

Transdisciplinarity and Globalized Digital Technology: The Case of “Blued”

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Abstract

While many scholars insist on sealed specializations, the field of global studies posits a complexity that requires cross-disciplinary expertise. Is this prioritization of transdisciplinarity for global studies necessary? The question is relevant to the debate on the degree to which the phenomenon denoted by the umbrella term “globalization” can be seen as the extension or re-casting of previously existing processes and phenomena or as a qualitatively different reality which is “sui generis,” of a different kind to that which went before. This latter argument can be strengthened if new realities of a globalized nature have a degree of complexity which are unprecedented. This paper argues that dating applications (or apps) with global positioning technology present a striking example of “complexification,” as they have a level of complexity not seen heretofore in quotidian social interactions. This paper presents data from a pilot study to evaluate the complexity of one particular dating application, the China-based dating application for LGBT people, “Blued.” It shows that only high degrees of inter-disciplinary study and analysis will be able to comprehend the layers of complexity involved. Findings may aid policy-makers to formulate appropriate policies of regulation.

Key words: global society; complexification; technologies; multi-disciplinary; sexuality; dating applications.

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In his introductory volume on global studies, Steger (2017) argues that trans-disciplinarity is a key conceptual pillar of the discipline. This paper seeks to support this position by engaging with issues raised by the information and communication technology revolution of recent years. This is of interest in the exploration of the nature of globalization itself, a question that constitutes a major field of interest within academic scholarship. A key question is whether or not the scale of innovative technologies in the modern era, such as the use of algorithms to shape data from open source platforms, has created a type of globalization unique in history (Axford, 2014; Scholte, 2005; Steger, 2017). If this is the case, then the earlier examples of trans-border flows do not truly constitute “globalization” in the sense in which the word is used today. Consequences for political philosophy and policy are far-reaching. An obvious application in the field of global politics can be seen in the series of revolts that swept the Middle East in 2011-2012, the “Arab Spring.” Reflecting on the role of digital technologies in popular revolts, Steger (2017, p. 123) asserts that they have “added an entirely new dimension to the nature of justice-globalist demonstrations.” These and similar examples have prompted social theorists to explore the unprecedented nature of innovative technologies in recent years. One of the relevant technologies is satellite location-based social network services and applications. Reflecting on the introduction of the gay dating application “Grindr” in 2009, BBC technology correspondent Chris Fox (2019) asserted that, “The concept was extraordinary.” Analysis of the use of social network services by sexual minority groups has tended to focus on sexual health issues, especially the transmission of HIV (e.g., Hirshfield, Groy, Parsons, Anderson, & Chiasson (2015); alternatively, the focus has been on the role of the internet in the viewing of pornographic material, especially as a marker of sexual identity (e.g., Downing, Schrimshaw, Scheinmann, Antebi-Gruszka & Hirshfield (2017)). This paper focuses on the fact that the use of SNS by sexual minorities is an extremely complex phenomenon. By pointing out the large number of aspects which could yield to helpful analysis across a wide range of studies, I show that extensive inter-disciplinary research is required to comprehend these processes which can be denoted as global and complex in a way that is probably unprecedented in human history. The means by which these issues are explored is a case study that engaged with one particular application for LGBT individuals, the China based app, Blued. If this one digital technology has unprecedented complexity, it may indicate that contemporary globalization itself has a qualitatively different status than that of earlier forms of globalization in human history.

Launched in 2012 in PRC by Geng Le, an ex-police officer who had been

dismissed because of his gay sexuality, the Internet application Blued now has 27 million users mainly in China, far surpassing its closest rival “Grindr” (which has itself recently come under Chinese ownership). It is worth about 600 million dollars now, having made over 100 million dollars in the year 2018 alone. The company stands to make huge increases in profits if it can break into markets outside of China where more gay men have high levels of disposable income. Blued formed a business partnership with the US based gay application “Hornet” in 2017 so as to realize its global ambitions. This may be possible if it can deal with the underage scandal from early 2019 (Duffy, 2019, a). Some users with low profiles in the entertainment world in China have been able to use the app as a platform to display their talents, becoming minor celebrities who attract up to two million viewers for their live broadcasts.

