Psychological, Social and Imaginary Dimensions of LGB People who use Dating Apps: A Netnography Approach

By Giuseppe Masullo[*] & Marianna Coppola[±]

Social networks and dating apps increasingly represent a novel way to meet people as opposed to traditional face-to-face communication. Virtual platforms are particularly important for gays and lesbians due to the social stigma related to their sexual orientation and are diversified according to their users: the former use Grindr and the latter Wapa. Our research involved a group of users from Campania, in southern Italy, and employs a mixed methods approach. We first studied users' profiles in both dating apps and then focused on qualitative interviews to reconstruct the psychological (emotional and affective dynamics) and social (sexual script) dimension of the imaginary underpinning online interactions. We aim at filling the partial gap in the Italian research between virtual media and homosexuality, highlighting the communication methods and relational approaches through which gay and lesbian people (and partially also bisexuals) relate through social networks. The first section reviews the relevant literature, connecting it to the relation between new media, affectivity, and sexuality. It explains the notion of sexual identity, an essential epistemological preamble for comprehending the possible phenomenology through which people relate to their own sexuality. The second section explores the apps' social mechanism, showing gay's and lesbians' trends on the emotional, sentimental, or sexual approach. Our purpose is to verify the existence of a different gay or lesbian approach in both applications (in the purpose of its usage and in some of the imaginary dimensions) or if those apps modify the sexual behaviour, thus producing new forms of social and relational homologation.

Keywords: *sexual scripts, app for dating online, gay and lesbian studies, gender models.*

Introduction

The history of the Italian LGBT community (and the related processes of emancipation and self-determination of identities and non-regulatory sexual orientations) has followed a different trend compared to other Western countries. Over the years, Italian society and its main institutions have proved conservative and paternalistic concerning sexuality and sexual practices. According to a naturalistic and heteronormative vision, these had to pertain exclusively to the private and intimate sphere of the individual, under strong pressure from public morals and religious ethics.

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*Associate Professor of General Sociology, University of Salerno, Italy.
[±] PhD Student, University of Salerno, Italy.

This social and cultural framework contributed to the delay and lack of emancipation of the LGBT community, even more evidently in the South of the country.

However, the advent of the Internet, since the early 2000s, has allowed homosexual people to elect *cyberspace* as a pivotal context in which to take refuge, create interpersonal relationships, draw on information and socialisation processes and practices, talk freely about identity aspects and above all create belonging to a community and a social and collective identity (Bacio and Peruzzi 2017).

The spread of Social Media, such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, has created the possibility to "stay connected" regardless of physical distance and to create interpersonal relationships conveyed by immediacy and gratuitousness.

Within the Social Media offer, several online dating applications have been developed and widely distributed, both for heterosexual people (*e.g. Tinder* and *Badoo*), gay men (e.g. *Grindr*) or lesbian women (*e.g. Wapa*, *Greta*), to provide opportunities to meet new people and establish interpersonal relationships beyond traditional face-to-face interactions.

The birth and diffusion of these "dedicated" applications, in addition to the specific advantages we have already mentioned, allow LBG people a further important *benefit*: confidentiality, thanks to which they can control and stem the psychological and social aspects related to the stigmatization of sexual orientation.

The scientific interest in the study of *homosexual sexual scripts* through the internet and social networks represents an innovative strand within Gender Studies, but with many unanswered research questions.

This contribution aims to integrate and compare two analyses on the use of apps for online dating by gays and lesbians and how this use reverberates for the psychological, social and symbolic aspects involved in the process of socialization to sexuality.

The first part, through a literature review, will analyse the concepts of *sexual orientation*, *sexual script* and *sexual market*, fundamental to build an epistemological frame of reference in which to understand and interpret both the results and the conceptual reflections expressed.

The second part will describe the results, related to two research works carried out between 2019 and 2020 in Salerno on young gays and lesbians who make regular use of online dating apps, analysing the psychological, social and symbolic dynamics involved in dating along the online/offline dimension.

Literature Review

The development of homosexual movements and the claims of egalitarian policies in the 1970s favoured the birth and spread of new sociological and psychological theories that undermined the hegemonic vision of sexuality derived from biology and/or psychiatry (Kinsey et al. 1955).

