(Re)Constructing gender and sexuality in and through mobile media.

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Call for Paper

The connection between digital technologies, gender and sexuality has a long history and feminist theories of gender and technology have come a long way over the last forty years (Wajcman 2007; Burgess et al. 2016). If the approach of the second-wave feminism considered technology mainly as a reproduction of patriarchy, the 1990s scholars started to celebrate digital technologies as liberator for women. This gap between technophobia and technophilia has been filled by the recent feminist and media scholars that produced an important number of studies that, in one hand, are more critical about technoscience and, in the other hand, are aware of its potential to open up new gender dynamics (Mowlabocus 2010; Light, Fletcher, & Adam 2008). Furthermore, the most recent studies focus on the mutual shaping of gender and technology, underlining how neither gender nor technology is taken to be pre-existing, nor is the relationship between them immutable (Van Doorn and Van Zoonen 2008; Krijnen and Van Bauwel 2022).

In its evolution, the field related to digital media, gender and sexuality touched different and important topics: the intertwine between technologies and bodies (Nakamura 2002; Lupton 2015), how communication technologies have been gendered through their social uses (Shade 2007), how people play with their identities in the digital environments (Turkle, 1995), the connection between online and offline spaces (Campbell 2004; Herring – Stoerger 2014), the sexism in the online interactions (Kendall 2002), the cyberqueer spaces (Wakeford 1997), the different approaches to cybersex (Waskul 2003), the online pornography (Atwood 2010), the representation of femininities (Cladeira et al. 2018), etc.

Nowadays, the studies connected to gender, sexuality and digital media focus on so called platform society (Van Dijck, Poell, De Waal 2018) with a specific attention to the algorithms and affordances (Shaw and Sender, 2016; Saka 2020). All these studies shows that digital media could reproduce and reinforce the most conventional (and hegemonic) social logic connected to gender and sexuality, favouring some users at the expense of others (young people, women, non-binary people, LGBTQIA+ community, black people, etc.) (eg. Noble 2018), but that they can also help users to perform different gender identities and practices or challenging more conservative vision of gender and sexuality.

A good point of observation of the intertwining between gender, sexuality and the platform society is represented by the use, the design and the creation of mobile applications (m-apps). According to a report by Statista (2021), 218 billion apps were downloaded from Google Play and the App Store (Apple) in 2020. The massive use of m-apps in different categories, from social platforms to dating and gaming, health, fitness and self-tracking apps, suggests that people are increasingly using apps to connect with others and interact with multiplatform content. As a result, these mobile technologies have become an indispensable part of life as an extension of the self (Drusian, Magaudda, Scarcelli 2022). In this sense, people's use and different appropriations of mobile apps are essential to understanding how they challenge or constrain their personal experiences, particularly regarding how they (re)negotiate their sexual and gender identities (Lupton 2015).

Indeed, how feminist scholarship has highlighted, gender and sexuality are likely to be challenged, (re)constructed and transformed (also) using m-apps (Fotopoulou 2016; MacLeod et al. 2019; Ringrose 2013).

Therefore, it is important questioning how gender and sexuality are constructed in media production and consumption identifying dominant ideas and discourses and how symbolic materials are outcomes of social arrangements that legitimize an essential social division.

Understanding technology as producing meaning, subjectivity, and agency shaped by power relations and adopting a critical perspective of contemporary digital media, this special issue invites scholars to analyse mobile apps affordances, grammars, platform politics and content, as well as their uses, appropriations and embodiment, in order to make sense on how they are shaping normativity and also challenging traditional gender practices and identities.

This special issue welcomes theoretical, empirical and methodological original manuscripts that use qualitative, quantitative or mixed methodologies and focus, not exclusively, on these topics:

- Do m-apps uses challenge traditional gender practices and identities?

- How do m-apps affordances and grammars convey or challenge binary gender dynamics?

- To what extent mediated interfaces reproduce or challenge normative imaginaries of gender?

- How do gender identity and/or performances vary across different m-apps?

- What are the legal implications connected to the m-apps in relation to gender identity and performances.

- To what extent do uses intertwine with the affordances of these apps?

- How do gender identities and practices are negotiated and imagined in user experiences of mobile apps?

- What kind of representations of gender and sexuality are shown by m-apps' design?

- How m-apps reinforce normative representations of practices and identities?

- How is it possible to work on m-apps, gender and sexuality from a methodological point of view?

- What are the challenges (methodological and ethical) of studying the intertwining between gender, sexuality and mobile apps?

Contributions should follow the "Guidelines for the authors": https://riviste.unige.it/doc_about_gender/authors_guidelines_AG_dec19.pdf
They should therefore be between 5000 and 8000 words (bibliography excluded), be written in one of the following three languages (Italian, English, Spanish) and be accompanied by: title in English, a short abstract in English (maximum length: 150 words), some keywords in English (from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 5). All texts should then be transmitted in a format compatible with Windows systems (.doc or .rtf), following the instructions provided by the Peer Review Process. In this regard, see the guidelines of the Journal: https://riviste.unige.it/index.php/aboutgender/about

Time schedule:

The deadline for the received articles is January 15th, 2023.
The notification of the acceptance of the articles will be sent by late February 2023.
The issue will be published in late May 2023.

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