Application features

A paradox is imbricated in the use of this type of application. Users are becoming connected to people who are very close in physical terms and also to those who are very far away, so that there is both a telescoping and micro-scoping of social relations through the use of location-aware devices. Users quickly adapt to this paradox, it seems, and become adept at using novel features, such as the sent photos which one taps and holds to view, and then the same images disappear never to be traced again (unless the power of government or inter-governmental organizations intervenes). AI broadcasters periodically tilt the camera away from prohibited views to zoom in on an adjacent piece of furniture and so avoid, or at least delay, censorship shutdown.

What do app consumers find when they access the application? While not viewing live stream images, users can read user’s profiles which are ordered on the basis of proximity. This allows Blued to function as a dating site similar to applications like Grindr. However, it seems to be more widely used for its video-streaming functions. Users can also form groups if they have common interests. The Blued website provides a glossary to explain key terms for first-time users:

Feed – “Users can scroll through an endless stream of photos or videos posted by guys they have chosen to follow.” The myriad availability of photos and profile information from those who are looking for friends, lovers, or partners is not a novel feature. Other applications like “Grindr” and “Tinder” (for the heterosexual community) have become highly successful in recent years. Like these other apps, Blued provides data on grids in order of proximity, that is, in terms of how close or

far the profiled person is from the viewer's location. *Live* : “Blued gives its users the ability to go Live within a community of peers and to show what life is like around them. All users have the opportunity to partake and create their community of followers or even fans.” This description is accurate, as many users bring their webcam cameras with them wherever they go, so that viewers can see views from people in motion, whether as pedestrians, motor-bike riders, or car drivers. Others place the camera in some vantage point in their workplace, home, or school. “*Grids* display nearby profiles by distance and viewers can either follow those profiles or engage in one-to-one conversations.” This feature is not new to the application, and in many ways simply offers a modern version of the perennial service of matchmaking or providing a mediation service for those who seek partners. “*Filters* are available to users to ensure a more appealing selection of profiles for everyone.” Again, filters can be found on other dating applications. What is novel, however, is that live stream broadcasts are also provided by the service, and these broadcasts are global. “*Group* conversations are available for users to join depending on their interests or location. Many get-togethers are organised and hot topics discussed on a daily basis.” Many groups do form, but the majority of broadcasts are done by lone individuals. “*Beans*” are the cryptocurrency of Blued which can get by live broadcasting, can be transfer to bank account” (*errors in original text*). The site also explains that the app allows for multiple login through its link-up with other platforms like *Twitter*, *Instagram*, and *Facebook*. Members who access Blued in Japan see profiles and live streams only from those who live outside of mainland China, where most users of Blued reside.

What can viewers expect to encounter when they access this application? Large numbers of men (no women seen broadcasting during the case study period) from around the world (mainly from east Asia (excluding mainland China) communicating with each other via live webcam. A member live streams images through the camera they hold in their hands or have placed on their desk, shop/kitchen counter, car dashboard, and other places. Viewers can type in their comments which appear on the screen. They can request face time so that their camera image will appear on the left side of the screen and viewers can see both users during their exchange. In addition to making comments, viewers can purchase “beans” – a range of colourful icons which are purchased by credit card. If users follow procedures, this can translate into monetary rewards. Some users involved in striptease type activities will make the gesture signifying money (rubbing of thumb and ring fingertip) to indicate their desire for more bean purchases. The statistics regarding peak views show that the average user gains between 30 and 80 views. However, if

a host has highly desired physical features (either boyish beauty and/or sculpted, muscled bodies) and they engage in striptease type activities or more explicit sexual behavior, they can gain peak viewerships that run into the thousands. Sexual displays are limited, however, by censorship demands and broadcast screens always carry the message – in broken but comprehensible English – “Tips: we encourage live with polite and respect. No content include explicit sexual behavior, violence or illegal act is allowed on Blued. All live is under review 24x7 to make the community fun and positive.” In some cases, when broadcasters begin engaging in salacious behavior, a message from the “Support Team” pops up on the screen stating that pornographic material will be banned. At other times, transmission is abruptly terminated, and a notice appears on screen stating that the broadcaster has been banned. This also occurs when private broadcasts take place, a practice that might be interpreted by some as heavy-handed censorship.