These new theoretical reflections, on the impetus of the processes of normalization of homo-erotic desire, identity self-determination and emancipation from hegemonic heteronormative masculinity, quickly spread both in North

America and Europe, giving rise to the Gay and Lesbians Studies (Altman 1974, Hocquen-ghem 1973, Mieli 1977).

A theoretical, philosophical and sociological debate began on the social representation of homosexuality, sexual identity and the concept of sexual orientation.

Based on these studies, *sexual identity* is today defined as the subjective and individual dimension of *the awareness of being a sexual-erotic agent*. This complex process of constructing meanings and symbols is the result of a dialectic between nature and culture within structured contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1969).

Sexual identity is organized through the interaction of three constitutive dimensions: a) **biological sex**: consisting of the biological and genetic evidence that gives the phenotypical classification of male or female. More specifically, it includes the chromosomal organization and primary and secondary sexual characteristics; b) **gender identity**: the psychological and inner construction of belonging to one or the other social and cultural category in the binary male-female division; c) **gender role**: the complex system of models, beliefs, expectations and behaviours, socially shared by a given culture and ascribable to male or female gender roles (Valerio, Scandura, Amodeo, 2014a, 2014b).

Each culture, therefore, develops a series of *sexual typologies, i.e.* representing patterns of conduct and symbolic resources that are institutionalized, accepted and shared (Schutz 1996).

The individual *is born sexed*, with a predetermined genetic, biological and somatic connotation, but thanks to the process of symbolization and signification he or she *becomes sexual*; this newly acquired construction makes it possible to establish, emotional, social and affective relationships and exchanges (Gagnon and Simon 2003).

Therefore, within this perspective of symbolic construction, there is not just one human sexuality, but *various sexual perspectives*, in which one can express the ways of acting, saying, expressing and feeling one's *sexual body*.

It is important, therefore, to define the concept of **sexual orientation** as emotional, relational and sexual desire/attraction towards people of the opposite sex (*heterosexuality*), of one's own sex (*homosexuality*) or both (*bisexuality*).

Many cultures of modern society are based on *genderist and heteronormative* ideological structures, which regulate relational, social and psychological dynamics on a binary naturalist dichotomous division (male and female), and on a heterosexual sexual orientation, ordered by nature and reproductive function.

In the light of these ideological matrices, LGBT people are often subject to forms of discrimination and social stigmatization and collectively represented as deviant, amoral and unnatural, creating strong psychological, relational and social discomfort.

Gagnon and Simon (1986) have described how interpersonal relationships, and particularly sexual dynamics, are regulated by *sexual scripts* created, consolidated and structured within processes of symbolisation and signification.

The *theory of sexual scripts* was born as a sociological theory of sexuality, harshly criticizing the positivist and functionalist tradition, overcoming the

dichotomous view of gender based on biological evidence and recognizing in sexual scripts an articulated range of behaviours, expectations, beliefs and practices to be adopted in social interactions in specific contexts.

Rinaldi defines sexual scripts as: "cognitive structures produced by the union of different complexes of structured concepts configuring a stereotyped, organized and adequate sequence of actions that resort to certain circumstances, in a given context, to achieve a goal" (Rinaldi 2017).

Sexual scripts are articulated through maps of meanings and behaviours established by the social groups of reference and elaborated by each individual to contextualize and decode their relational and sexual experiences.

Gagnon and Simon (2003) argue that sexual scripts are organized on three specific levels: a) *cultural level*: refers to orientations, cognitive maps and systems of norms and beliefs of reference, within which to act and co-construct meaning; b) *interpersonal level*: refers to the application of cultural scripts through behaviours and attitudes in a given social text or contextual situation; c) *intrapsychic level*: refers to the system of values, beliefs, feelings and emotions of the individual.

Later Gagnon, in collaboration with Laumann (1995), expanded and reorganized the theory of sexual scripts, postulating the theory of sexual markets.

The concept of the sexual market analyses the set of cultural and social structures that can aid or inhibit sexual behaviours and highlights the existence of a "social and relational structure" in which to search for a sexual partner.

