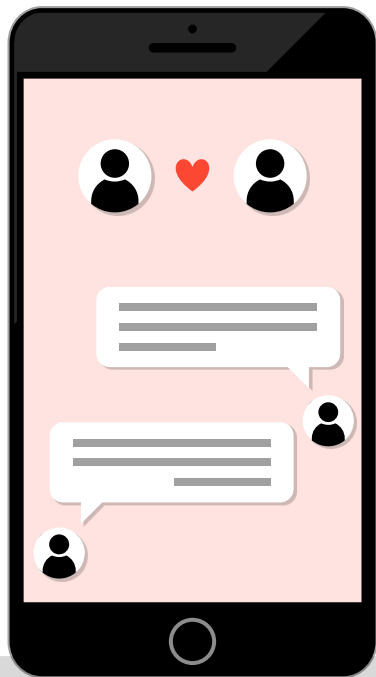




II International Congress on Media,
Gender and Sexualities:
Representations, Literacies and
Audiences
Benasque, June 10th 2025

"TO BE QUEER, TO BE IN DATING APPS, TO BE QUEER IN DATING APPS"

**Biographical Queerness and the Creation of Safety
Strategies in Online Dating behind Stigma and Fears of
Italian Queer Young Adults**

Rachele Reschiglian - Università degli Studi di Padova (ITA)
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Trigger warnings

(Sexual) violence
Gender-based violence
Homophobia - Transphobia





Context

“Young LGBTQ+ people and digital intimacy” project – Monash University & University of Padova

Governmental Understanding

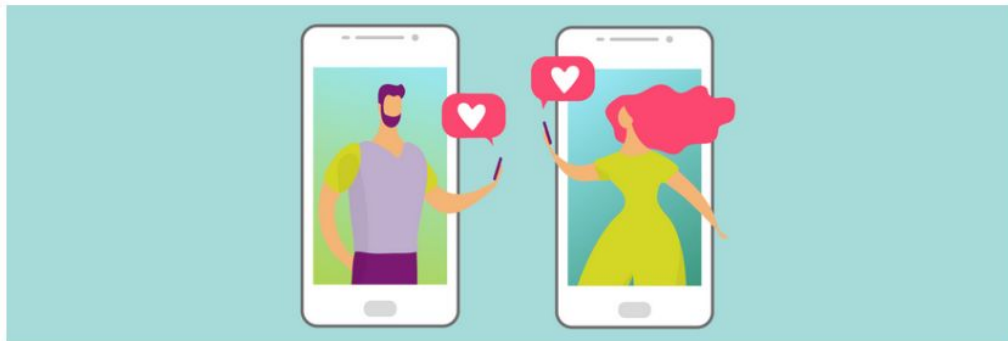
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- GDPR (EU) – one request in 2020 to Match Group about privacy & online safety in dating apps
 - Garante per la protezione dei dati personali (ITA) – guidelines about online dating and privacy

Cultural Understanding

- Right-wing / anti-gender movements – homophobia (Trappolin, 2024; Lavizzari & Prearo, 2018)
 - Dating apps & relational filter bubbles (Parisi & Comunello, 2019)
 - negotiating gender norms (Comunello et al., 2019)
 - young adults (Scarcelli, 2020) → stigma
 - LGBTQ+ (Coppola & Masullo, 2021; Parisi & Comunello, 2019)
- 

Quando inseguì Cupido online, fai attenzione alla privacy!

Dating online e protezione dei dati



Vuoi usare o già usi siti o applicazioni per cercare la tua “anima gemella” online? Hai pensato alla tua privacy?

Sei consapevole che, per quanto utili, i servizi di dating on line possono raccogliere, trattare ed eventualmente diffondere varie informazioni che ti riguardano, anche di carattere molto sensibile? Parliamo ad esempio delle tue abitudini sociali, di alcuni aspetti molto privati del tuo vissuto emotivo e caratteriale, dei tuoi orientamenti sessuali, della tua rete di relazioni e della natura di tali relazioni, compresi, quindi, eventuali tradimenti...

