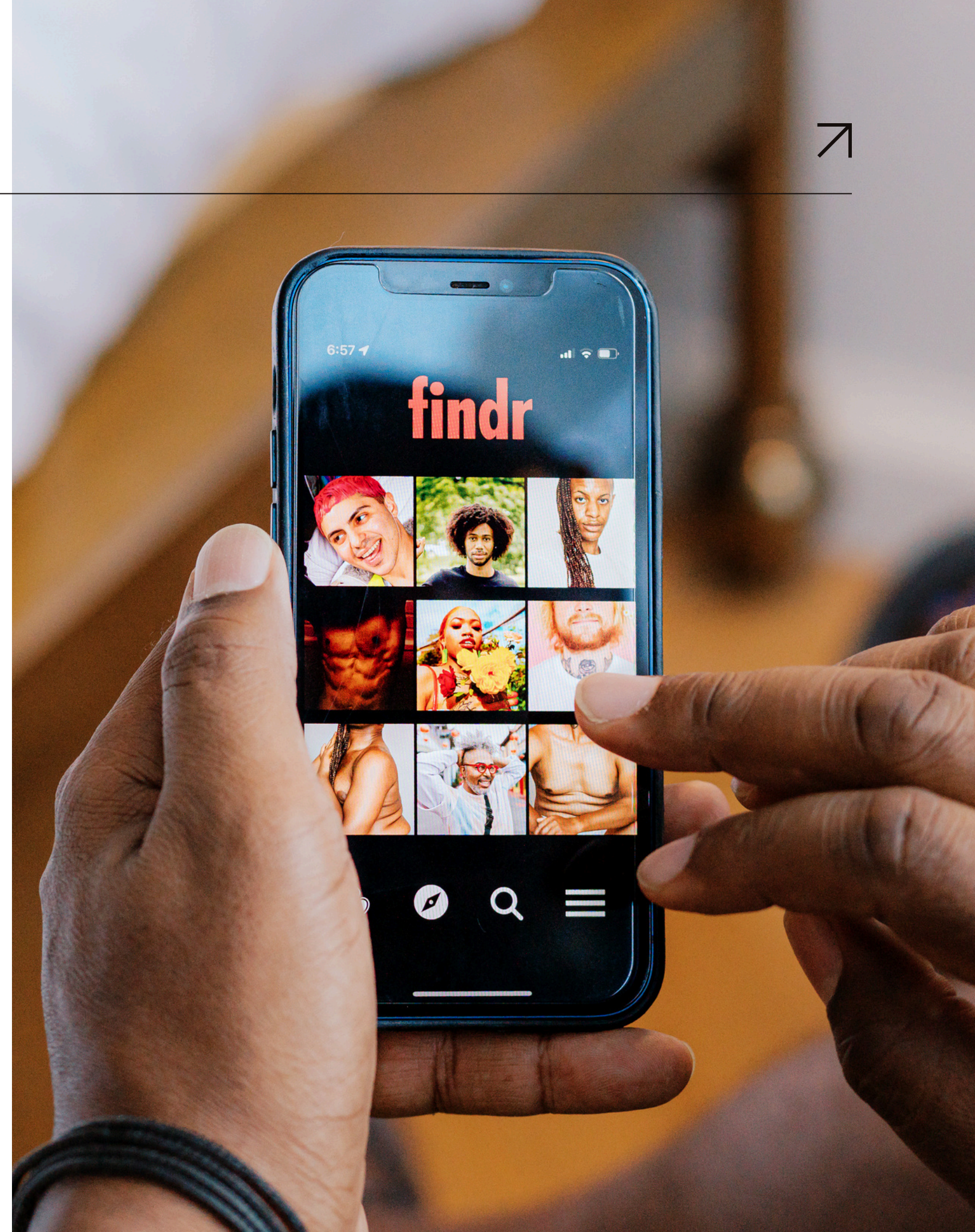
**ESSENTIAL SAFETY FEATURES ARE MISSING OR BEHIND A PAYWALL**

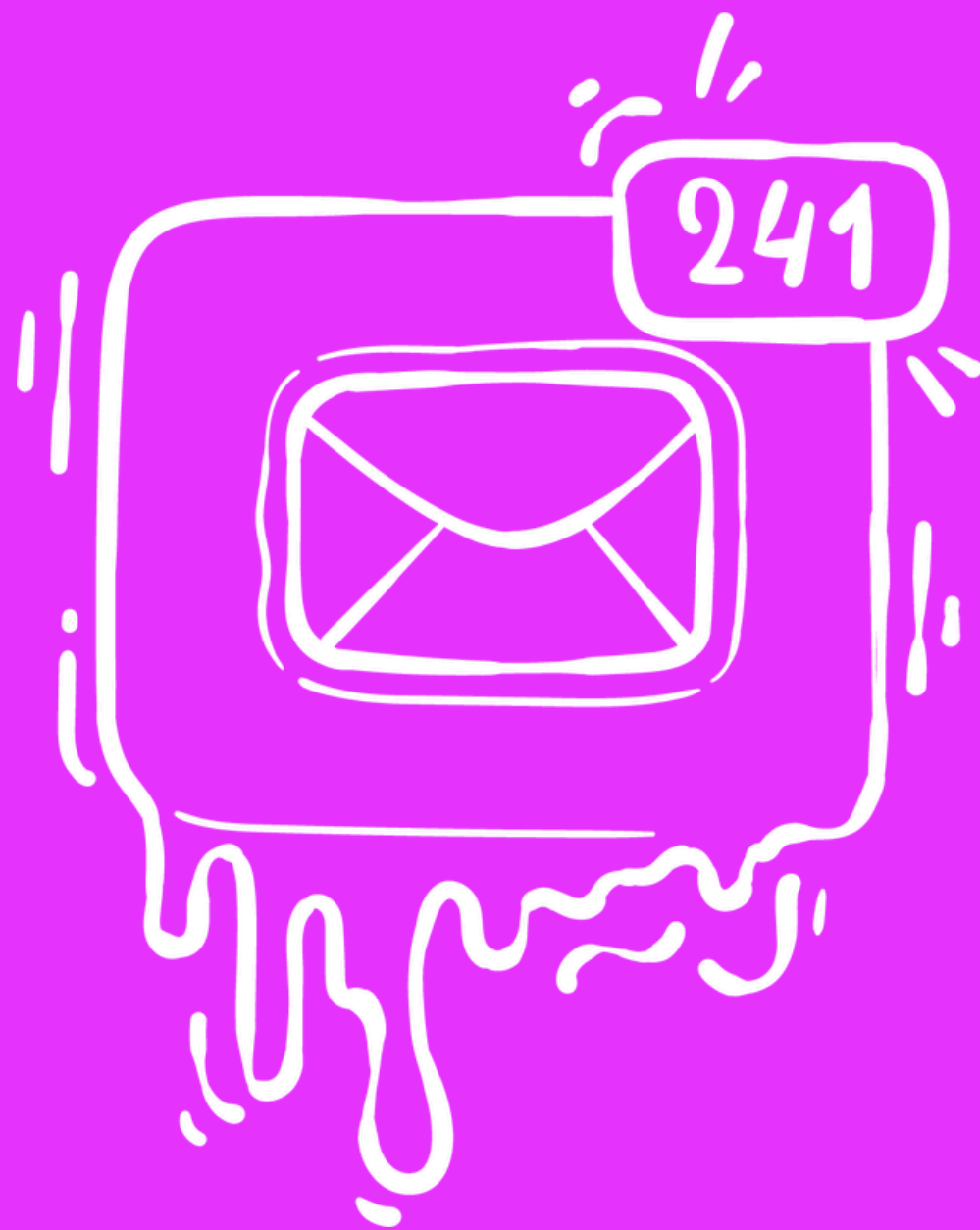
**SEXUAL + MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR APP USERS**



# HERE'S WHAT DATING APP USERS RECOMMEND.

- 1 MANDATORY PROFILE CHECK-UPS**
- 2 SCAM EDUCATION**
- 3 AUTORESPONDER MESSAGE**
- 4 SECOND CHANCE ALERT**
- 5 SAFETY CHECK-IN**
- 6 24 HOUR OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT**

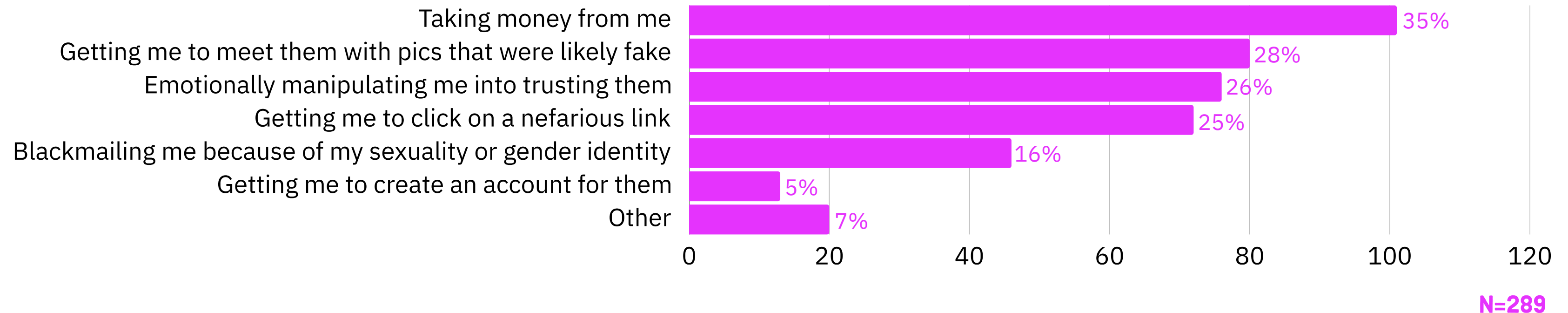




**SCAMS ARE THE TOP  
PRIORITY, FRUSTRATION,  
+ EXPERIENCE.**



# MORE THAN 3 IN 4 DATING APP USERS HAD EXPERIENCED A SCAM OR ATTEMPTED SCAM.



The most common scams listed were monetary, with **over 1 in 3 users experiencing a financial scam specifically**. These included:

- Requests for gas/rideshare/parking before ghosting
- Sugaring
- OnlyFans content promotion before chatting or meeting
- Requests for personal info to send money
- Job or brand ambassador offers

Other common scams included:

- Blackmailing and sextortion
- Long-con romance scams to build trust and intimacy
- Catfishing, identity theft, and impersonation
- Insisting on only connecting off-app (ex: via WhatsApp or Snapchat)