Laumann (1995) defines five constitutive elements of sexual markets: a) *social networks*: the network of interpersonal relationships, both real and virtual, within which the subject can begin *partnering* processes. Social networks are generally constituted through affinity parameters, *e.g.* ethnicity, religion, ideology, geographical affiliation, elective affinity, sharing a physical space; b) the *physical space*: consisting of geographical boundaries (real and virtual) within which a process of partnering can be expressed; c) the *internal and external sexual culture*: sexual markets generally have an internal sexual culture related to specific social and cultural groups (*e.g.* ethnic group, religious group), and an external sexual culture related to the combinations of rules, roles and expectations established by the macro-culture to which they belong; d) *sexual scripts*; e) *institutional spheres*: which include religious organizations, the educational and pedagogical system, the Welfare State and the control bodies that regulate social norms and rules regarding morals and social and sexual custom.

It is important to note that there is an important gap in the literature and scientific production on *sexual scripts* and *sexual markets*, as the only studies that have considered non-regulatory sexuality have highlighted how homosexuals, for example, *borrow* symbolic and meaningful co-structures from heterosexuals by reworking them and adapting them to their situations, leaving heteronormative and dichotomous male/female parameters in the background (Bacio and Peruzzi 2017).

With the advent of the New Media the symbolic squares in the sexual markets have expanded, articulated and differentiated, helped by the elimination and sublimation of filters and taboos that previously regulated and inhibited the

contents and the symbolization processes of communication regarding the body and especially the sexual body (Amato et al. 2014).

Social Media, for example, represent spaces and tools of socialization, which convey and promote communication processes and represent new communication opportunities for sexuality, for the construction of new social representations of eroticism and new sexual scripts.

Within the wide range of socialisation applications and tools, the most widespread Social Media (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*) have been joined by applications for online dating, both for heterosexual and LGBT people.

These applications are *new sexual markets* and represent an important turning point in the socialization scenarios for people with non-heteronormative identity and sexual orientation, marking a new perspective both in the construction of meanings and in the birth and consolidation of new relational and sexual practices.

Specifically, two widely used applications, Grindr and Wapa, guarantee, besides the peculiar advantages of Social Media (gratuitousness and immediacy), other fundamental aspects in the new processes of socialization and the new sexual markets: *anonymity*, which allows one not to openly manifest their identity, to assume other identities to preserve their offline privacy; and *geolocation*, which allows one to search and establish affective and/or sexual relationships in their surroundings or a specific area of reference, precisely to regulate the personal level of confidentiality and privacy.

There is a research gap in the scientific literature on the use of online dating apps as a new way of socializing and as new symbolic places in sexual markets. Existing research refers to the study of sexual behaviour of gay men, especially to describe medical-health and epidemiological aspects. Halloway *et al.* (2014) have studied the relationship between the use of the Grindr app and the sexual behaviour and practices related to AIDS prevention and infection in the US.

The data show that a significant percentage of users (about 33%) used the application to search for new sexual partners, while users with an affective and relational purpose were less than 15%. Moreover, the qualitative analysis of the conversation with the research participants showed that there was less attention paid to the measures for preventing HIV infection among Grindr users than non-users (Duncan and Goedel 2015).

Rivière *et al.* (2015) described how using Apps is a way to map and outline the visibility of the LBG community within society, and how the massive use of online dating Apps has diverted the main sexual market for gay men to virtuality, excluding lesbian women from this mechanism. Consequently, the scientific interest in the online sex market in Women Studies represents an innovative field of investigation.

Hancock (2011) in his contributions highlighted how homosexual women, compared to men, find few spaces to express and claim their identities and their principles of self-determination, connoting a hegemonic male presence also in homosexuality.

The reflections on imposed roles and the adoption of gender and sexual identity of lesbian women of the fourth period of Feminism argue that the chauvinist and heteronormative society considers female homosexuality as a sexual practice and

not as a recognizable and distinctive sexual identity. Therefore, a devaluation and subordination matrix emerges even within the description of deviance, recognizing an identity state to male homosexuality and relegating female homosexuality to a mere sexual practice (Bunch 2000, Rich 1980, Connell 1983).

