

Exclusive dating app for celebrities and influencers: Why Raya has been called 'the Illuminati of the Tinder world'

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Credit: Sammie Sander from Pexels

In 2020, Sharon Stone [tweeted](#) that her Bumble dating profile had been closed due to users reporting the account as fake. In less than 24 hours,

Bumble had restored her account and apologized for the misunderstanding.

You might be forgiven for thinking the Basic Instinct star couldn't possibly be looking for love on a mainstream dating app like Bumble. It's not every day that you swipe left to discover the next profile to be a Hollywood celebrity.

However it would appear celebrities, are just like the rest of us. Looking for love or intimacy in a world where the face-to-face meetings are no longer commonplace. Unlike Sharon Stone, instead of using Bumble, the majority use their own special dating app called [Raya](#).

A membership to this invite-only dating app is as exclusive as you would expect, with only a small number of elite applicants accepted on the app—which means your chances of charming and dating someone rich and famous on Tinder (insert shocked emoji) just got even slimmer.

What is Raya?

Launched in 2015, Raya, prides itself on being "an exclusive dating and networking platform for people in [creative industries](#)."

Cara Delevingne, Ruby Rose, Alexander Wang, Patrick Schwarzenegger, Teri Hatcher, Elijah Wood, and Zach Braff are among the elite crew [rumored](#) to be on the dating app. Demi Lovato has been a longtime user of online relationship sites. She revealed in her documentary, *Simply Complicated*, that she chose Raya after her split from Wilmer Valderrama in 2016. Most recently Lily Allen and David Harbor credited their meeting to Raya.

Before you think about sneaking onto the platform sometimes known as the "Tinder Illuminati" of the dating-app-world, there's a complex

application process—which includes being referred by three people, and then being vetted by an unknown panel of judges. Rumor has it, Raya has over [ten times](#) more people waiting to get on the app—than those currently on it.

The *New York Times* reports only about [8% of applications are accepted](#), meaning Raya has a higher rejection rate than the illustrious Harvard Business School.

You'll also need to pay for it, with a conservative fee of AU \$9.99 a month, and further in app purchases (for example, extra swipes—once you've swiped on a certain number of profiles, Raya temporarily stops showing you new profiles unless you choose to pay a small fee of \$4.99) required. Promotional material indicates: "Raya's primary goal is for like-minded people to have an easy, accessible, and comfortable platform on which to connect."

The applications are "reviewed by an anonymous global committee" to "maintain that ideal."

How to find love on Raya

My research examines how and if dating apps have changed intimacy, sex and romantic relationships. How does love change as a result of a digital sieve? However, it's difficult to locate Raya users to provide their testimonies on their exclusive experiences.

Most B grade users, that is, non-celebrities and non-influencers, report that the app is overwhelming, and doesn't deliver matches. In simple terms if you're not an A grade celebrity, you simply don't have the celebrity pull to get the matches.

Insiders indicate that the app is awash with professional photos, where

the majority of users look like models. On ordinary apps, such profiles are usually rejected as potentially fake profiles or as bots.

The profiles are shown in slideshow format, with users picking a song to play their slideshow to. All profiles include the person's Instagram handle, so if you did really like the look of someone and wanted to make sure you did connect with them, you could add them on Instagram. In addition, screenshots, are not allowed within these hallowed halls.

From 40 people interviewed in Australia, only 2 had used Raya. Those interviewed described the app as a "waste of time," indicating that while there was a plethora of recognizable talent on the app, the majority fell into the influencer category—and their strike/ or match rate was low if not non-existent.

Celebrities and creatives

The app does raise a pertinent question around what we consider to be the creative industries in today's society—and whether this terminology expands out to influencers or for example, OnlyFans content creators, and how we tier celebrities, and creatives.

Dating apps also tend to open a pandora's box of judgmental behaviors. My research would indicate that the majority of users make split-second decisions mostly based on appearance, but also tend to continue this hypercritical behavior as they discontinue direct message exchanges, and ultimately people.

Mainstream dating apps are highly white domains, [with sexual racism proliferating](#), occurring in overt (for example, the common "No Asians" [bio descriptions](#)), to more covert behaviors such swiping left against ethnically diverse people.

They encourage a [highly visual economy](#), where individuals are often reduced to a hot or not factor. Most of the participants in my focus groups and interviews felt like they had become more judgmental as a result of their dating app use—quickly rejecting punters who were not arbitrarily attractive.

Apps like Raya, while claiming to pool together like-minded people instead tend to extend and reinforce the idea that modern-day-love, categorized by the dating app, is only eligible for a certain hallowed few arbitrarily good-looking people, with solid Instagram, or Only Fans followings. Simultaneously, they warp the idea of the creative industries and creative people.

Raya opens up the promise of a private dating space in an online environment. However, in doing so it creates a digital culture where intimacy is limited to an elite group of people, no longer open to the masses.

As platforms like Tinder [undergo scrutiny](#) around pricing structures and safety, the future could entail a plethora of Rayas—defined by the attributes (and payment) of their community members. Importantly, keeping the undesirables at bay.

But in doing so are we further creating a world of intimacy haves and have-nots?

While a select few might be enjoying the sanctity of private and exclusive dating—the rest of us have been locked outside, left to navigate the wild-west of the digital dating world.

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