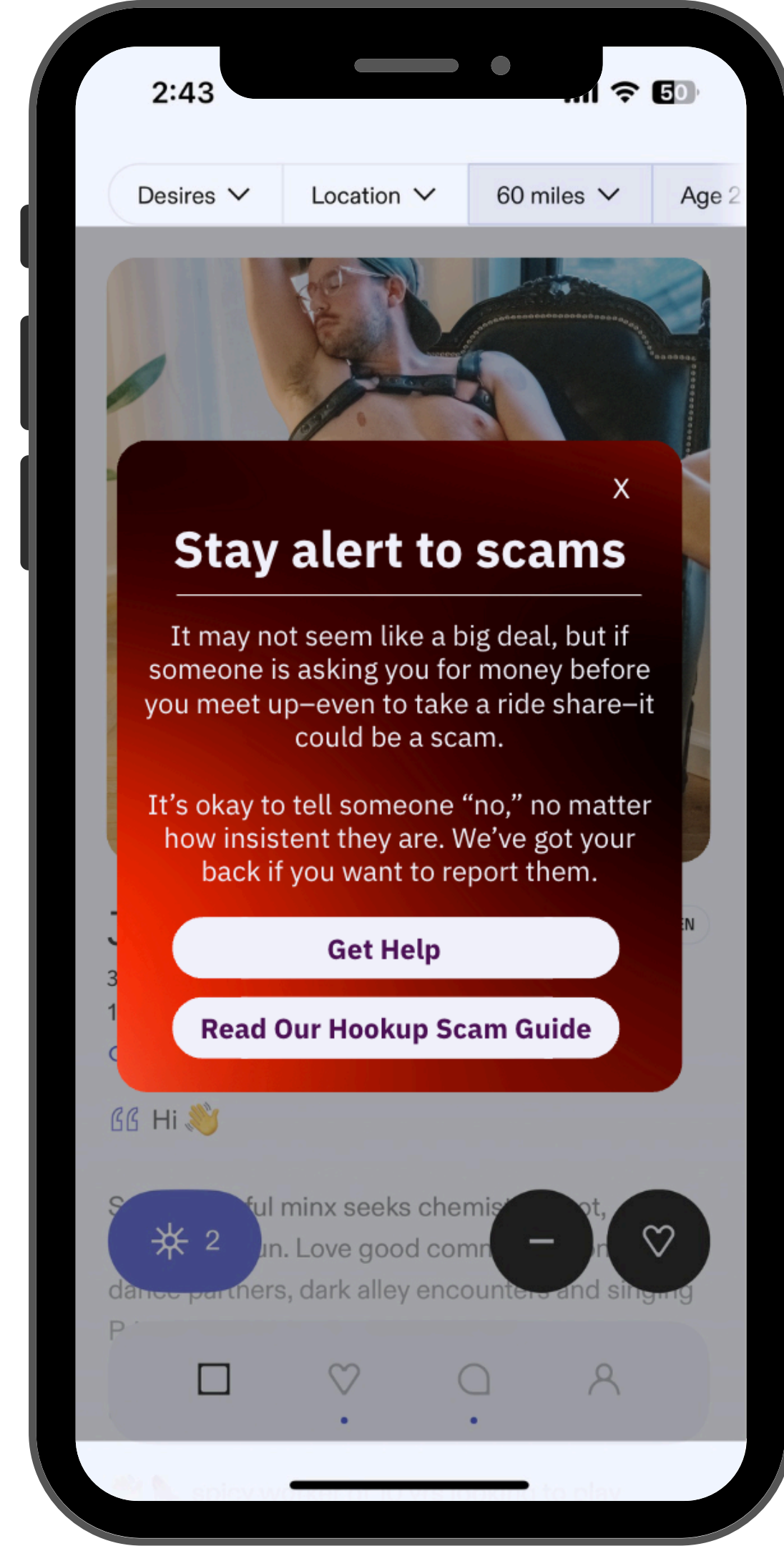
# SCAM EDUCATION MESSAGES

78% SUPPORT

Participants repeatedly framed scam warnings as enhancing safety, transparency, and user preparedness. Users also remarked that **warnings alone are insufficient** and should be **paired with other verification and security measures**—leading to a potential to highlight unique product features on app platforms.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- Scam contextual reminders should be detailed and engaging, not something that is easy to click past and ignore. Include **real-world examples** and consider tying scam warnings with specific features users can access to protect themselves (ex: set up filters for “verified only” users).
- **In-the-moment reminders** can help users stay alert on a more consistent basis. This could also be **triggered by certain behaviors** (like sharing a phone number, social media handle, or address) with a DM reminding users who may be sharing more vulnerable information.
- Include links to a **general safety guide**, platform moderators and support, and consider **visible partnerships** across social media and in-app, like [Tinder’s Date Safely campaign](#) and accompanying [Romance Scams Awareness guide](#). Link out to support resources for victims, such as [Advocating Against Romance Scammers](#).

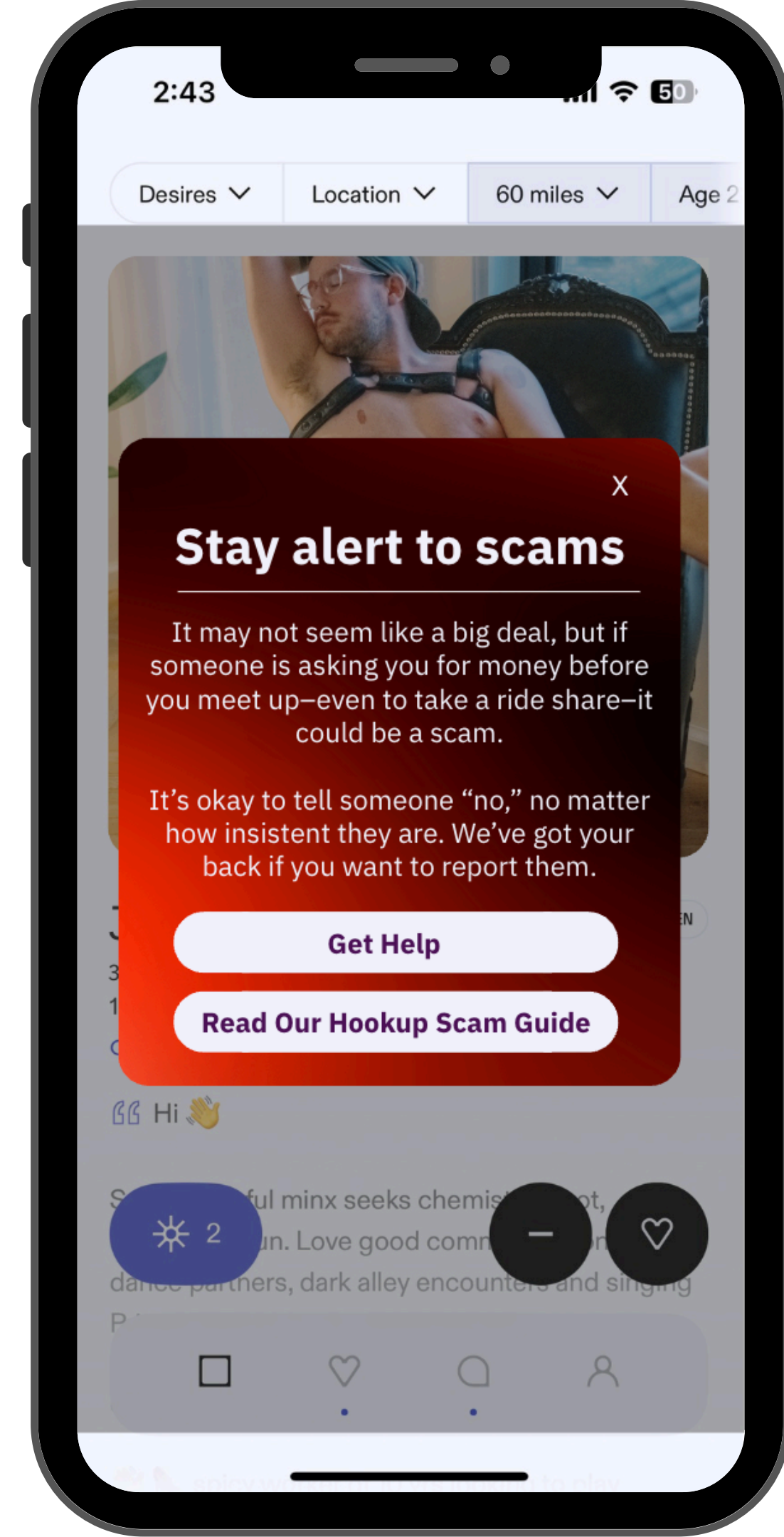




# SCAM EDUCATION MESSAGES

78% SUPPORT

- **I've heard a lot of horror stories about scams. I think that apps could give a list of common scams (and have it be updated weekly with information about new schemes that have cropped up).** –*White pansexual cis man, 40s, Georgia*
- **I think a transparency is the best thing, especially with these type of apps. What you want to feel is safe and in the loop.** –*Latino gay cis man, 30s, Arizona*
- **I feel it educates the uneducated masses on theses platforms, and kinda single out those scammers. By educating people that way, [scammers] feel more prone to just leave the platform eventually.** –*Black bi trans woman, late teens, Georgia*
- **It's ok but hard to be all inclusive and protect users 100% of the time...but I do think SOMETHING needs to be done.** –*Multiracial gay cis man, 40s, Georgia*





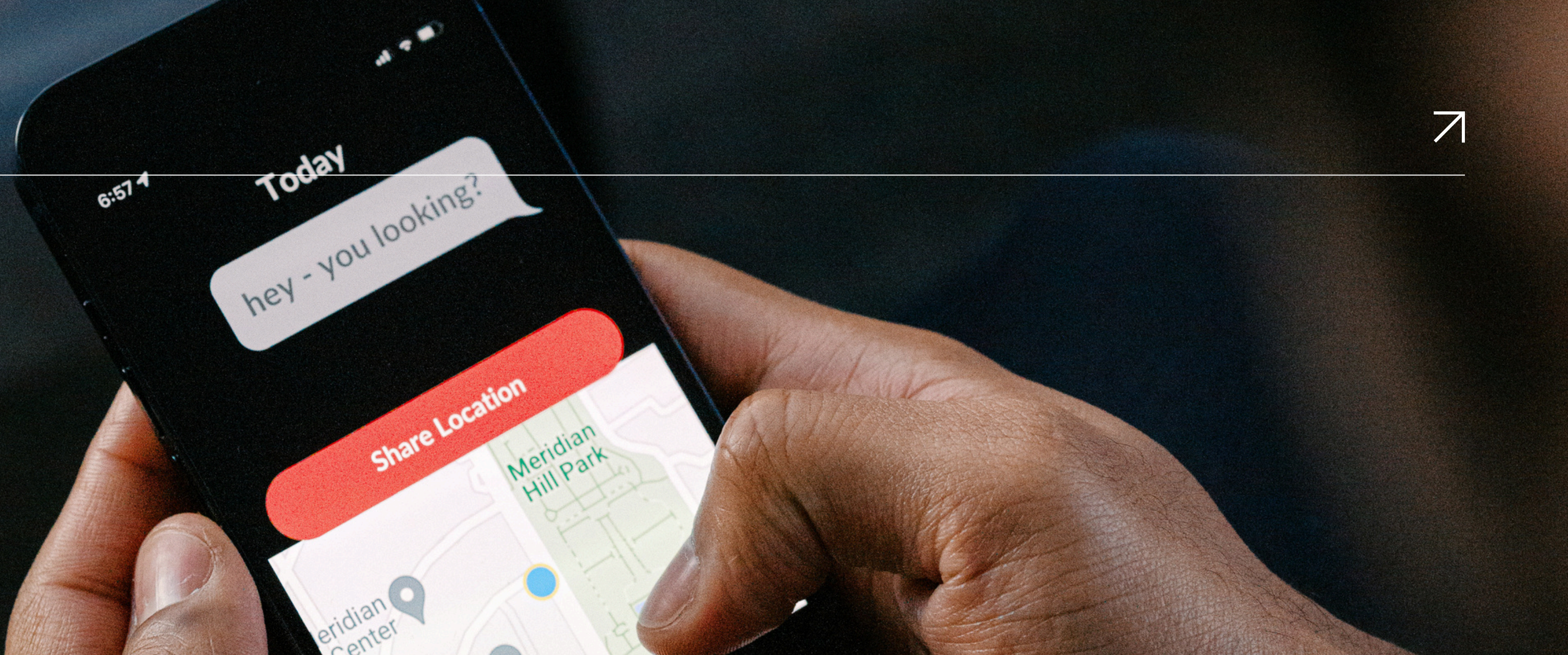
The majority of users knew to look out for scams but ultimately felt the **apps could take more responsibility for preventing scams** in the first place. Specifically, users wanted **clear examples** of what happens, what to look out for, **how to prevent scams using app features**, and what the app would do if they became a victim.