The future of Blued and similar applications is not entirely assured. They sometimes face closure due to a sentiment of homophobic panic among the general population (e.g. Indonesia provides a recent example) and so the role of LGBT apps can be seen as another element in the culture wars that reflect the perennial conflict that exists within society regarding long-term ownership of symbolic and material resources, as well as the determination of authoritarian regimes, both secular (e.g., the Russian Federation) and religious (e.g. Iran) to distract attention away from domestic failures and onto the scapegoats who rarely fail to draw the ire of disgruntled and ill-informed citizens. Blued, also faces curtailment of some sort due to a crisis about underage males using the service, particularly in China. The app stopped accepting new users for a few weeks in early 2019 due to the scandal. China is not the only country that has identified the problem of the sexual abuse of minors through the use of dating applications. A report in the United Kingdom (Braidwood, 2019) found that thirty cases of sexual abuse of minors occurred after the young people had accessed dating sites Grindr and Tinder. Further scholarly research, such as the work of Houtepen, Sijtsema, & Bogaerts (2016) will assist criminologists and forensic psychologists to formulate more effective strategies and policies to deal with the activities of paedophiles.

Method

Data collection took place for two hours, morning and evening, for two weeks in Jan-Feb. 2019. As is usual for a content analysis case study, I took notes of patterns in terms of actions during broadcasts and the motifs in comments being

posted by viewers. While maintaining a participant observer status without pre-set expectations, I initially focused on detecting what might be seen as sexual harassment during broadcast interactions. I texted mails to five broadcasters to ask if they felt they had been subject to sexual harassment on the application. The text read: "Can you please help with some research I am doing? It's for a university project. My question is: 'Have you ever experienced sexual harassment on this app (or on a similar app)? Have you ever seen other people being subjected to sexual harassment? I really appreciate if you can reply.'" However, none of the five prospective participants chose to respond. Further research is needed to determine which research method might succeed in obtaining this or related information. Up to this point, the most innovative study has been Vitis and Gilmour (2017) who explored the ways in which humour and art might be used to counteract against the application of sexual harassment online.

Instant and sustained aural and visual communication is made available by apps like Blued at prices that are accessible for even very low income individuals. This is certainly an innovative feature unprecedented in human history, what Giddens (1991) might refer to as the "democratization" of tele-communication. Giddens also foresaw massive scale processes of "democratization" by which globalized technology would allow members of the general public to determine outcomes which had previously pertained to an elite group of some sort. In this case, producers and "professionals" are not choosing the performers or the actions to be performed in particular sequences. There is a certain "democratization" of pornography at work here as the non-professionals are the performers who can stand to gain monetary rewards and a Warholian "fifteen minutes of fame" by means of their eroticized broadcasts. While similar apps like Grindr charge membership fees which place them beyond the reach of low-income individuals, Blued is accessible to all who own i-phones or similar devices, and these technologies have become ubiquitous, even in poor, rural areas in Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and similar locations. Certainly, a diverse range of webcam technologies have allowed non-professionals to earn large sums of money, and the pornography industry is currently struggling to meet this new challenge (Song, 2016). Following sections, while excluding some relevant fields such as Media Studies, provide accounts of the ways in which various scholarly disciplines, might address the complexification involved in dating apps such as "Blued."

Sexuality Studies

The phenomenon of globalized dating apps raises a range of questions that are of interest within sexuality studies and psychology. Is there an acute danger of hypersexuality habit formation if these apps offer access to live performances of sexual behaviors in a continuous stream? How can regulation of sexual behavior be implemented in a way that remains respectful of individuals’ right to sexual health? What patterns of sexual initiation may be associated with use of dating apps.