<https://www.garanteprivacy.it/temi/internet-e-nuove-tecnologie/dating-online>



GAPP

GARANTE
PER LA PROTEZIONE
DEI DATI PERSONALI

Inserire il testo o il doc web

CERCA

I miei diritti

Imprese ed enti

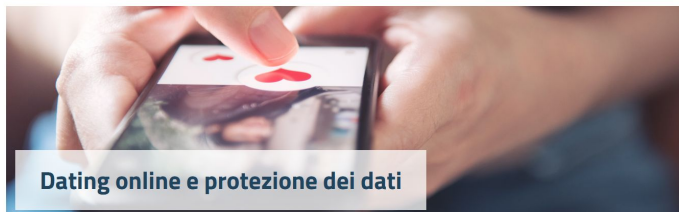
L'Autorità

Temi

Normativa e provvedimenti

News e comunicazione

Amministrazione Trasparente



GARANTE
PER LA PROTEZIONE
DEI DATI PERSONALI

APProva di privacy

I suggerimenti del Garante per tutelare la tua privacy quando usi app

Alcuni spunti di riflessione



Se usi una app per il dating (appuntamenti online), ricorda di informarti su come verranno trattate e conservate le informazioni che ti riguardano, e a chi verranno eventualmente resi noti aspetti della tua vita privata che potresti voler mantenere riservati.

Research Questions

<u>RQ1</u>	What risks and fears are faced by LGBTQ+ Italian Young Adults in online dating apps and experiences?
<u>RQ2</u>	How do LGBTQ+ Italian Young Adults negotiate and manage those risks and fears in online dating apps and experiences?



01

Theoretical & Literature Background





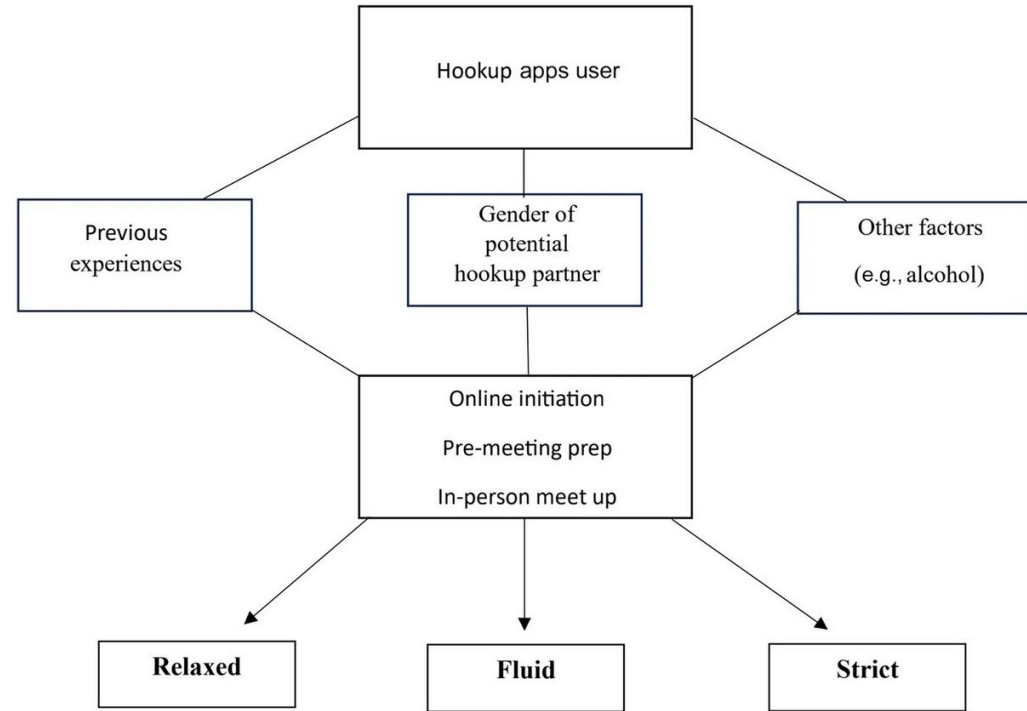
- **Cyber-queer spaces** (Robards et al., 2018; 2021) → online spaces for young LGBTQ+ : connection, inclusion vs isolation, exclusion & harassment
- **Dating apps & LGBTQ+ identities:** resources for negotiating societal norms, stigma, and risk mitigation (Byron et al., 2021; Harkness et al., 2021)
- **Safety in dating apps for LGBTQ+** → Negotiating surveillance and etiquette (Byron & Albury, 2018) + Safety Spectrum Theory (Babcock et al., 2024)



Safety Spectrum Theory Model

Babcock et al. (2024)

- **strict:** follows strict personal rules and guidelines when apps users meet with potential online hookup partners
- **fluid:** fewer rigid practices and willing to yield to more situational compromises
- **relaxed:** may not engage in safety protocols