When asked if apps were getting better, worse, or had largely stayed the same, **49% of respondents said dating apps were getting worse.**

A significant factor contributing to that belief is the prevalence of scams. **The constant vigilance that users have had to exercise over the years has both depleted their joy of using dating apps generally and depleted the level of trust they have that apps care about their emotional and physical safety.**



**USERS WANT TO FEEL GOOD ON THE APPS + THEY CURRENTLY DON'T—IT LARGELY COMES DOWN TO HOLISTIC SAFETY.**



It used to be that you were given the benefit of the doubt until the first date, but now people are having to prove they're real and genuine before an interaction can begin. One of the ways dating apps have forever changed the way people date is that they have created a space where **users have to make quick judgements about how suitable someone is, if they pose a danger to them, and how attractive they are based off very little information.**

**3 IN 5 PEOPLE ARE MEETING IN A PUBLIC PLACE WITH PEOPLE THEY MEET ON DATING APPS VERSUS A PRIVATE RESIDENCE.**

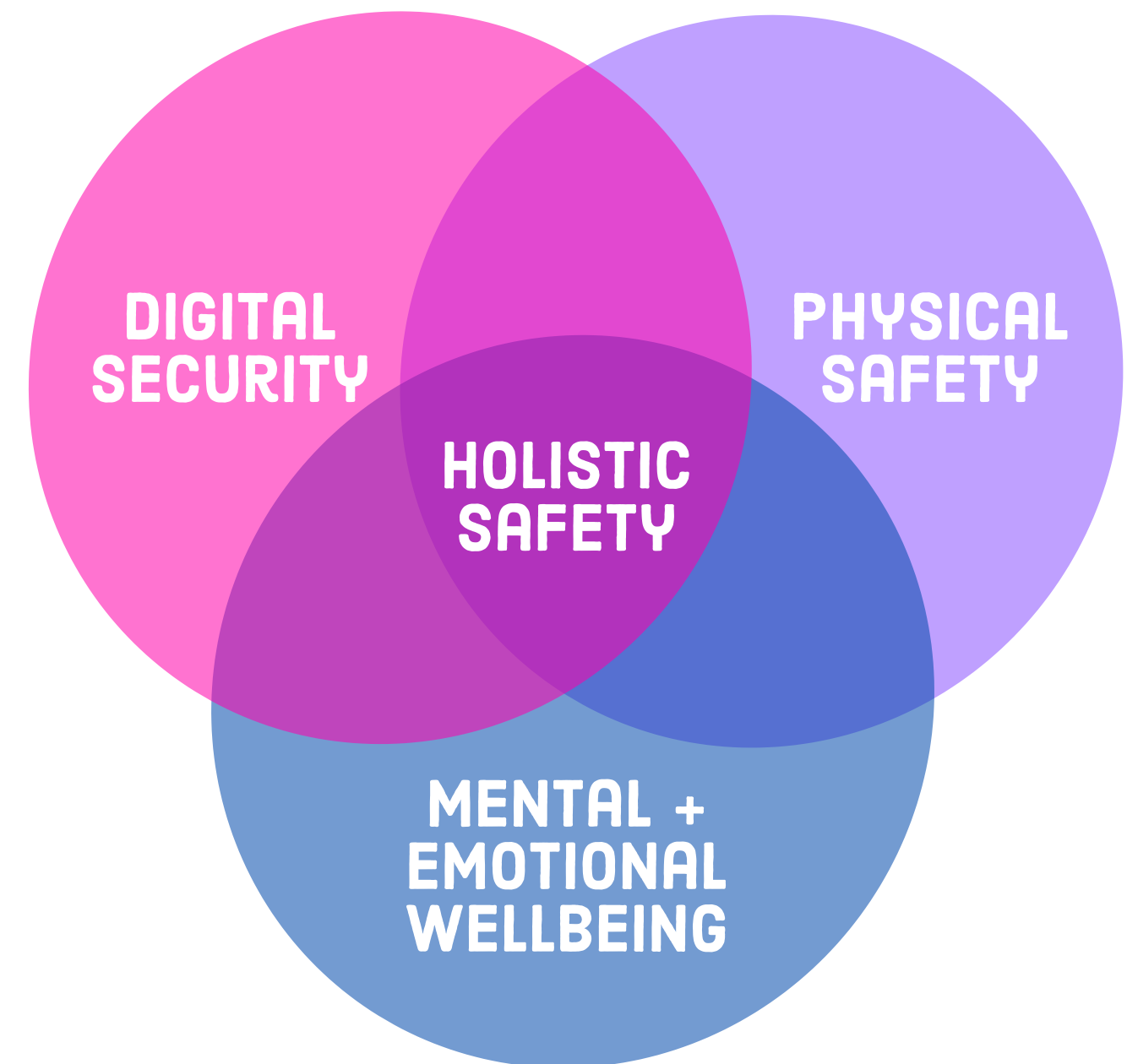


## USERS THINK OF THEIR SAFETY EXPANSIVELY.

One in five (21%) people had experienced a crime or serious threat. Experiences of being in unsafe scenarios weren't the same for everyone. **Trans and non-binary dating app users (19%) were twice as likely to have been physically or sexually assaulted** than cisgender users (9%).

Fifty one percent (51%) expressed concerns about their safety or had experienced assault or another crime. However, approximately the same percentage (53%) said they worry about their physical safety **"about the same as I worry about it generally"** when meeting someone off of a dating app for the first time. This may seem contradictory, but not when you consider that users have a more expansive view of safety than apps typically do—**users are concerned about more than just their physical safety.**

This suggests that the constant vigilance user practice on the app against scams also leads to a culture of feeling unsafe when they meet someone in person.