Another question of concern is the role of censorship. If a user begins to engage in sexual behavior, such as masturbation, the censors immediately shut down the broadcast and a notice states that the user has been banned (depending on undisclosed criteria, the ban only lasts for one hour or one day). It would be interesting to explore who formulates the criteria regarding censorship and if their application differs depending on host country. This would resonate with the approach of sociologists like Foucault or Weeks who explore the meanings behind discourses of sexuality in the modern era. For Foucault, the prohibition on expressions of sexual desire during the 19th-century rather than silencing desire, was in fact the means for an explosion of elements to create discursive formations of sexuality. Similarly, while Blued viewers are constantly exposed to the message that sexual behavior is prohibited and censors are checking 24 hours a day seven days a week, this functions only to fortify the affect of hyper-arousal.

A Foucaultian analysis would probably point to efforts by national governments, such as Indonesian and Chinese government authorities (Duffy, 2019, b) to censor the activities of purveyors of gay dating applications. It would see the ineluctable surveillance of the global panopticon as another manifestation of the perverse nature of late capitalism – subjects are disciplined but the discipline incites the desire which leads them to purchase, buying more beans to make real their desire in a world where identity is constituted by financial prowess, “You are what you buy.” The host may be eager to obtain financial rewards for basic physiological needs – many of the broadcasts come from shoddy homes in rural Vietnam, Thailand, or the Philippines where one sees concrete block walls and hears the sounds of roosters and crying babies in the background. In contrast, many other hosts reveal bedroom environments adorned with designer label clothes racks and expensive accessories, cuddly toys and hi-tech electronic gadgets. For individuals living in poverty, the temptation of cash prizes may induce their reluctant participation in events and actions, such as the February 2019 Valentine’s promotion

event on Blued which offered over \$3000 dollars in cash prizes for the hosts who could garner the largest bean contributions. In addition to the regulation, ghettoization, and monetarization of sexuality, users are disciplined into the market. The subtext might be understood as something like: “You too in your east Asian hovel can aspire to the Louis Vuitton lifestyle of your peers but you must work on obtaining those beans!”

The analysis might take a Critical turn also by noting that the devotion to individual enrichment and the sense of competition against peers in the procurement of favours from small numbers of generous viewers, vitiates any sense of solidarity among low-income workers or the hope that their unified action might bring about the changes in individual lives that are sought by all who promote egalitarianism. Economic factors are also explored by Lik (2018) who recognizes that there are ambivalent forces at work, and ambivalent feelings on the part of the participants. On the one hand, they want a wide range of choices, yet often feel swamped by the over-abundance of choice, so that the possibility of intimacy, physical and/or emotional, is actually curtailed. The authors see this as a symptom of late capitalist and neo-liberal economic markets and consumer systems which are oriented towards establishing patterns of continuous choice-making rather than settling on choices. It should also be noted that the economic dimensions of applications like Blued have been reviewed in staple publications of international political economics such as the *Economist* (An ex-cop, 2015). Nevertheless, a Foucaultian analysis might point to more positive elements. “The History of Sexuality” turned readers’ attention to ancient Greece and Rome to underline the possibility of varied taxonomies of sexuality. Rather than an axis of two contrasting species “heterosexual” and “homosexual” the conceptual taxonomy may divide subjects along lines of “penetrator/penetratee.” The focus is taken away from essentialized facts of identity to acts of desire and the corporeal positions and behaviours that can be allowed into erotic circuits of interaction. While the Modern era prohibited inter-generational desire between older and younger men, this forum allows these flows of desire to play themselves out (though this raises the danger of exploitation of children by predators, a concern towards which Foucault failed to direct a great deal of attention). Perhaps, it would be ideal, taking the cue from Foucault’s affirmation of the indignity of speaking on behalf of others, to evaluate these platforms by extensively interviewing broadcasters. In-depth interviews could answer the question about whether the young men have felt empowered through their use of the app or, in contrast, exploited or cheated in some way.

Global Sociology

Wu and Ward (2018) researched technologies of mediation in the lives of gay men with a particular focus on dating apps. They found that the apps play a significant role in terms of self-presentation and that interactions are taking on novel aspects not evident in the past. They see this as part of a complete transformation in social relations between gay men. Sociologists should direct more attention to these transformative factors.