02

Methodology

- 
- 8 focus groups (4 offline, 4 online)
 - In the whole peninsula (NE; NW; Centrum; South)
 - October 2023-January 2024
 - snowball sampling
 - 39 self-identified LGBTQ+ Italian young adults (19-35 years old) who used/were using dating apps
 - Topic about Queer Online Dating Practices
- 

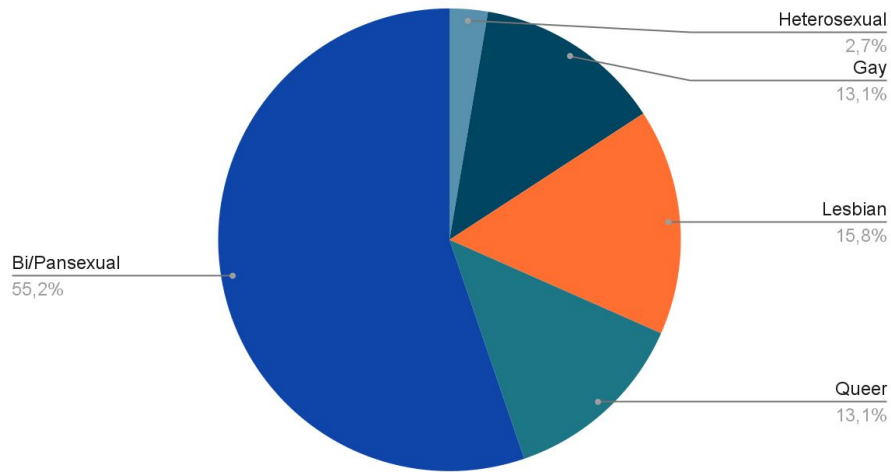
Population

Snowball sampling

NW: 23% - NE: 28% - C: 26% - S: 23%

GENDER	Number	Percentage
Female	20 (14 bi/pan; 4 lesbians; 1 n/a)	51%
Male	7 (5 gays, 2 bi)	18%
Transgender/ Nonbinary	12 (5 queers, 4 bi/pan; 2 lesbians; 1 hetero)	31%
<i>Total</i>	39	100%

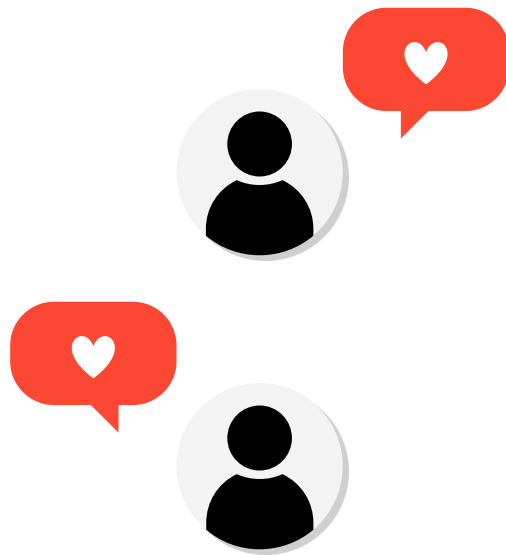
Sexual Orientation





03

Findings



Risks & Fears – Based on gender and/or sexuality of the user



Men	• Risks of dick pics on Grindr • Catfishing → recognition of a male privilege when navigating (online) dating experiences → perception of safer experience on Tinder rather than Grindr for gays
Women	• Risk and fear of aggressive and violent behaviours from cishet men to women • Catfishing • Fetishisation of bi/pansexual women and lesbians by cishet men • Risk and fear to meet men that are using the categorisation of gender-diverse/woman in the app to get access to women on app
Transgender/ Nonbinary	• Risk and fear of Chasers • Catfishing • Risk and fear of violent acts from cis men • Fear of being reported as “not in the right platform” and getting violent acts from men on Grindr • If transgender and non-binary presentation is not “passing”, fear of not getting romantic dates → perception of safer experience on Tinder rather than Grindr for transmen and nonbinary masc presenting





“sono bisessuale e queer però passo molto da ragazza eterosessuale e quindi tipo su Tinder ho entrambe le cose però quando **ho approcci da uomini eterosessuali ho a volte un approccio molto molto aggressivo sicuramente**”

“I’m bisexual and queer, but I often pass as a straight girl, so on Tinder, I choose both things [as categories].