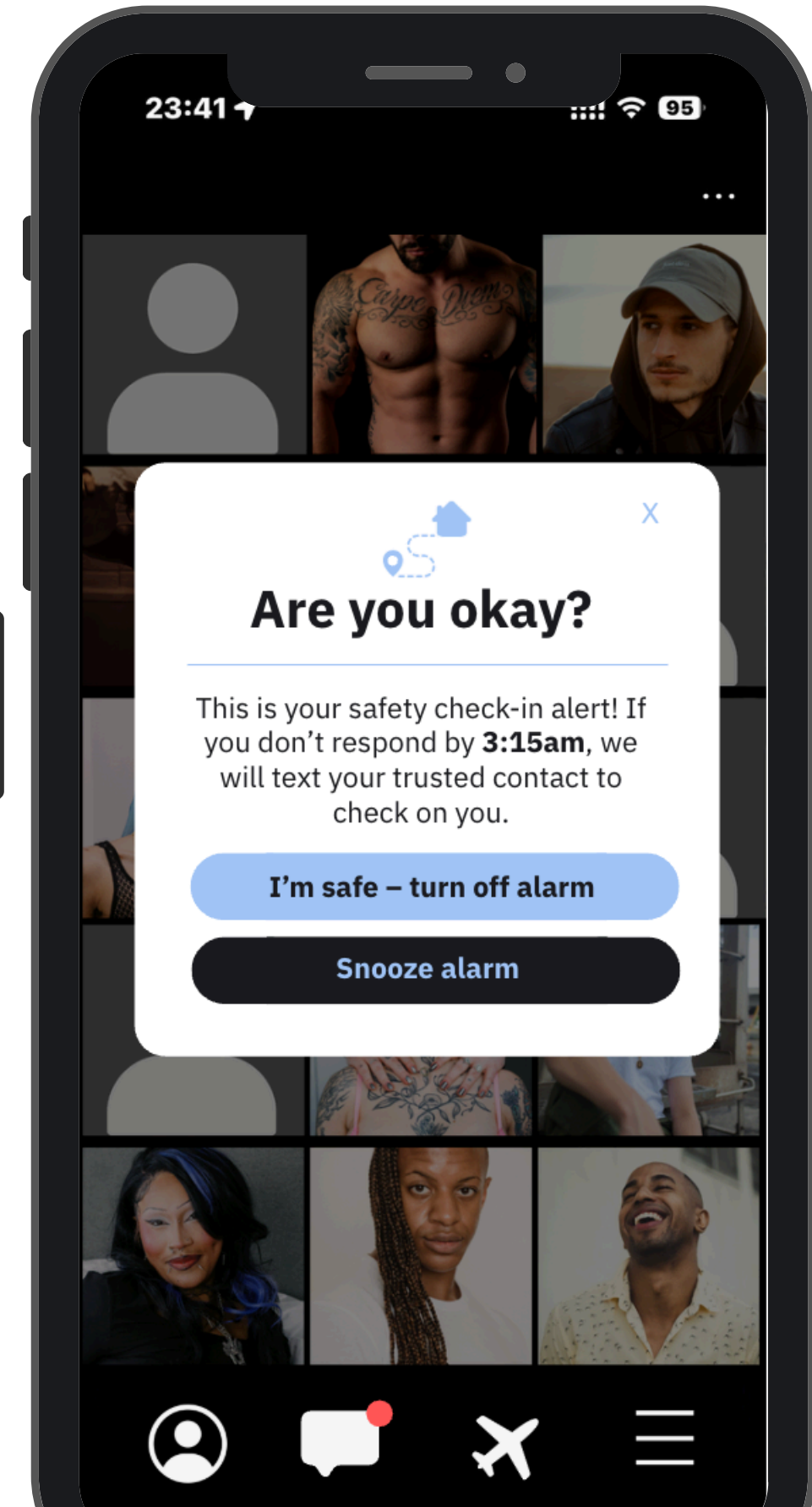
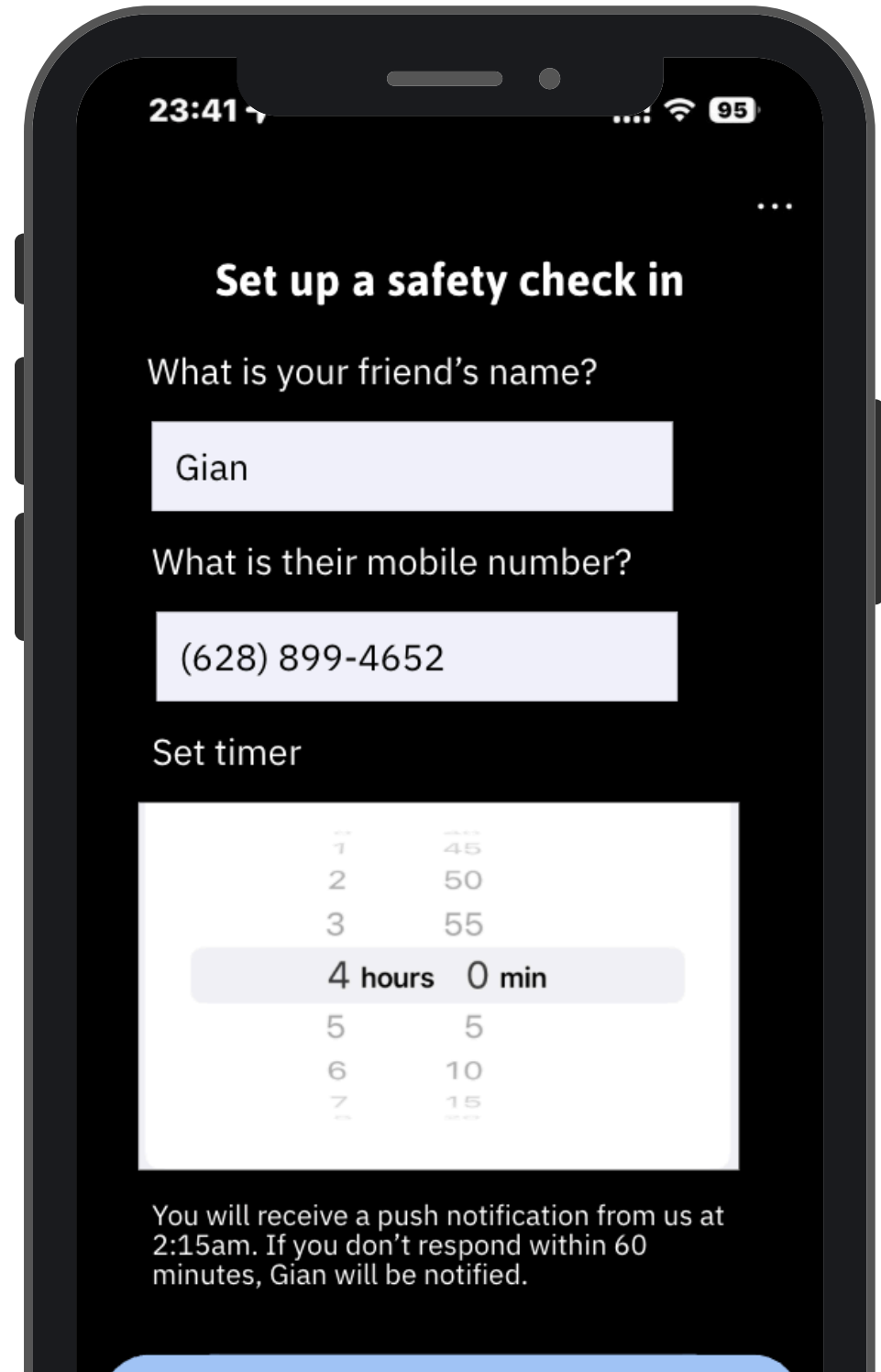
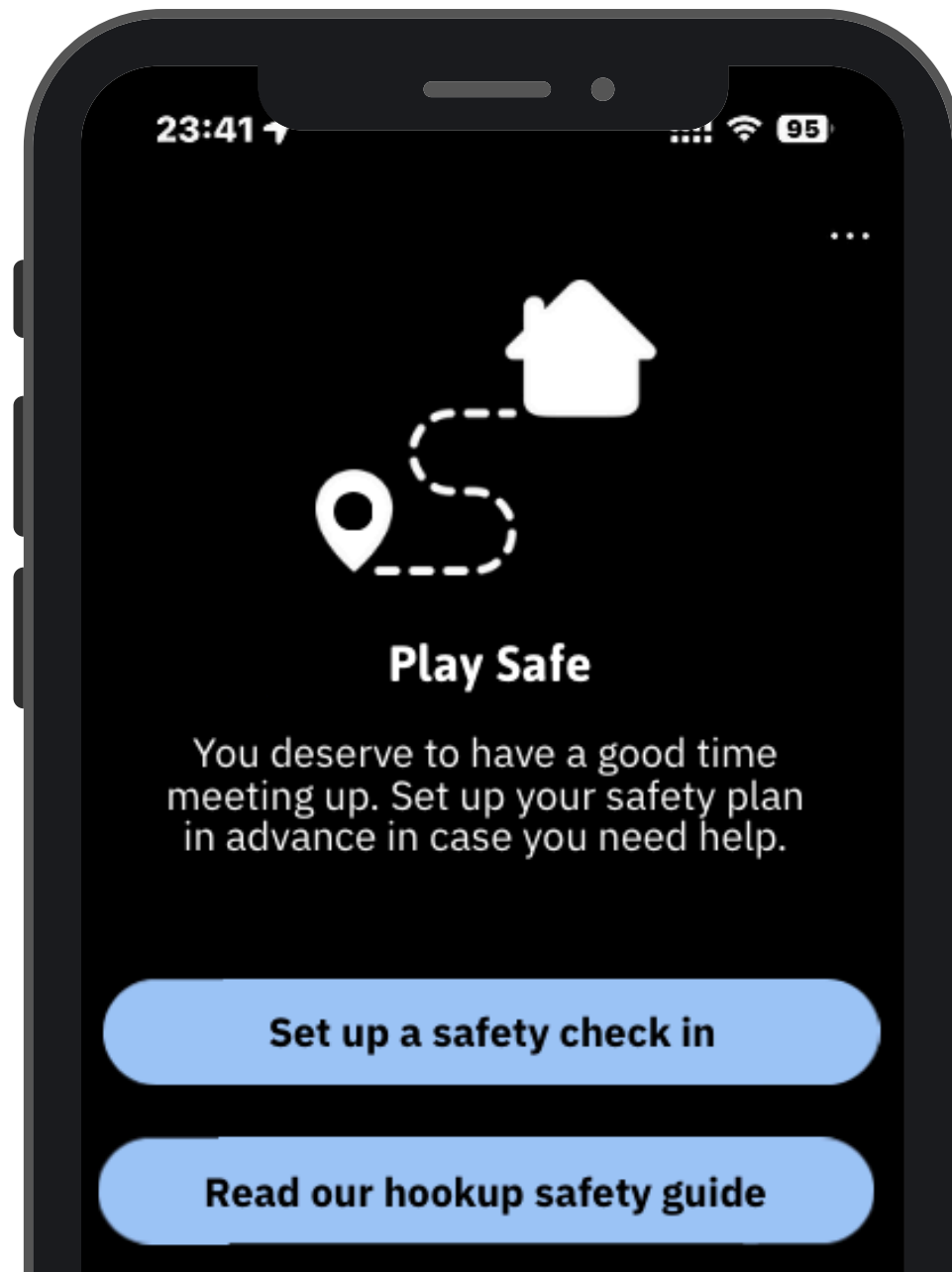




# SAFETY CHECK-IN

A safety check-in feature allows users to set up a plan in case something goes wrong when meeting up with another app user in person.

57% SUPPORT





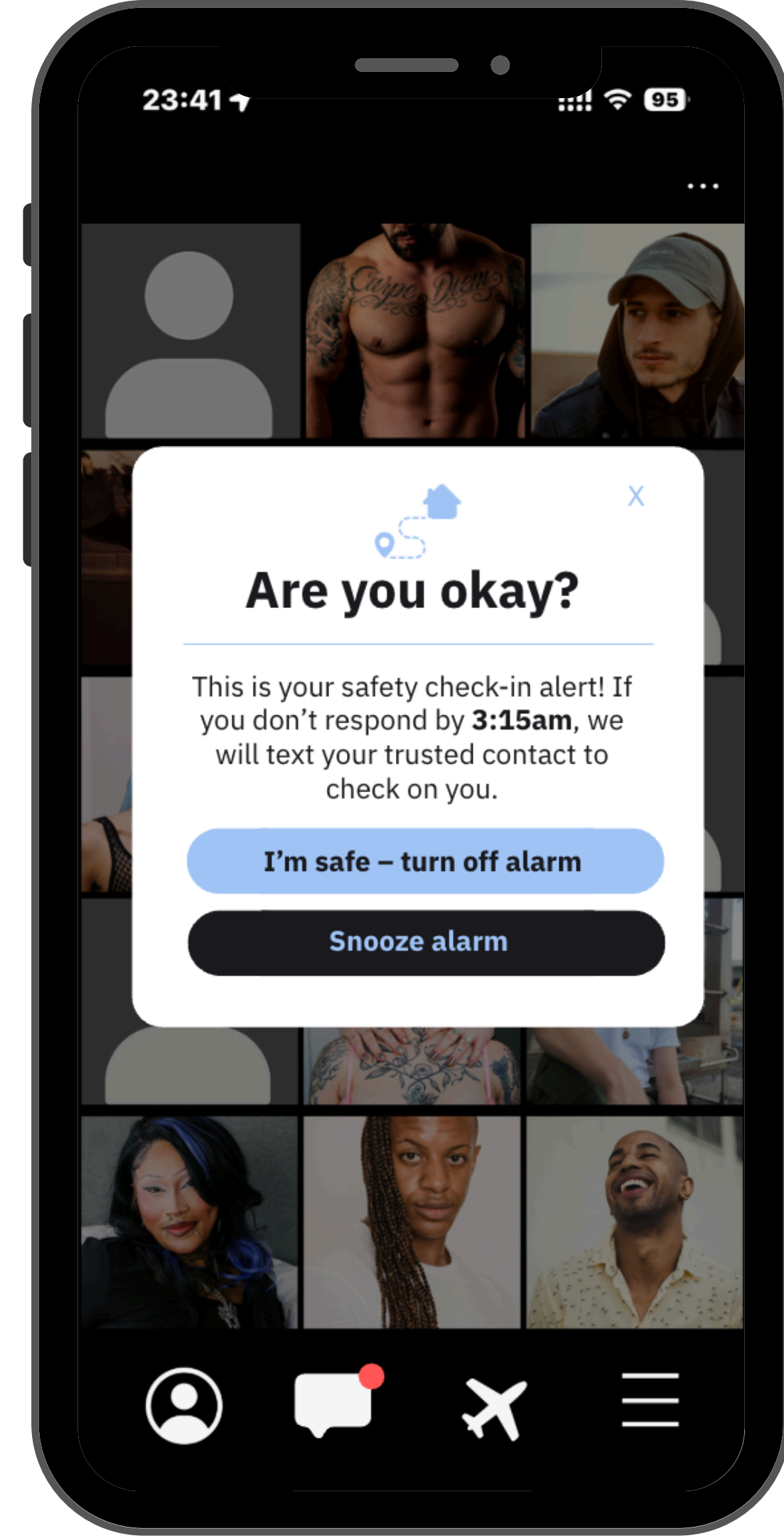
# SAFETY CHECK-IN

57% SUPPORT

Overall sentiment for a **safety check-in was positive**. Several users referenced current behaviors like sharing locations and photos with friends, but said this feature could formalize these practices. Participants also highlighted particular value for women and those having first time or anonymous encounters.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- There are **multiple ways to implement a safety check-in**. The version we tested with users focused on a **pre-set alarm and text alert to a trusted person**. Another option could include **adding location (live or last known) in an alert** to a trusted person.
- Allow for **customization** of key components of the feature, including the option to **set the initial timer** and the **check in grace period** before alerting a trusted person for as short or long as they want. Users also wanted to option to **customize the message itself** if possible.
- Consider **privacy concerns of platform users** who may not be open about being on dating apps, being “out,” or otherwise having high discretion and privacy needs. Potentially offer a **vague text that doesn’t indicate the sender** but lists the person name and asking the trusted contact to reach out to them.
- Some users mentioned the option to have a **backup contact or more than one contact**.