Social theory would find much of interest in global dating applications. Feelings of isolation and loneliness contribute to the need for this surveillance companion (often without any host-viewer interaction). Another issue of concern would be the exploitation of low-income groups in less developed countries as well as public health and sexual health awareness initiatives; (these issues are considered in following sections which underpin the necessity of inter-disciplinary research activities to fully comprehend the phenomenon under discussion). Criminal sociology would find a range of issues of interest when considering the globalized technology of dating applications. One criminal aspect regards the increase in cases of stalking due to the use of the apps which allow viewers access to domestic spaces and to purveyors’ daily lives. International cooperation would be needed in cases of trans-border criminal activity such as the grooming of minors for inter-generational sexual activity; e.g., if a predator in Japan grooms a minor on Blued and pressures the minor to provide sexualized images. Who can intervene? Who has responsibility? These questions are a challenge for Interpol and similar organizations that are fighting internationalized criminal activities.

Language Studies/Discourse Analysis

The skills of a trained polyglot would be required to monitor and analyse the interactions taking place on the site at any one time as most participants write and speak in their first languages. Such resources might promote the survival of local patois or rates of bilingualism over the long-term. By the same token, the proliferation of textual interactions on these sites may also contribute to the decline of local varieties by reinforcing the dominance of English (and in the case of Blued, standardized Mandarin) as the required forms of communication.

Communication of ideas and intentionalities in face-to-face interactions is the driving engine of language acquisition. However, low-income individuals in Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines or other places will find it difficult to have such

interactions as they might be prohibitively expensive. Here at least, it may be possible to have sustained levels of comprehensible input from advanced speakers. This is especially helpful on dating sites where users are likely to be speaking about what most deeply motivates them – their erotic and romantic desires. In the same way that “extensive reading” proves successful when readers engage with the texts they find most motivating, optimal interlanguage expansion for speaking skills is likely to occur here when hosts must produce language to communicate with the other who can be imagined to be the embodiment of all one’s dreams.

Conversation analysts can explore the question: what sorts of sexual scripts are used in texts and interactions? Their findings would be of considerable interest to scholars of digital media in the language field. Practitioners of Semiotics would note that non-verbal sign systems may develop (e.g., widely known gestures to indicate money) or using indexical signals that are context-driven (e.g., finger pointing to the side to mean “be aware of the censors”). Language, sexuality, and masculinities studies intersect in the consideration of the use of epithets such as “bitch” or “babe” which work to secure feminization or infantilization of performers. The rapid purchasing of beans that shoot across the screen may also act as a signifier of power being displayed over the broadcaster.

Psychoanalysis and psychological counselling

This discipline would ask a range of questions to determine what is manifesting itself on the level of the psyche for both hosts and viewers. Progressive schools of psychoanalytic theory would adopt a non-judgmental approach to the dating app phenomenon through its affirmation that erotic imagination and desire merit expression and analysis in their own right (e.g., Butler, 1997; Sedgwick, 1985; Warner, 1993). If individuals engage in behaviours that are characterized as exhibitionism or voyeurism these practices are not condemned *a priori* as there is no assumption of “normal” sexuality, as in a pre-set standard that determines if sexual expression will be classified as “healthy” or “mature.” Comprehensive understanding of participants would require one-on-one analysis sessions. In a sense, what is seen on the screen are symptoms of whatever complexes or issues a person might have. Another obvious reflection would regard the narcissistic element involved. A Lacanian (1977) analysis might frame typical encounters as attempts to project onto the camera screen, onto the imaginary audience of anonymous viewers, the vision of the unified ego-self which cannot be found on the inverse side of the screen. The host delights in the gaze of the beholder as the bearer of the “truth”