Recently some studies have described how social media re-produce the sexual behaviours and sexual scripts typical of the gender models prevailing in real life and the LGBT community.

Corbisiero (2010), for example, through a survey carried out in Campania on a sample of homosexual people, highlighted how sexuality represents a central aspect of life for 75% and how fidelity and affective monogamy represent important values for 73% of lesbian women interviewed while only 34% of gay men refer to a stable and lasting relationship.

In accordance with Corbisiero (2010), Bacio and Peruzzi (2017) have shown, in a recent study on the use of Grindr, how the online can represent a virtual "door" to new connections with an open evolutionary relational trajectory in a continuum that goes from the possibility of sex only to the possibility of a new knowledge/friendship/relation.

In the following section, we will analyse, interpret and compare the psychological, relational, social and symbolic aspects highlighted through the use of online dating apps of young gays and lesbians from Salerno, trying to identify common aspects, similarities and differences on the construction of sexual scripts, the organization and construction of meaning around sexual markets and the concepts of masculinity and femininity (Simon and Gagnon 1984: 2003, Connell 1989, Masullo and Giannola 2017, Bacio and Peruzzi 2017).

Methodology

The research takes into consideration the process of socialization to sexuality, the construction of sexual scripts and how to access the virtual sexual market of two different target groups: gay men and lesbian women living in Salerno and its province, in the Campania Region, in Italy, from October 2019 to February 2020.

The analysis tries to answer the following research questions:

- How do the relationships experienced through virtual sex markets outlined using online dating apps (Grindr for gay men, Wapa for lesbian women) contribute to structuring the experience of one's sexuality, outlining sexual scripts?
- How can these new socializing tools represent resources and opportunities to conceive identity constructions in terms of masculinity and femininity in gay and lesbian people? (Connell 1996);
- what are the main similarities and differences between gays and lesbians concerning the use of online dating tools? Can these similarities and differences be ascribed to different ways of living one's gender and sexual identity?

The analysis is an exploratory survey, highlighting the limits of the methodological approach, including the resistance of homosexual people to be

involved and to explicitly argue the dimensions related to their identity, sexuality and sexual practices and experiences.

The strategy used is, therefore, a netnographic approach[1] with a combination of online/offline qualitative techniques, including covert observation of users in a virtual environment and semi-structured offline interviews with privileged witnesses of the examined context.

For the collection of data in covert mode, we built an observation grid taking into consideration dimensions such as:

- chosen nicknames: distinguishing between *proper (first) names* and *pseudonyms*;
- profile pictures characteristics: distinguishing between *identity photos* and *non-identity photos*;
- socio-biographical information: understood as height, weight and place of residence, and distinguishing between *present* and *absent*;
- types of presentations: highlighting recurring themes, ways of representing the Self and the search characteristics of the partner(s).

We analysed 150 users for each the Grindr and the Wapa application.

The semi-structured interview, instead, tried to investigate the *identity dimensions* in relation to the use of the App and the processes of self-definition and sexuality; the *media consumption* in terms of usage mode, frequency and profile characteristics; *sociality* in terms of lived experiences, friendships, love and continuity between online meetings and offline relationships; *discrimination* suffered in the online environment for characteristics related to one's gender and sexual identity; *evaluations* on the use of the App as a vehicle for socializing, on models of construction of masculinity and femininity.

Online dating applications are widely used as a new communicative space within which to create relational possibilities, opportunities for socialisation and intersubjectivity. Within the offer of social networks for homosexual people *Grindr (for gay men)* and Wapa *(for lesbian women)* represent the most used applications. These apps share the fundamental aspects characterizing the diffusion of an application: they are *free* and *geo-localized*, so they allow instant and free access to a *possibility of socialization and relationality* unimaginable before their appearance.

Another fundamental aspect, which represents two sides of the same coin, is the *preservation of memory*, a function that, on the one hand, allows to create a chronology of one's interpersonal contacts, and on the other, undermines the assumption of confidentiality, since this memory, by preserving itself, exposes people to the risks connected to the diffusion of their online/offline data.