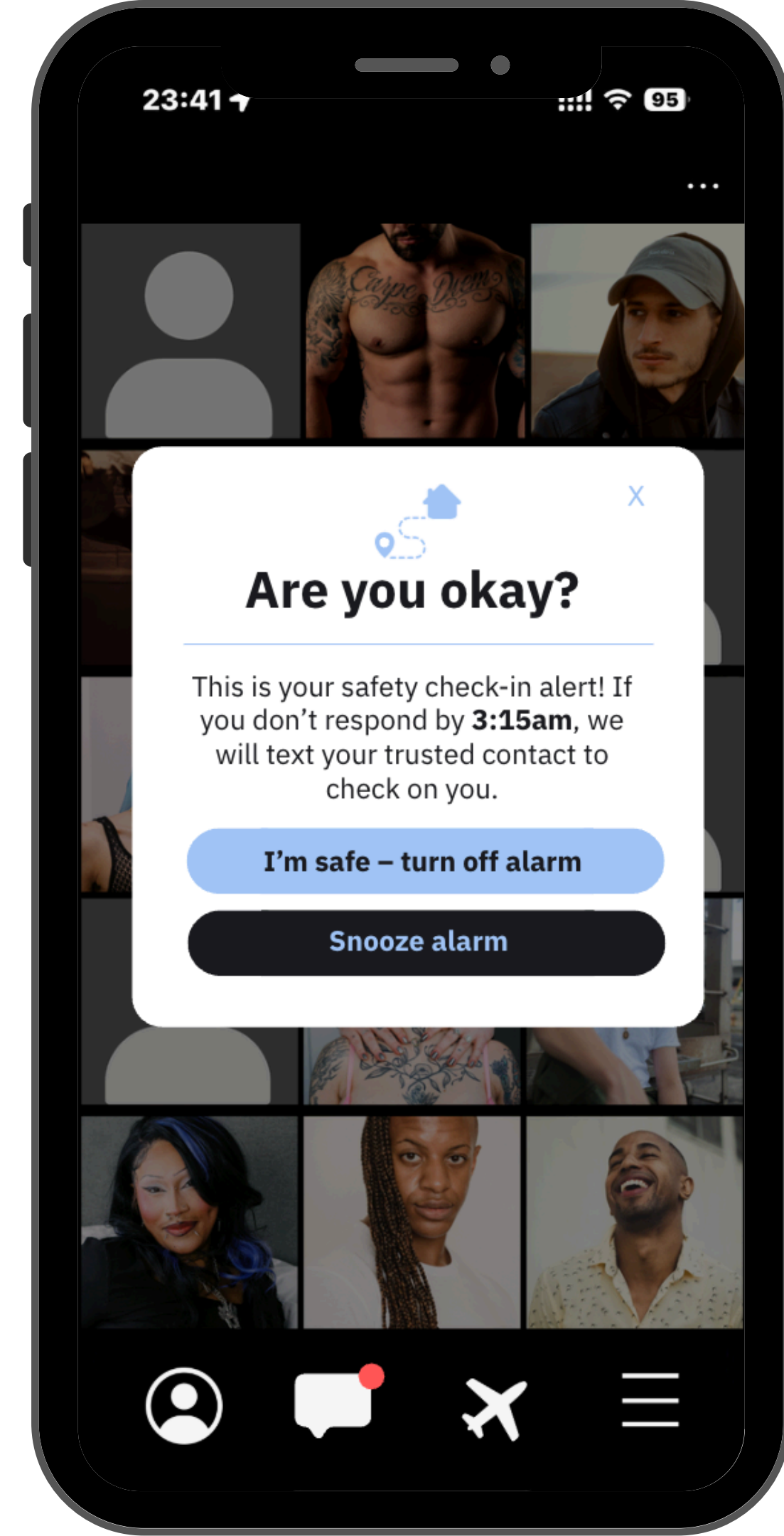




# SAFETY CHECK-IN

57% SUPPORT

- **I like it. I usually share my location with friends and alert them I will be meeting up with someone but I'm sure it can be easy for them to forget to check or lose track of time.** *–Latina bi cis woman, 30s, Colorado*
- **This is so cool. Would be great to have timestamps and the ability to share location with a separate trusted friend, even live [location].** *–Latino gay cis man, 30s, Texas*
- **I do love this idea. I always thought about doing it in general, but it also felt a bit weird to ask for someone every time I wanted to hook up. Having an auto message is a good idea.** *–White queer cis man, 40s, District of Columbia*
- **I personally like this, and it helps to even establish building or reinforcing a support system, despite the nature of the app itself. You've got to protect yourself these days.** *–Black gay cis man, 30s, Georgia*





# 24 HOUR OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT

57% SUPPORT

When someone harasses or harms another dating app user, they might block them proactively or delete their account—ensuring the victim can't easily report their profile to the app's Moderation Team. There was overall support for a delay that could help preserve these account records for improved user reports. **This type of 24 hour period could specifically prevent people from deleting an account and immediately starting a new one to harm others.** Nuances around safety were critical—users were concerned about continued harassment and if the abusive user could still find their location.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- Tie the waiting period to the last message sent by the potential reporter. This prevents the abusive user from bombarding them and “resetting” the clock.
- **Allow a “block” on the front end (no messaging and no location sharing)** but have the other user's account still listed for 24 hours. This would help the potential reporter to **capture evidence against their abuser for a more complete report** to the app's moderation team.
- On the backend, apps should be able to match user IDs for a limited time to see engagement, including any abuse.
- Educate users on your platform's general reporting process so they know they can report at any time. Users need to know they can report an account even if it's been removed and receive a summary of what happened.



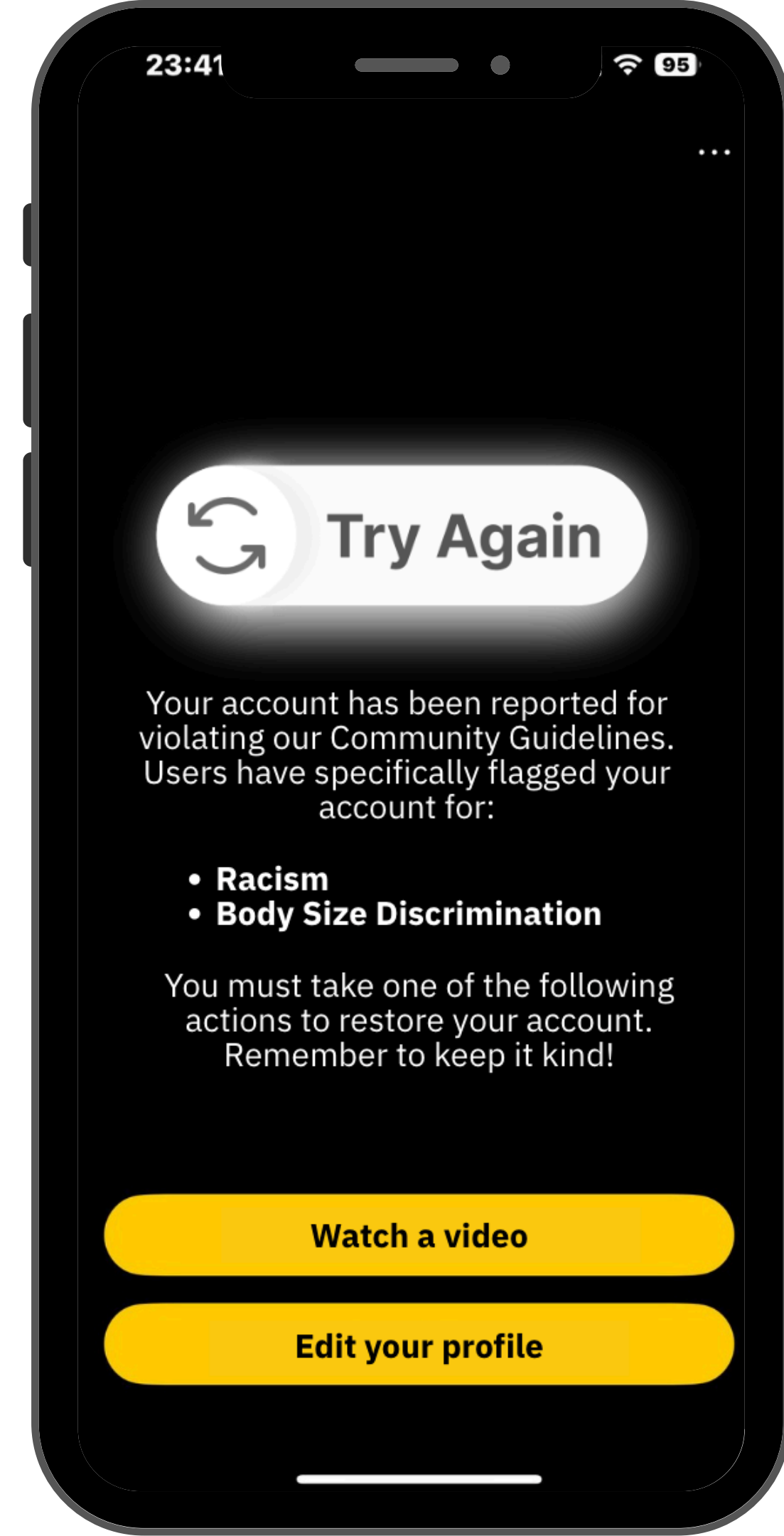


# SECOND CHANCE ALERT **66% SUPPORT**

Users were in favor of receiving a second chance to change their behavior or content in their profiles if it violated Community Guidelines. **Warnings were preferable to sudden bans** for most reasons—especially for a **first-time report**. This is an opportunity for apps to build trust with their user base—both to show that they are monitoring for bad actors and that there is genuine goodwill for users who want to do better when they have caused harm. Participants raised **obvious caveats that violations involving physical harm, stalking, or other illegal actions** may warrant **bypassing standard warnings** to protect others.

## CONSIDERATIONS

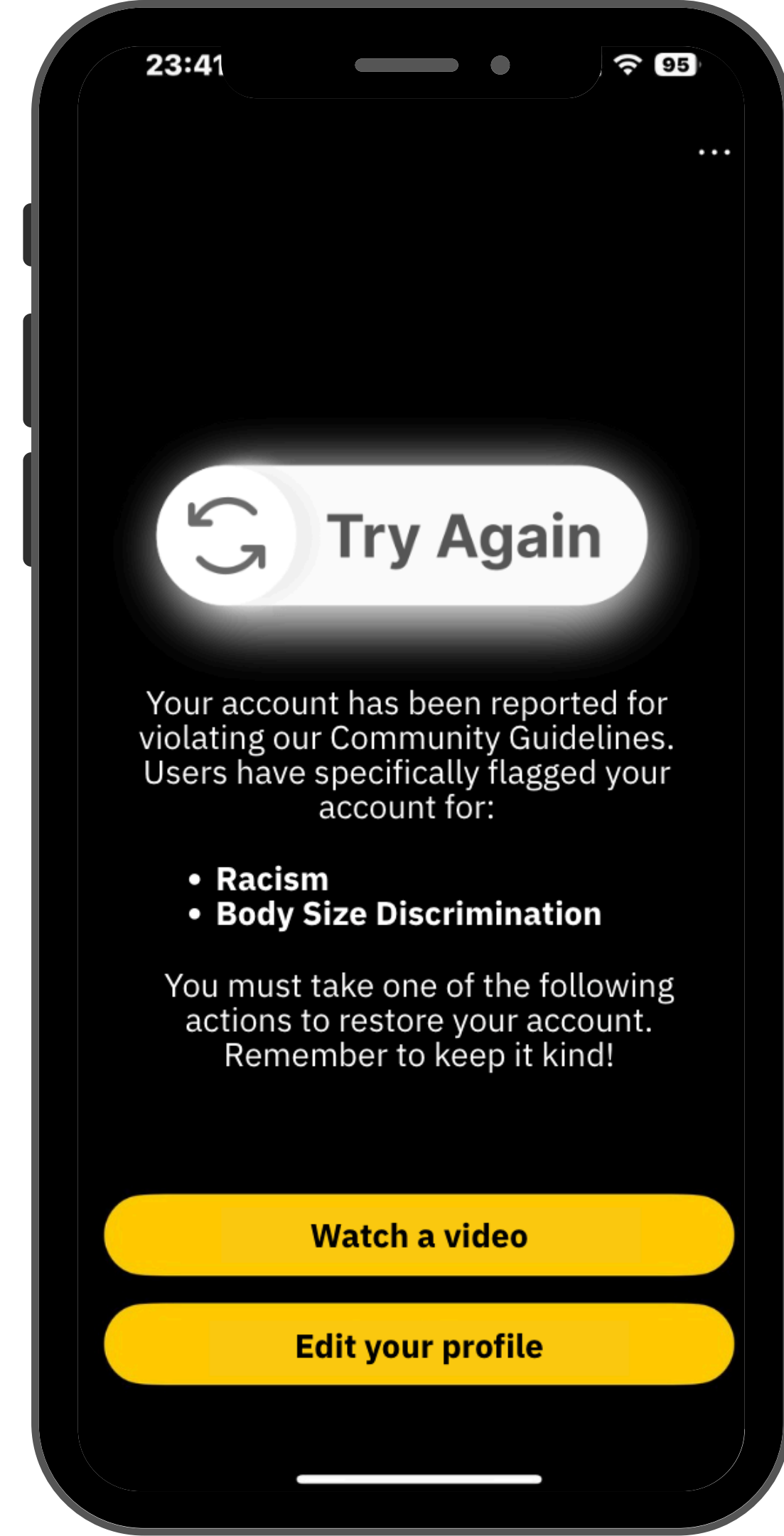
- **Defining if content in a message or a profile** was the reason was flagged is key to users.
- Specifically making the **fix something actionable** felt like a reasonable step for flagged users and would motivate behavior change.
- However, giving too much information could lead to users and/or bots figuring out ways around the reason for banning.
- Users preferred for a **human review instead of A.I. or generic support** articles.
- Apps should provide a **clear appeals process** to refute the warnings.
- Provide **user education on zero tolerance reasons you might get banned** without a warning. Apps should also define what happens when someone is flagged multiple times for the same issue (ex: the number of flags that leads to an automatic ban).