However, when **I get approached by straight men, their approach is sometimes very, very aggressive for sure**”

— Martina (queer, bisexual)





Ho riscontrato un altro problema grosso grosso grosso grosso... gli uomini online, **io ho impostato il filtro solo donne su tutte le app che utilizzo perché ho spesso proprio il terrore di essere contattata da uomini, della loro invasività** e ovviamente parliamo di un campio generale, parlo dell'uomo cis nel come l'ha formato la società

"I've encountered another huge, huge, huge problem... men online. **I've set the filter to 'women only' on all the apps I use because I often feel an actual fear of being contacted by men, of their invasiveness.** And of course, I'm speaking in general terms—I'm referring to cis men as shaped by society"

— Schiorro (non-binary, queer)





General “Strategies”

(regardless of gender and/or sexuality of the users)

- Feeling safer when on Tinder the **profile is verified**
- Choosing **specific filters** (gender, orientation, age...)
- **Studying the BIO and pictures of the profile** to get as much information as possible to check compatibility
- Looking for **social media accounts linked**
- **Hierarchy of intimacies** (Scarcelli, 2022) and **rituals of transition** (Broeker, 2021) □ from dating app to social media (Instagram) to Whatsapp
- **Learning by doing and asking peers** how to get safer when sharing sensitive contents



In-app

Multi-app (external)

Offline

They report that there are no concrete strategies to protect the fear and risks, but a lot of “sixth sense” when looking at the pictures, but limits the experience

“you know when it’s not safe [...] it’s survival matter”

(Italia, trans masc non-binary, bisexual)





Biographical Queerness – Risks/Fears & Strategies

- **To be “outed”**, if people are not out in small (home)towns, with family members and friends (fear of word-of-mouth from known people)
- **Stigma of using dating apps and being “non-normative”**
- **Being report** as non-conforming to the app (transmen)

“to be queers, to be in dating apps, to be queer in dating apps” - Martina (Queer, Bisex)

→ Changes throughout the biographical queerness (in-the-closet vs fully out)

→ In the gender transition-journey



Strict

Hide the profile
Do not use the app when home
Choose generic dating app
Do not put photos or socials in BIO

Fluid

Choose specific/sectoral apps
Disclose specific parts in BIO strategically

Relaxed

No strategies



“quando ero a (piccola città del nord italia), lo disattivavo”

[...]

(piccola città del nord italia) è piccolina, provinciale, e quindi alla fine la gente è quella lì; quindi maschi ancora ancora, però anche quello mi stava mi dava abbastanza fastidio magari trovare il compagno delle elementari o quello con cui hai fatto basket dieci anni prima. Ma soprattutto spogliarsi nel mm con le ragazze quindi ah ok è bisessuale, che ora non ho più problemi a dirlo, i miei lo sanno, però è come se quella parte di me bambina che ha vissuto in quella realtà, quella parte lì mm mi va bene che non lo sappiano, non so come dirvi. [...] E basta, quindi direi sì, **il mio timore più grande era che mi sgamassero le persone**”

"When I was in (small town in northern Italy), I would deactivate it." [...] "(Small town in northern Italy) is small, provincial, so in the end, it's always the same people around. So, with guys, I could still manage, but it still bothered me quite a bit, like, to come across a classmate from elementary school or someone I played basketball with ten years earlier. But especially exposing myself on the app with girls, so like, 'Oh, she's bisexual,' which now I don't have a problem saying—my family knows, I mean. But it's like that part of me, the child who grew up in that place, that part of me, mm, is fine with them not knowing, I don't know how to explain it. [...] **And that's it, so yes, I'd say my biggest fear was that people would find out.**"

— Feffa (female, bisexual)



Fluid

"io mi identifico anche come poliamorosa e non mi sentirei mai di scrivere su Tinder poliamorosa, mentre invece su bumble mi sento già più a mio agio a scriverlo anche solo nella bio. Poi non so se ha senso o no scriverlo però in ogni caso su Tinder non me la sono mai sentita di scriverlo [...] **dato che appunto è da poco che ho intrapreso questo percorso poliamoroso,** mi sono chiesta quand'è il momento di dirlo ad una persona che stai conoscendo? Prima di conoscerla? E quindi non ho ancora capito qual è il modo giusto."