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[1]We can therefore define netnography as a qualitative research approach that transposes the ethnographic research techniques developed for the study of physical communities to that of *audiences in digital spaces* grown through computer-mediated communications in order to study cultures (Kozinets 2015, Masullo *et al.* 2020a).

Moreover, the use of an App, allows an unlimited number of inter-personal contacts (chat) through the creation of an account or a virtual identity that can be enriched, built ad hoc, enhanced with more and more specific details (photos, preferences, quotes, content).

The peculiar differences of the two applications essentially lie in the different degree of specificity and quality of the information provided. Grindr allows the possibility to include or exclude elements of one's identity such as *ethnicity*, *body type* or *sexual role*, it has a list of preferences on users' profiles, it allows to block undesirable users, it also dedicates a central position in one's presentation to sexuality and sexual preferences. Wapa, on the other hand, while preserving some features of Grindr, (such as the possibility to block unwanted users), does not provide the possibility to add profile entries related to sexuality or sexually desired practices.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the profiles, and the comparative analysis carried out between the sample of gay men and lesbian women shows an *early* functional access for gays (18 years) compared to lesbian women who approach the application around the age of 25. This is partly explained by the time gap between gays and lesbians in sexual identity awareness. Women have more difficulty in understanding their sexual orientation, in our opinion, also due to an unavailability of existing and legitimate patterns and models of signification of the lesbian culture in the offline environment, also due to the action of a double social stigma, as women and as lesbians. For lesbians, the dimension of identity and sexual orientation is stabilized at an older age and with a greater experiential awareness (Chetcuti 2013).

There is a greater predisposition of gays to express the *bodily, erotic and sexual aspects* compared to the *character and psychological aspects* that instead represent the prevalent expression of lesbian women, in line with the literature that sees women interested in interpersonal relationships and friendship compared to gay men who use the digital tool (app) as a new mode to access the sexual market (Masullo and Gianola 2017).

Finally, references to external social media are a prevailing practice in gays compared to lesbians, confirming the dimension of invisibility and anonymity of homosexual women compared to gay men (Bertolazzi and Esposito 2015).

Table 1. *Analysis of the Profiles*

Dimension	Grindr	Wapa
Predominant age	55% (18-30)	43% (25-30)
Predominant type of characteristics	Physical	Psychological
References to social profiles (Facebook, Instagram)	Average frequency	Low frequency

The analysis of the Profile Pictures allowed to confirm aspects highlighted by the general profile analysis. Invisibility and anonymity are also central

aspects in the analysis of Profile Pictures, in fact personal profile photos comprise 55% of gay users' profiles compared to 33% of lesbian women's profiles. Also the aspect related to physicality and prevalent erotic habitus in gay men compared to lesbian women is confirmed by the analysis of the photos, in fact it is on average frequent in gays (35%) compared to a low frequency in lesbian women (15%). Finally, both categories refer to images that refer to the most widespread homosexual subcultures in the LGBT world (such as the bear culture for gays and the dark culture for lesbians).

Table 2. *Analysis of Profile Pictures*

Type of profile image	Grindr	Wapa
Face	55%	33%
Body parts	35%	15%
Images related to LG subcultures	15%	15%

In line with the analysis of the profiles, the presentations confirm a series of significant aspects: if gay men emphasize more the physical and bodily aspects, lesbian women highlight the aspects related to psychological characteristics; in the Grindr application the characteristics related to sexual practices (such a*s master, slave, no sex, looking for versatile*) are more evident than in the Wapa application, in order to create *coordinate frames* for sexual scripts, to facilitate the exchange and languages within the sexual market.

Moreover, gays seem more critical than lesbians about how to use and enjoy the application: this data can be read because of the scarce opportunities for L women to have offline meeting spaces. In the examined context, the chat for women, unlike men, represents an indispensable tool for socializing sexuality and learning useful sexual scripts in an online environment.