# SECOND CHANCE ALERT **66% SUPPORT**

- **I would feel less frustrated with the action of banning my account if I was given a detailed notice.** –*Black queer non-binary person, early 20s, North Carolina*
- **I love that idea. People are often very hurtful on the apps and say things I imagine they'd never say to someone in real life.** –*White gay cis man, late 20s, District of Columbia*





## VERIFICATION PROVIDES PHYSICAL + EMOTIONAL SAFETY.

What dating app users are really looking for is authenticity—they want to talk to real people, discern why they are on the platform, and be able to see the consequences for bad actors. **All of these things work in tandem to provide a sense of emotional safety for users that the risks they are taking on dating platforms are reasonable.** When users have this emotional safety and they have the tools that will allow them to get the information they need to make decisions, it allows them to be vulnerable in a way that fosters the connection they are looking for.

- 70% agree that **verification is digital safety**
- 80% agreed that **dating apps that make users verify their identity are safer than there those that don't**
- 74% agreed that moderators should **close the loop on reports** and **outcomes should be transparent**





**USERS ARE  
INTUITIVE + CRAVE  
AUTHENTICITY.**



Dating apps offering scam education and safety features alone doesn't solve the issue of deciding if the person an app user is talking to is real or authentic. **Dating app users still need to be able to screen people, determine their intentions, and decide if it's a potential match—but they need accurate, updated information to do that.** That's where the apps can assist in making sure users can express themselves and their desires through profiles and clear communication.

**GOOD VIBES + AUTHNETICITY\***  
**WAS THE #1 METRIC THAT USERS VETTED FOR WHEN LOOKING.**

*\*Received the most 1st and 2nd place votes—over sexual position, proximity, ability to travel/host, their physical attributes, or matching “intos,” etc.*



# HOW PEOPLE PRESENT THEMSELVES CONTRIBUTES TO GOOD VIBES AND BETTER CONNECTIONS.

Profile pics and user bios are an opportunity for users to express themselves clearly. It's also a chance to give others that are interested clues on how to best connect when starting off an interaction. **Ninety six percent (96%) of users told us they believe their profile pics and bios are an accurate reflection of them**, so it makes sense they view this as vital information when determining authenticity. **Dating apps should find ways to encourage, and reward, users that make a good faith effort to have a completed profile.**

**88% OF USERS** AGREED THAT SOMEONE HAVING AN ACCURATE+ FILLED-OUT PROFILE WAS A SIGNIFICANT DETERMINING FACTOR IN WHETHER THEY INTERACTED WITH ANOTHER USER.





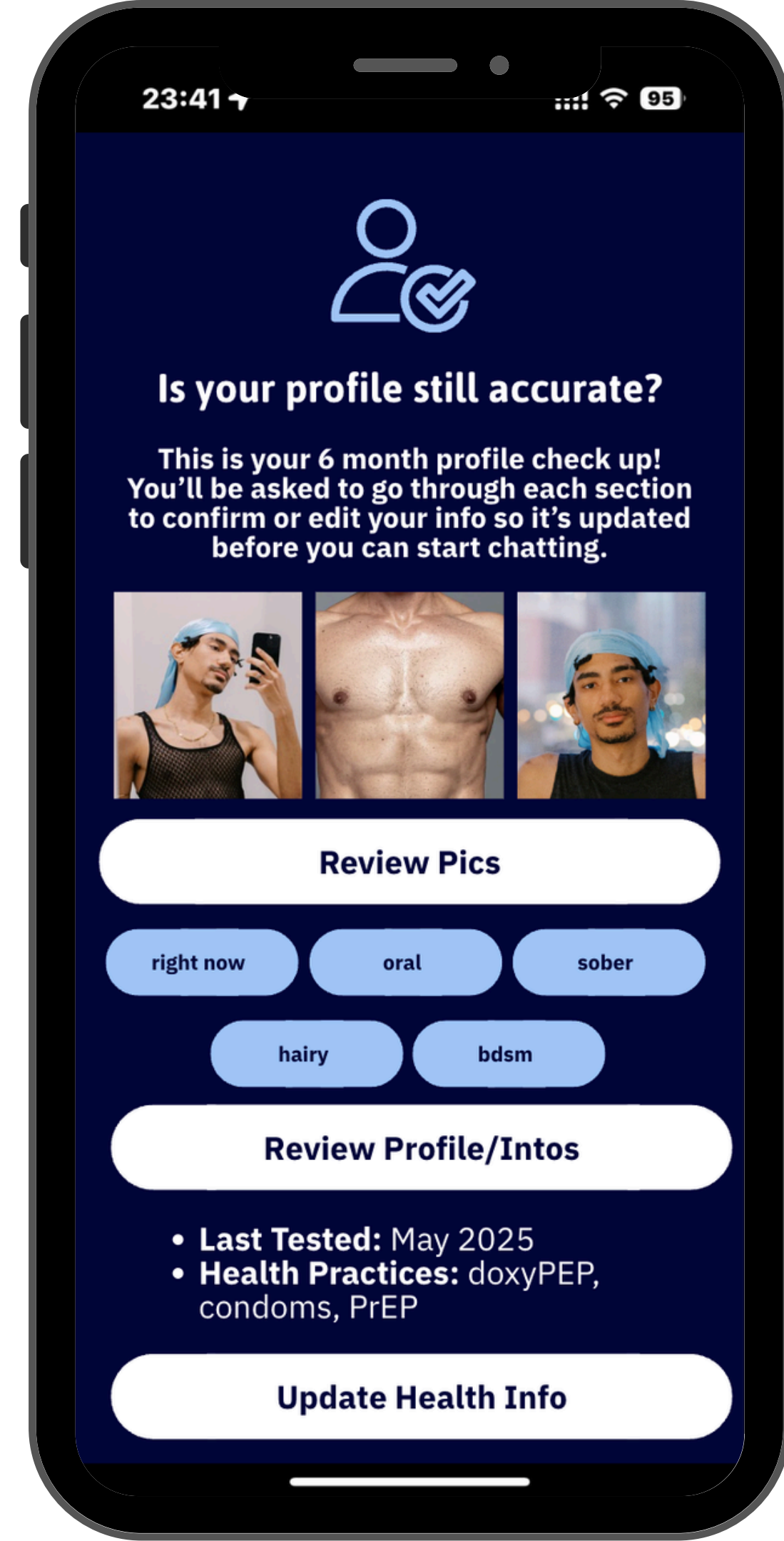
# MANDATORY PROFILE CHECK-UPS

84% SUPPORT

**Prompting, incentivizing, or requiring occasional profile updates** could help ensure dating app users still have an active and accurate account. It can also **serve as a barrier to bot accounts** which may not be able to complete the verification process. **Over 3 in 4 participants were supportive of it being a requirement** of using a dating app.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- Users preferred a **once or twice a year check in**. This was especially important for dating app users who use the apps infrequently (ex: only on travel).
- Don't only require changes to the profile or new photos. **Simply asking people to confirm the listed information and photos are still accurate** is reasonable and won't make people update things unnecessarily.
- **Add a label on profiles when they were last updated** (ex: "Profile updated 2 months ago"). The same concept could be applied to photos (ex: "Most recent" watermark on a picture).
- **Offer incentives** for users to complete the profile check in process. For example, those who update their profiles and/or photos get put in a **featured category or have their profile boosted on the cascade** (like Grindr has done with "New Faces" for accounts that recently joined the app).
- Alternatively, if a check-in feature feels too blunt, **create gamification strategies to encourage profile completion**—like **profile tips, photo suggestions, and other personalized optimization advice** based on what they are looking for.