"I also identify as polyamorous, but I would never feel comfortable writing 'polyamorous' on Tinder, while on Bumble I already feel more at ease including it, even if just in my bio. I'm not sure if it even makes sense to write it, but in any case, I've never felt comfortable writing it on Tinder. **Since I've only recently started this polyamorous journey,** I've been wondering when is the right time to tell someone you're getting to know? Before meeting them? So, I still haven't figured out the right way to do it"

— Ginevra (woman, pansexual)



"a livello di timore e difficoltà anche legate alla tecnologia in realtà ne ho avute e ne ho ben poco, **nel senso che avendo fatto coming out prima di iscrivermi sul sito non mi sono mai fatto grossi problemi a mostrarmi**"

"In terms of fears and challenges, even those related to technology, I've actually had very few. **Since I came out before signing up on the site, I never really had major concerns about showing myself.**"

— Cepuka (man, gay)

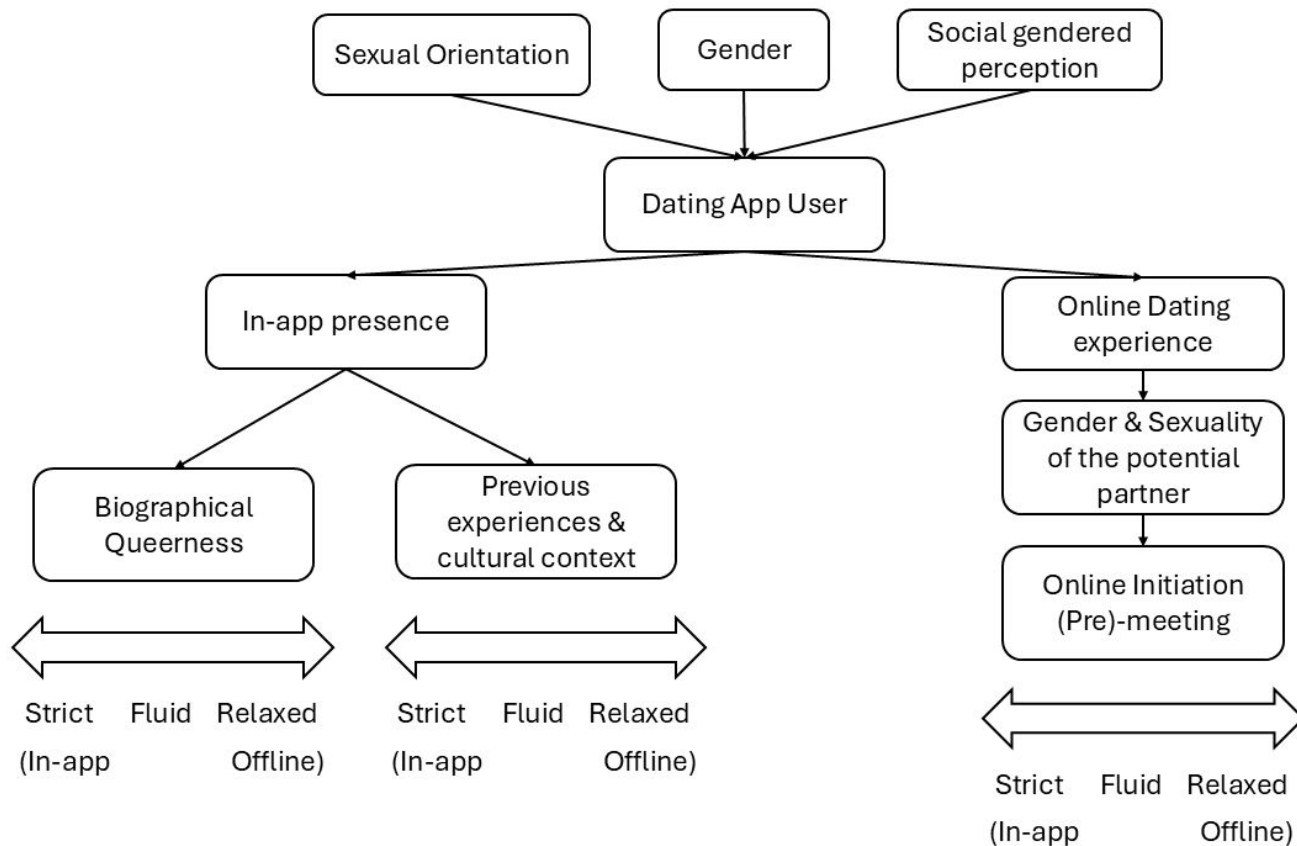


04

Conclusions



Extended Safety Spectrum Theory Model



Upcoming next...

“To be Queer, To be in Dating Apps, To be Queer in Dating Apps”: Biographical Queerness and the Creation of Safety Strategies in Online Dating behind Stigma and Fears of Italian LGBTQ+ Young Adults

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Mediascape Journal



Thank you!

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