Table 3. *Analysis of Profile Presentations*

Dimension	Grindr	Wapa
Physical aspects (description with reference to physical and erotic characteristics)	High frequency (*e.g.: Height, Dark, Blond, Well-endowed, XXL)*	Low frequency (*e.g.: Blonde, Sexy, Curvy)*
Psychological aspects (presentation with reference to emotional and personal dimensions)	Average frequency (*e.g.: Sweet, Strong, Introvert, Cheerful)*	Average frequency (*e.g.: Friendly, Sweet, Affectionate, Lovely)*
Intellectual and cultural aspects	Low frequency (*e.g.: Quotes from books, poems, etc)*	Mid-High frequency (*e.g.: Quotes from books, poems, etc)*
Aspects linked to gender characteristics	High frequency (*esempio: Masculine, Bear, Teddy)*	High frequency (*e.g: Feminine, Dame, Femme, Lady)*
Aspects linked to preferences in sexual practices	High frequency (*e.g.: Looking for versatile, No fenimine, looking for Master, looking for Slave)*	None
Aspects critical towards the application	Average frequency (*e.g.: This is a whorehouse; the chat is just for sex)*	Low frequency (*e.g.: Wapa Hell; I hate monosyllabic people)*

We interviewed 40 gay men and 40 lesbian women[2]. The analysis of the interviews allowed us to outline the functional accesses through the use of the App, highlighting similarities and differences.

For gay men, the most recurrent sexual script emphasizes the hegemonic masculinity model, a masculinity to be constantly confirmed through more and more sexual intercourse according to the stereotype of the *predator*. The search for sex is, therefore, the main reason for using the dating app, relationships are shorter and often cease if the transition from virtual to offline reality does not occur. Sentences such as "no time wasters" are frequent:

> *"When I want sex, I know that if I open the app and schedule a date for the next day I must be in bad luck. In 80% of the cases I meet and sleep with someone the same evening! Practical and fast!" (Giovanni, 30)*

However, although in a residual form, some gay men, especially young men, use the App as a *testing ground* where they can experiment with aspects related to their sexual identity and create new friendships, role models or where they can find information on protection practices and tools:

> *"I felt the need to subscribe to the App, just to understand more. I was curious to get to know someone, you have to start with someone!" (Luigi, 19)*

Most respondents highlighted a number of long-term advantages of the virtual tool, such as the obsolescence of face-to-face communication strategies:

> *"In my opinion, it's rather difficult today to meet someone in real life. Personally, I met two of my previous boyfriends [through the app]. Is it a must to use apps, where do you find in real life the possibility to meet, date and fall in love with a gay person? Life goes fast, we missed practice!" (Daniele, 29)*

L women, instead, use the App mainly as an emancipation tool in the absence of other physical and real spaces where they can meet and explore the L universe.

> *"It started as a curiosity, for some time I had some strange fantasies, I saw of this app on the internet and downloaded it. I didn't know where to start..." (Sara, 33)*

Women often tend to prefer chats, as in offline reality women in the L community get to know each other through friendship chains, with the limit of greater control over their sexuality and exposure to social judgment by other women, confirming the importance of anonymity:

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[2]The socio-biographical characteristics of the respondents, (referring to the users of both applications) they are between 18 and 50 years old. They are residents of the city of Salerno and province. 61% of them has a high school diploma, 22% a university degree or other postgraduate qualification, while 17% is under-educated (no higher than eight grade).

"The app ensures that I remain anonymous, you know, I'm not out of the closet, I don't even know if I'm really a lesbian, why create a fuss without a reason? It's fine for now... then we'll see!" (Gina, 24).

Finally, lesbian women prefer the search for relationships and friendships over sex-aimed relationships. This aspect could also mean adhering to a stereotyped view of *womanhood*, which classifies in a negative way those who freely live their sexuality and detach it from emotional aspects:

"I'm not looking for sex, I'm not a whore! I hate whores, they sleep with everyone. I'm looking for a sincere relationship, I've had too many disappointments... I'd rather be alone..." (Laura, 29)

Virtuality, therefore, represents immediacy, gratuitousness, and offer for gay men, while for lesbian women it represents of reserve-heartedness, anonymity and continuity.