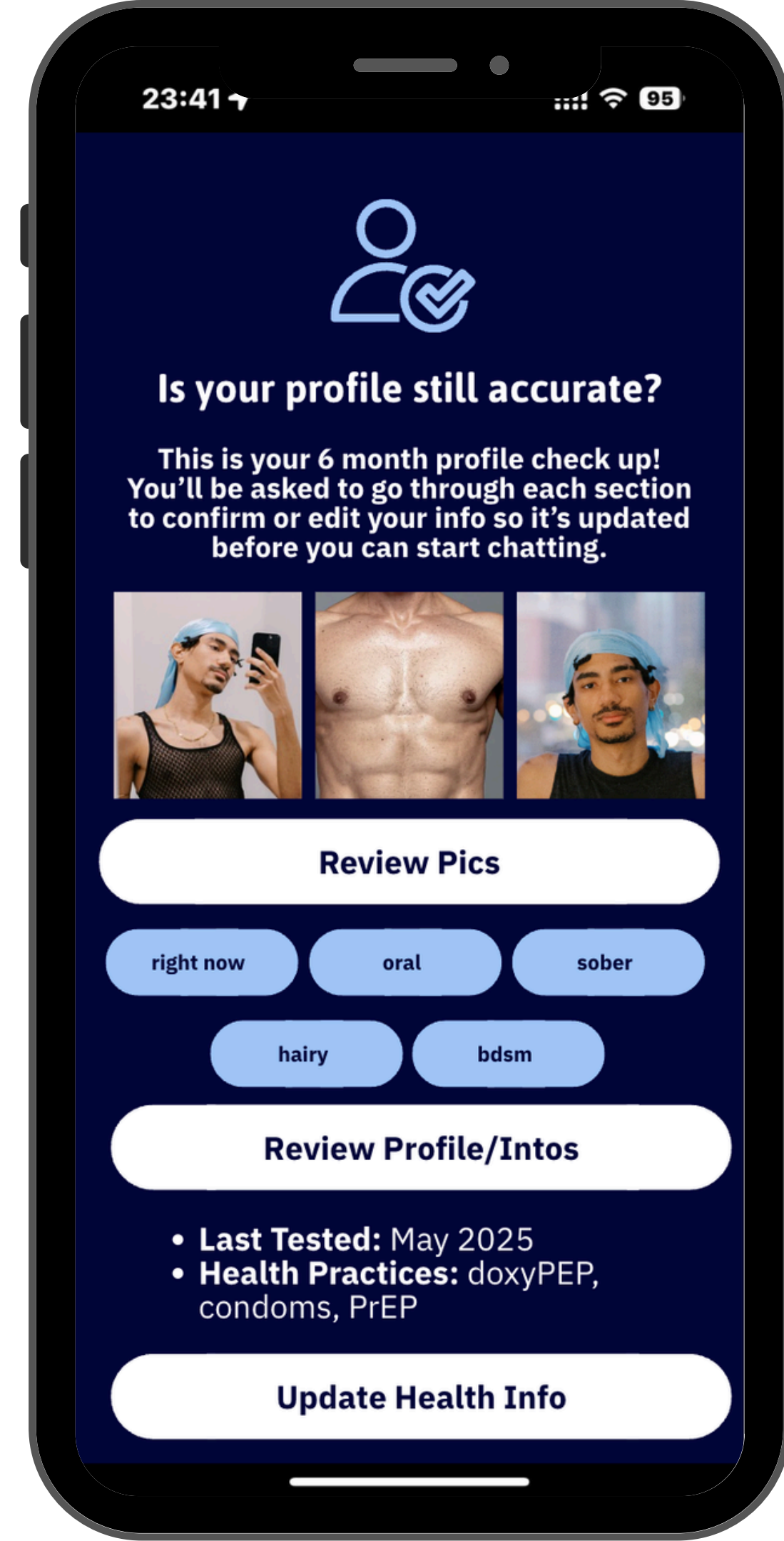




# MANDATORY PROFILE CHECK UPS

84% SUPPORT

- **I think it's a great idea - profile checkup to make sure things are still accurate or easily updated. This would make me feel more secure with who I chat with and the information they're publishing about themselves.** –*White gay cis man, 40s, Minnesota*
- **A lot of the time when I register for the app I will set up my profile and then very rarely go back and edit anything as I'm not viewing my own profile. A reminder would be helpful.** –*White queer cis man, 20s, Massachusetts*
- **Good! Too many profiles are outdated or haven't logged on in a long time.** –*Asian straight cis man, 30s, New York*
- **It will definitely show that the people who work for the app care about people's safety.** –*Black gay cis man, 30s, New York*





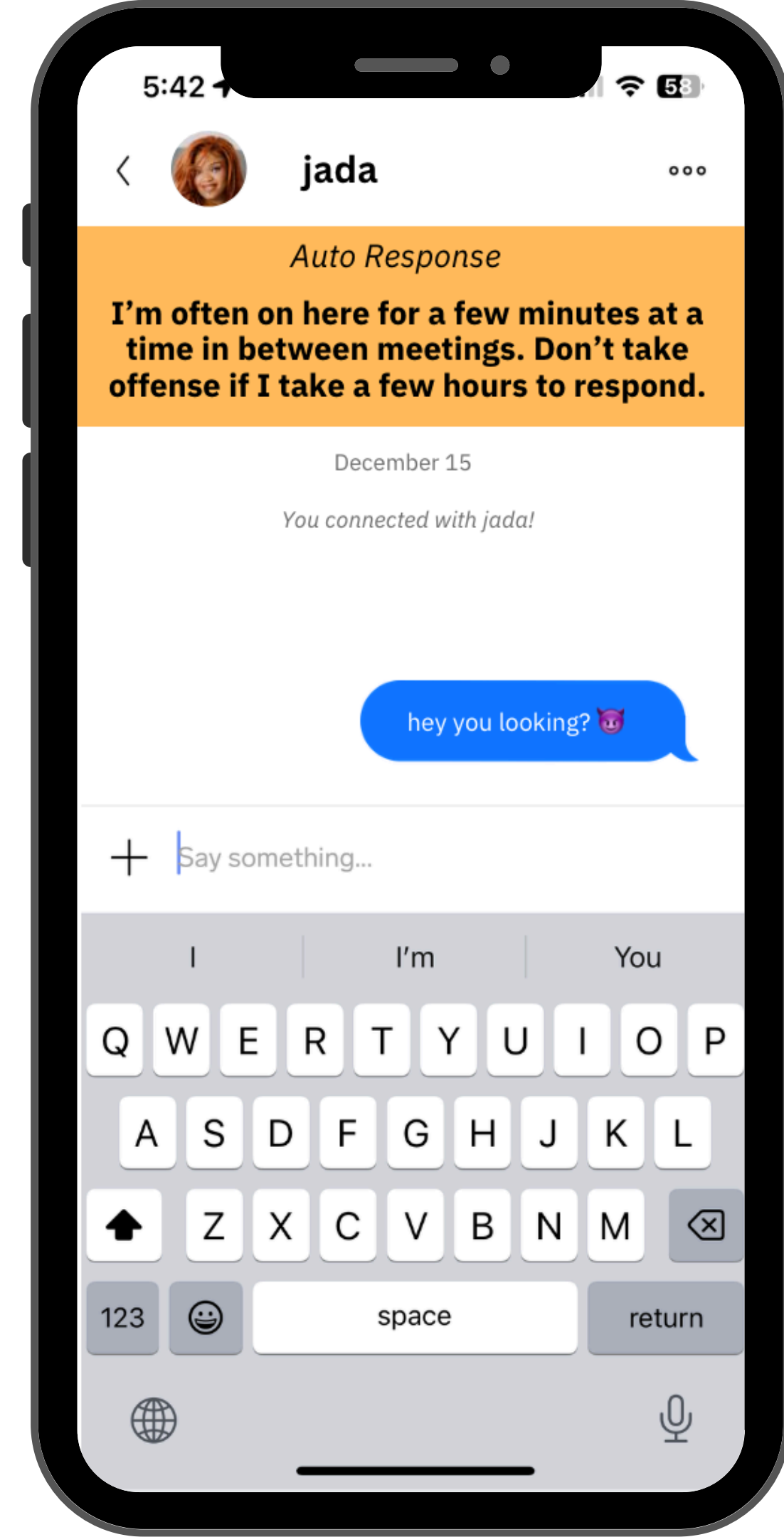
# CUSTOMIZABLE AUTORESPONSE

68% SUPPORT

Dating apps host users who are looking for a variety of connections and also using the apps at different times of day and durations. An autoresponder feature would allow users to **flexibly and preventively affirm what they are looking for in a given moment and their general availability**—rather than a delayed response showing disinterest as a default. Users said this feature provided **clarity, convenience, and expectation-setting**, especially finding it helpful during travel, using apps at cruising events, and during particularly busy days.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- Ensure it's **customizable but offer pre-written options** for ease of use. Some use cases to keep in mind are: general availability; vacation or travel mode; specifying a “right now”/hookup mindset or a regular chatting/dating mindset.
- **Prevent nefarious use for spam or bots by not allowing hyperlinks.** Apps might consider not allowing phone numbers or social media handles for similar reasons.

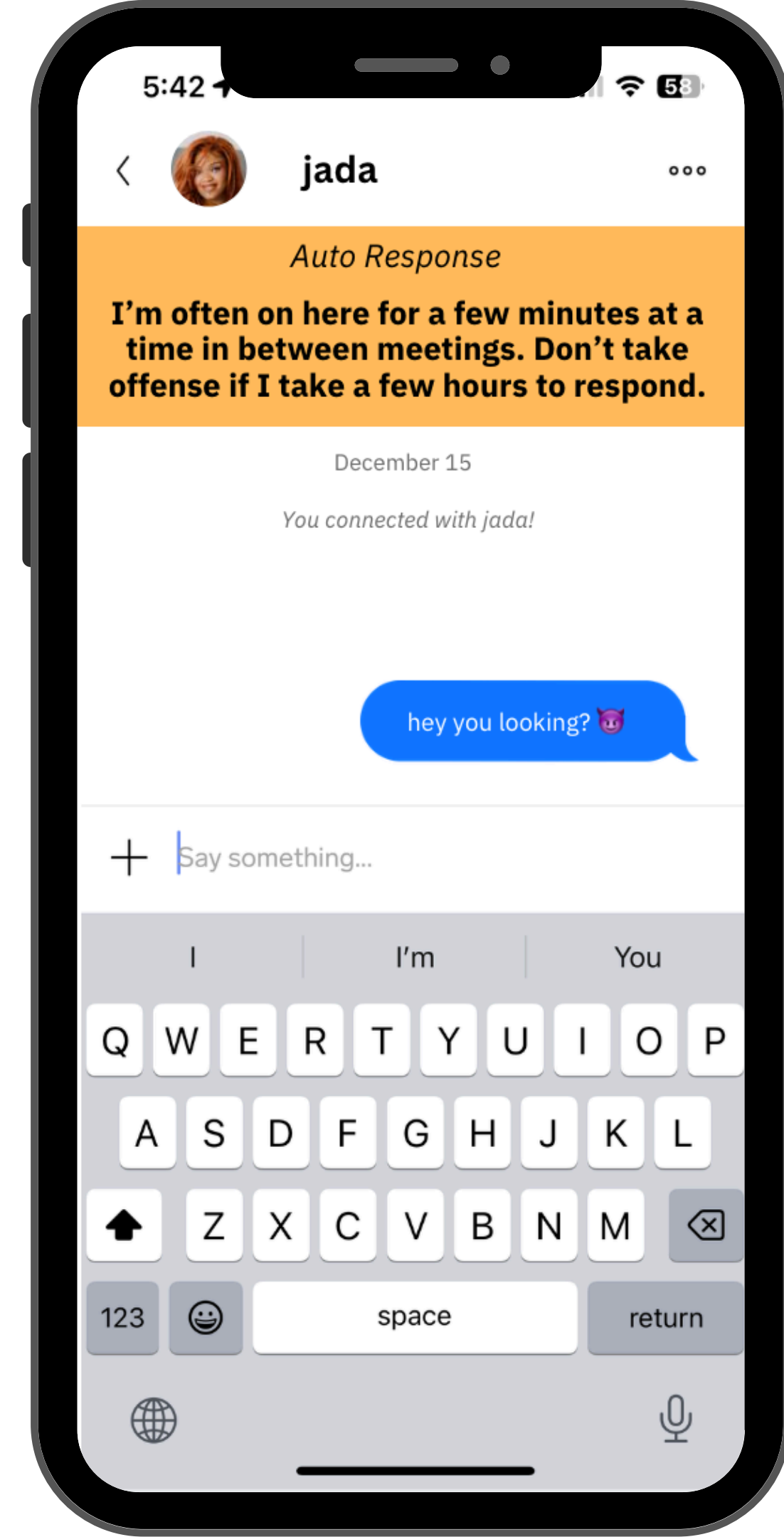




# CUSTOMIZABLE AUTORESPONSE

68% SUPPORT

- **I like the idea because it does defend you without people getting upset like they normally do and saying rude things to you or blocking you right away.** –*Black gay cis man, 30s, New York*
- **I would use that feature or honestly apps could stop being greedy and use the features already embedded into the app that allows us to see stuff like that (Ex. Read Receipts, Activity).** –*Black bi trans woman, late teens, Georgia*
- **I love it. I am horrible about checking the apps unless I am in the mood. So many people think I am being a jerk and that is not the case. I just keep notifications off.** –*White gay cis man, 40s, Georgia*





**SEXUAL HEALTH IS  
A KEY AREA OF  
CONCERN.**



## SEXUAL HEALTH FEATURES ARE INDUSTRY STANDARD.

One in three dating app users we heard from check if a dating app has the sexual health features they want *before* committing to using it. Having more information is better than having less when making choices about our partners, and dating apps can play an important part in helping users exchange sexual health practices more easily. **Optionally listing this information in one's profile can help those who may struggle to have the conversation in person—if they even have it at all.** Allowing users to list their HIV status and their practices can also reduce HIV stigma and increase education about STI and HIV prevention.