that must be repeated ad infinitum to sustain the cohesion of identity: “You are beautiful, you are perfect, you are whole.” Lacanian analysis also draws attention to the reality of “scopic drive” the perennial desire to see the fascinating object of desire. For Lacan, the instincts which are sublimated as drives should not be confined solely to oral, anal, and phallic spheres. The drive to consume the desired other through the gaze is seen to be equally if not more powerful, and this affirmation is borne out in reality to an ever greater degree. Electronic devices which are light enough to be carried everywhere, which are cheap enough to be bought by low-income groups, and which are linked to global satellites that transmit images from all parts of the world mean that most people on the planet feel the lure of the scopic drive. Indeed, it has now become a commonplace to remark on the fact that people no longer see what is around them anymore, so glued are their eyes to the screen they hold before them, the screen that allows for the constant repetition of the attempt to achieve wholeness on the level of the psyche. For Žižek (1997), all too often there is an absurd quality to the activity, rather like the itch to scratch the healing wound, or the urge to roll the roulette table one more time. Not surprisingly, brain scan analysis of inveterate gamblers finds that there is no elation in winning, no sense of closure. For the gambling addict, the process is all, a journey without a destination. Psychologists will focus, perhaps on issues of sexual addiction and the dangers of hyper-arousal for those who carry hand-held camera devices around with them at all times of day and night. Perhaps the resource will also lead to an increase in cases of illicit exposure. Further research in the field of psychological studies will succeed in answering these questions.

Discussion and Implications

Technology has transformed the nature of political, economic, and social interactions across borders to an unprecedented degree. Location-based mobile phone technologies are seen as the key factor in explaining the impact of popular revolts such as the “Battle of Seattle,” and the “Arab Spring,” which have affected the global political landscape in recent times. Global society faces complex questions about the future of labor workforces in a world of artificial intelligence (AI) which is already transforming the global economy. Globalization has been driven by technological forces that may be unprecedented in human history. The position taken on the “naturalness” of globalization determines agreement or non-agreement with dominant neo-Liberal positionings, such as the view of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who asserted that there was “No alternative to

globalization. If nothing can be done about the natural movement of economic and technological forces, then political groups ought to acquiesce..." (quoted in Steger, 2017, p. 114).

This paper has argued that contemporary globalization can be seen as unprecedented in human history if the technologies themselves have a degree of complexity that can also be seen as unprecedented in human history. This may be the case as much trans disciplinary study would be required to fully analyse all levels of complexification associated with just one innovative technology, the dating application, *Blued*, one of many cutting-edge technologies that engenders complex layers of global interconnectivity. This was shown to be the case for "*Blued*" by exemplifying the need for analysis by a number of disciplines, while recognizing that others, such as media studies, were not being addressed. Another obvious limitation of this case study was its shortness – about 30 hours of viewing over a two-week period – and the fact that no respondents were found to share their thoughts and experiences on the topic of sexual harassment. Nevertheless, the study was sufficiently extensive to establish that dating applications like *Blued* are hyper-complex phenomena which require transdisciplinary analysis if they are to be fully understood within academic discourse. Sexuality studies for global society, for example, can focus on the globalization of erotic desire and the role of desire in flows of migration (cf. Ahmad, 2011).

New forms of digital media such as dating applications offer innovative and complex options for individuals in search of others for a range of separate or overlapping purposes: friendship, sexual intimacy, companionship, or knowledge of particular topics or places. Agencies of public policy have directed attention to digital media in terms of sexual health issues, with a keen focus on sexual health. This is reasonable, but other aspects of health and safety should also be considered. One relevant aspect of public health would be the issue of unsafe driving of road vehicles. On two occasions during the study, I saw drivers who were broadcasting being encouraged to touch their own bodies provocatively or to remove items of clothing. In this situation, drivers are hardly capable of giving full attention to road safety and the rules of censorship should probably intervene here to cut the broadcast. Another aspect not discussed in this paper and one which has received little attention is the interest of Diaspora studies. Scholars in this field should also direct their attention to globalized dating apps as they seem to form a social practice for immigrants who have left their country of origin but seek to retain contacts with first country individuals and to communicate with compatriots in their first language. The flows of migration from global south countries such as Indonesia,

Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam are reflected when individuals from these countries broadcast from global north locations such as Japan, the U.S., and Singapore. In fact, during the case study, I rarely saw a Japanese citizen broadcast from Japan or a U.S. citizen broadcast from the U.S. One Korean broadcaster did little of note, showing his small apartment as he assembled a piece of furniture or blow-dried his hair, and yet had a viewership of over 800 during that session. It seems possible that viewers are individuals in home countries who are thinking about migrating to the U.S. and are curious to see the actual material conditions of life for one of their own in the target destination? This is a question that should be addressed by Diaspora studies which could also assess the extent to which sexual minority migrants have decided that dating apps are part of what they bring with them when they enter global flows of migration and are a means of sustaining a sense of identity in a new or alien environment.

The initial focus of this case study was on the dangers of sexual harassment taking place on gay dating applications. Pink News reported that young men complained that they had been pressured to perform sexual acts for viewers. Based on an interest in sexual harassment as a research topic, I accessed the application and found that the platform is interesting not only as an aspect of sexual harassment but also for a wide range of disciplines. During the case study data collection period, I saw several instances where sexual harassment may have been taking place. I was interested to explore the issue of sexual harassment and I found that, not only was sexual harassment a danger in the way I outlined earlier, but one could also point to a novel phenomenon that could be called “financial love bombing.” I witnessed one broadcast where two viewers competed in the application of pressure on a broadcaster - a Filipino male in his mid-20’s – to remove his shorts. They showered him with purchases of beans, the token currency which translates into monetary rewards for broadcasters. Usual notifications of bean purchases range between one and ten. On this occasion, the quick-fire succession of purchases ran into the hundreds. The broadcaster seemed to relish the attention, and the prospect of cash flowing his way. However, he did not comply with the requests for nudity, showing that it is possible for broadcasters to resist unwanted demands. There may be occasions, though, especially for low-income individuals in need of money, where “financial love-bombing” on apps constitutes a form of sexual harassment. At times a young broadcaster may be reluctant to fulfill the erotic demands of viewers, but may be inundated by comments of a coercive nature. Broadcasters might reluctantly submit to the demands of the group, but feel afterwards that they had been unfairly objectified, humiliated, and sexualized. In other instances a

broadcaster is in a quotidian situation, such as sipping a glass of juice in a café or listening to the voice of instructors at morning assembly in school; if a viewer posts a sexual comment at such a moment, it may have the same intrusive quality as recognized forms of verbal sexual harassment. In short, there are cases where consent is only partial and subject to coercive forces which can remain behind a screen of Internet anonymity.

While the case study did show the possibility of sexual harassment taking place, the danger seems to be built-in with this type of digital medium. Only very intensive, continuous surveillance would be able to prevent such harassment, and if the majority of users found such a regime intrusive – as many likely would – the success of the application itself would be called into doubt. Nevertheless, the application seems to serve some useful social functions, and the most salient feature of the phenomenon is, perhaps, the level of complexity that it typifies in terms of global flows of desire with wide-ranging social, cultural, and economic dimensions. Within a Foucaultian vocabulary, these flows of desire can be seen as forming an economy of desire: there must be regulation, both external and internal, for desires to flow in ever more complex ways and a discourse will form around all of those subjects who are involved in the social practice, whether as surveillance staff (and the element of voyeurism is seen as relevant here also) or for those who desire to be seen. The need for a transdisciplinary approach may be the most salient lesson to be learned from the existence of dating applications and similar global-scale technologies. As a language educator, I was interested in the use of English as a *lingua franca*. As a member of a global studies discipline, I was interested in a form of media which constitutes a globalization of sexuality. It was clear to me that there are levels of complexity involved which cannot be comprehended by one individual, no matter how eclectic their research or scholarly interests. Nevertheless, scholars and researchers from a wide range of disciplines may find it helpful to explore this novel type of globalized social network which exemplifies the phenomenon of complexification in a world of globalized technology and networked intimacy. Another key conclusion that follows from an engagement with issues surrounding digital communication technologies is that transdisciplinarity is necessary to fully comprehend the complex and interconnected processes associated with globalization. Cross-disciplinary research should remain, then, a major conceptual pillar of global studies.

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