There are, therefore, references to the models of social and mental representations of gender and relational practices, which confirm the hegemonic model of masculinity in which the man is seen as a cunning predator and a stereotyped image of the female universe anchored to relationality, knowledge, temporality and the construction of an interpersonal plot.

The analysis of the interviews also revealed constructions of intra-group discrimination in both gay men and lesbian women.

As far as gay men are concerned, highlighted discriminations refer to dimensions such as *age*: people over the age of 55 are seen as individuals outside the sex market and not selected within it:

"Ah I'll tell you what, I block over-55 a priori, it's not out of malice but I don't like wrinkly skin or white hair, I prefer the 18-35 bracket maximum!" (Roberto, 25)

Moreover, the exaltation of the aspects related to the *gender model of reference* are discriminated, in fact there is an important contrast between extreme machismo and effeminate models:

"I think there has to be some balance, I can't stand fairies! Those gays too effeminate, let's be clear if I wanted someone like that would go with a woman, right? I like balance!" (Silvio, 23).

Finally, a discriminatory component emerges towards transgender people, mainly MtoF (male to famale) because they are considered a voice out of the chorus and not adhering to the context and the peculiar use of the application:

"Honestly, it's not discrimination, but what's the point of a transgender joining Grind? Why doesn't she join Tinder or Badoo? What do you want here? I think they are confused people, they want to be women only when it's convenient" (Vincenzo, 28)

Similarly, the analysis of the conversations of interviews with lesbian women identifies forms of intra-group discrimination. A first discrimination lies in the

expression of gender characteristics, for example the too masculine aspect of some categories of lesbians (e.g. Tomboys) is strongly stigmatized:

> *"I don't like women who are too masculine, butches! I honestly find them vulgar and boorish as I find males vulgar and boorish!" (Luna, 24).*

A further form of discrimination is directed towards those who use the application as a means of "procuring" sexual experiences, in line with that social and mental representation of female relationships that sees them disconnected from physicality and sexuality:

> *"The chat room is a whorehouse, they create closed micro-groups that have sexual relationships with each other, honestly it sucks!" (Greta, 20).*

Also in lesbian women there is a discrimination towards MtoF trangenders because they are perceived as non-women, as a separate category, with less erotic habitus and therefore out of the prevailing logic and preferences of lesbian women:

> *"For me a transsexual is not a woman, personally I see them as people stuck between two worlds, I would never be attracted to a transsexual, being a woman is another thing..." (Katia, 33).*

Conclusions

Social Media, current virtual communication tools, online dating applications, represent new communication spaces and, consequently, new sexual markets where new sexual scripts can be *staged*.

The direct observation of profiles in a virtual environment has made it possible to highlight how the same social, mental, logical and cultural representations are reproduced in chats or online as in face-to-face interactions and off-line reality.

The analysis and comparisons of the use of Apps for online dating for gay men and lesbian women in Campania show a different functional use.

Concerning the first research question, we found that if it is true that for gay men the App is mainly an *additional* tool to fulfil the need to live their sexuality, it is also true that it also reinforces some stereotypes related to the *Mediterranean homosexual model*, where sexual roles build coordinates for the selection of partners with respect to gender expressiveness (for example active = male, passive = female) (Taurino 2016).

For lesbian women, no doubt, chats are fundamental in this context due to a double stigma, which hinders women to live their sexuality publicly. The Wapa application, therefore, helps not only in meeting other women, but in learning a language, jargon, sexual scripts, which they cannot intercept elsewhere, since the context on lesbianism has matured a heteronormative stereotyped imaginary (shared by some lesbian women) that confuses the practice of lesbianism as friendship between women or that sees it only as a sexual fantasy. Ultimately, women lack terms

to "express themselves" as lesbian and to live as "lesbians" more than gay men (Masullo and Coppola 2020b).

Our contribution would confirm the current the literature (Whitley and Kite 1995, Bacioa and Peruzzi 2017) that underline how homosexuals borrow heterosexuals' sexual scripts, then rework them and adapt them to their situations and "*their rules*".

The future developments of this research can be many, such as to further explore the link existing between the App and the processes of socialization to sexuality for *bisexual* people (who use Apps for heterosexual encounters) and transgender people (both MtoF and FtoM).

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