**2.4 MILLION**  
**GAY + BI MEN ON DATING**  
**APPS USE SEXUAL HEALTH**  
**FEATURES**

*Source: Increases in Awareness and Uptake of Dating Apps' Sexual Health Features Among US Men Who Have Sex with Men, 2018 to 2021*

- **LAST HIV OR STI TEST DATE**
- **HIV STATUS**
- **HIV/STI PREVENTION TOOLS**  
**CONDOMS, DOXYPEP, PREP, U=U\***
- **DRUG USE PRACTICES**
- **OUTBREAK ADVISORIES**
- **HIV + STI TESTING REMINDERS**

*\*Learn more about these terms at [bhoc.me/health](https://bhoc.me/health).*



When asked about their overall safety, **twelve percent (12%) of all survey respondents said that sexual health risks remain a major worry** when using dating apps, specifically the possibility of getting HIV or other STIs. Participants mentioned worrying that people might lie about health on their profiles or **might forget to update it**. Many users we spoke to were **disappointed that the dating app they used didn't offer these profile fields**. For dating apps that have them, users wanted apps to **promote the features** so more users would fill out these components.

**OVER HALF OF PARTICIPANTS SAID SOMEONE LISTING THEIR SEXUAL HEALTH PRACTICES WAS A DECIDING FACTOR WHETHER TO TALK TO THEM.**



# A.I. USE CASES + DEALBREAKERS



# A.I. CAN BE BOTH PART OF THE PROBLEM + THE SOLUTION.

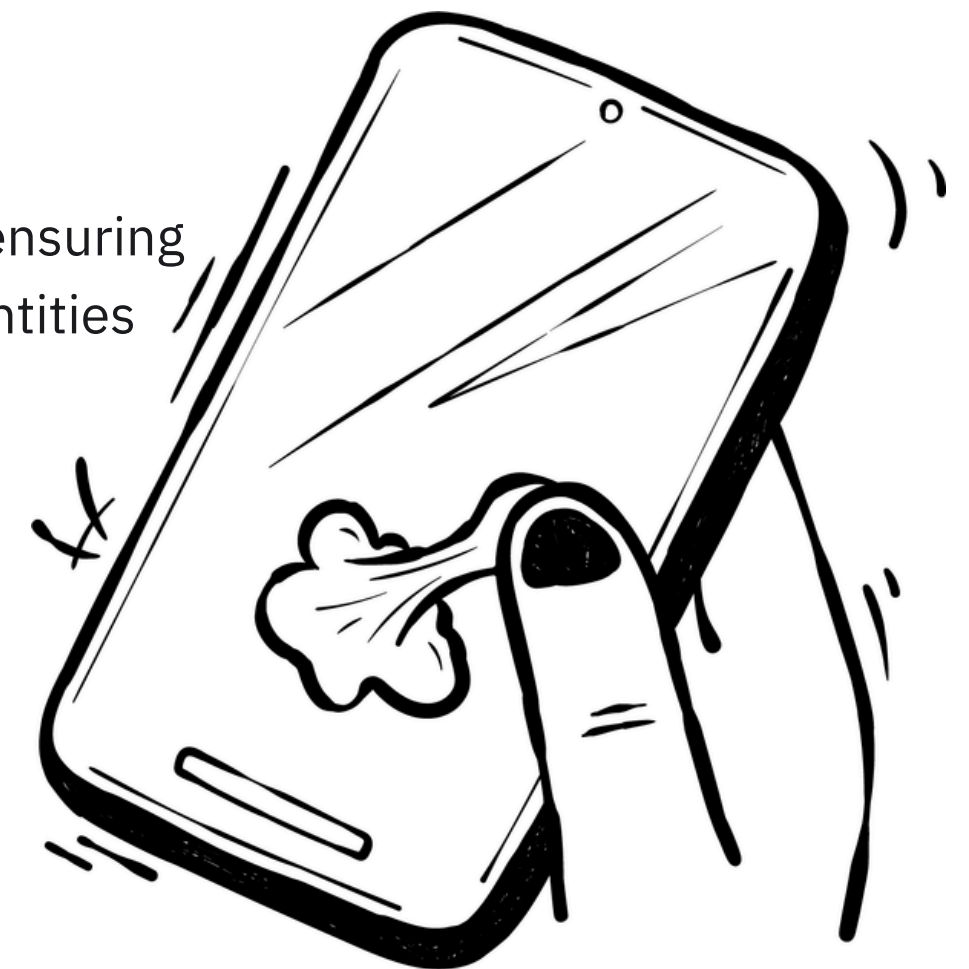
Dating apps as an industry have begun imbedding artificial intelligence (A.I.) in their platforms, enhancing the user experience in certain ways while introducing new risks. Using A.I. can assist dating app teams—especially moderators—in ensuring the platform is being used as intended. However, relying solely on A.I. leaves dating app users and owners open to legal, ethical, and privacy concerns.

## USE CASES

- Identifying bots/scammers, analyzing nefarious links, and flagging threatening speech in real time
- Advising users on how to put their best self forward through profile and photo recommendations
- Developing strong reporting symptoms by cataloging evidence and tracking repeat abusers
- Assist in language translation—but there are caveats related to nuance around flirting, sexting, and ensuring affirming/accurate language for health-related conversations and talking about queer and trans identities

## DEALBREAKERS

- Being the sole moderator for user reporting and appeals to account bans—nuance is needed and users recommended having human moderation
- Relying on government IDs and facial recognition for user verification—especially puts trans and non-binary as well immigrant users at risk
- Violating user privacy and discretion for what they share in private messages
- Perpetuating stigma and misinformation, especially around HIV and sexual health (which A.I. models might not be as familiar with)





# DATING APP OWNERS ARE A KEY PARTNER IN PREVENTING **STICKY SITUATIONS** FOR THEIR USERS.

Users are tired and frustrated. **They feel they are working harder to make fewer connections** while dealing with higher prices, a lesser “free” experience, ads that increasingly and purposely interrupt their searches while also handling the strain of constant vigilance to protect themselves from scams and bad actors.

**The users we spoke to are clear that there need to be more visible efforts from the apps to show they care about their overall experience, including their emotional well-being.** As dating apps have become a normal part of life, users’ expectations of what apps can and should do has also evolved. Currently, they do not feel that dating apps are rising to meet those new expectations or helping to support them in an increasingly challenging digital world.

That means there's an opportunity for the industry to listen and do something differently! Inevitably, dating apps will look different in the next decade—and users are hoping that part of that change will be more considerations for how they are impacted by the decisions that are made by app owners.

➤ **THE TOP FEATURE WAS REQUIRING PROFILE UPDATES AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR.**

➤ **USER FRUSTRATIONS WITH PERVASIVE SCAMS LEADS TO DISTRUST IN OTHER USERS AND THE APP OWNERS—ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR OVERALL SAFETY.**

➤ **3 IN 4 USERS WANTED MODERATION TO BE MORE VISIBLE + TO REPORT BACK WHAT HAPPENED.**



---

2026 REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM NICEAF, AN ANTI-STIGMA PROJECT FROM  
BUILDING HEALTHY ONLINE COMMUNITIES

---



**NICEAF.ORG**

 @bhocpartners



# USERS OF COLOR + TRANS USERS PRIORITIZED CERTAIN FEATURES.

Features that trans people are more likely to support are:

- **Customizable Autoresponder:** Trans respondents affirmed it could be customized to reduce confusion and clarify who/what they are looking for (+12%).
- **Safety Check-In:** Trans people reported that this could be valuable, especially for trans people of color (+11%).
- **Second Chance Alert:** Trans users endorsed this feature, saying the app could take some of the pressure off of them to correct abusive behavior (+9%).

Features that people of color were more likely to support are:

- **Sexual Health Features:** Respondents of color overwhelmingly based their likelihood of meeting with up with someone on if that user listed sexual health practices in their profile (+24%).
- **Safety Check-In:** People of color mentioned that the feature was useful in formalizing informal practices they had, but many agreed that “outing” was a concern (+12%).
  - People of color (38%) were **more likely to be worried about their safety when meeting someone offline** than White respondents (30%).



# DATING APP USERS EXPERIENCE MENTAL UNWELLNESS.

A unique theme that emerged in survey responses was the mental health impact of dating app use, with users calling upon companies to center the mental wellbeing of users as much as possible when making decisions about their platforms. **Negative mental health outcomes impacted a range of dating app users, but also specifically impacts people who use drugs and/or are facing sex addiction.**

- "All the apps feel hopeless and make you feel even more hopeless...I think it's only worsening the mental health crisis that exists."
- "It can really be really draining mentally to log into an app day after day and find nobody appears to be interested in you."
- One user felt they had "become undateable and it was time to give up" before meeting someone offline.



# LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT

The principal limitation of this report is that the participants who choose to take a survey or join a focus group on this topic may not be representative of all dating app users. Other limitations include:

- Unintentional oversampling of people over age 50 in the survey may have impacted focal areas for the project that are not as prioritized by people under 50.
- Single select options for identities and experiences within online focus group platform limit full descriptive information
- Occasional misunderstandings of intricate details of how each proposed feature would function influenced users' endorsement of them



# PROJECT STATEMENT

As dating apps have become a regular and essential part of our lives, the expectations we have for what they can do have increased—but so too have the frustrations when they don't deliver on their promise for connection. **While dating apps continue to position themselves as gateways to connection, users increasingly believe that apps are actively undermining any real chance they have to find what they are looking for.**

For many users, it's not just that subscription prices have gone up or that the number of untargeted ads creates a frustrating experience—it's also that the amount of time and effort they are having to put in to find what they were looking for has increased. The weight of all of this leads to a situation where people are on the apps out of habit, not because they want to be. In our focus group, most users said the apps are getting worse and that while they used to pay for the app previously, they no longer do.

**Users are very clear that what they want is authenticity. They want an opportunity to interact with real people, be able to discern their reason for being on an app, and for there to be clear accountability when others violate the rules.** But, dating apps have been slow to build the features and create the environment that allows users to express all of the variety and complexity that dating, friendship, and sex demand.

Now that users are openly questioning whether apps do more harm than good, it's important for app owners to understand what users are really after. Apps often state that the safety of their users is a top priority, seemingly as a way to mirror the safety concerns they believe their users have. Users are concerned about their digital and personal safety on dating apps, but not any more than they are when on any other type of app. Their bigger concern is the risk of being vulnerable with someone who is not authentic and the physical, or emotional, danger that can put them in. In our focus group, there were more users that were hesitant to share links to their social media profiles on dating apps than they were to send nudes. This may seem counterintuitive, but social media is the “face” we use to present to the world. Allowing someone you're not yet sure about to view that can feel like an intimate experience or make you vulnerable to a scam if you're not careful, as so many dating app users have been subject to.

**So what can apps do? They must do a better, and perhaps, more visible, job of helping users navigate (or prevent) the sticky situations they inevitably experience when using the app.** Dating apps can help nudge user behavior in positive ways to avoid the difficulties that sticky situations bring. With features like updates to stay alert to recent scams, specific warnings when behavior may get them banned and autoresponders on profiles to alert others when they are not available but maybe still interested, all could make the platforms feel safer, kinder, and **NiceAF.**