# A Netnography Study About Wapa as a Mobile Dating Application: An Existence Struggle from Turkey

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## Abstract

This study examines gender performances on mobile dating applications (MDAs) in the context of queer theory with the help of netnography methodology. The research was conducted with Wapa users from Turkey. Wapa can be defined as a popular, location-based, real-time dating application for lesbians. The research examines the self-presentation narratives from the contents of user accounts and focuses on the user experiences that were obtained via online interviews. Based on the findings, this study contributes to the literature about communication, technology and gender studies by revealing both male and female masculinity in a mobile communication environment. Although MDA technology is considered an opportunity for users to specify their preferred age range, proximity and sexual orientation, the mobile environment is also an area where stereotyping about queer identities is introduced and circulates.

**Keywords:** Wapa, location-based dating apps, mobile communication, queer theory, netnography

## Introduction

Mobile dating applications (MDAs) have become one of the most popular phenomena among all gender classifications with the development of location-based technologies. Gender classification of applications is also an important indicator for understanding the current mobile romantic communication environment. For instance, Tinder is known as a heterosexual app, Grindr is for gay males, and Wapa is for lesbians. An overall assessment indicates that MDAs, as one of the most popular geosocial app categories, provide an easier and more efficient way of finding a romantic partner.

On the other hand, such forms of communication also cause problems because of the uncertainty and unreliability of user accounts (Corriero and Tong 2016). Moreover, while this technology initially appears as a resistance area for different gender identities, it can also easily reproduce unequal narratives and stereotypes about gender.

Although MDAs are a rising technology, there are few studies in the literature about this topic. A small number of research studies focus mainly on security issues such as recklessly sharing personal information and matters of privacy rather than on gender experiences (Farnden et al. 2015; Norcie et al. 2013; Hoang et al. 2016). The present research aims to analyze the gender dimension of MDAs. In this context, usage rates and habits of MDAs are examined, after which the general map of studies in this field is shown in a systematic way. Extensive research results and commonly used methodology will be presented. In doing this, neglected dimensions of studies in the area will also be discussed.

The empirical part of the study begins with the network architecture of Wapa as an MDA for lesbians. Then Wapa users' self-presentation patterns will be considered detail by analyzing selected accounts' statuses and pictures in the context of queer theory with the help of netnography methodology. The final part of this study presents an analysis of online interviews with Turkish Wapa users for uncovering their performances with the same theoretical and methodological basis. The basic mind map of the study is depicted in Figure 1.
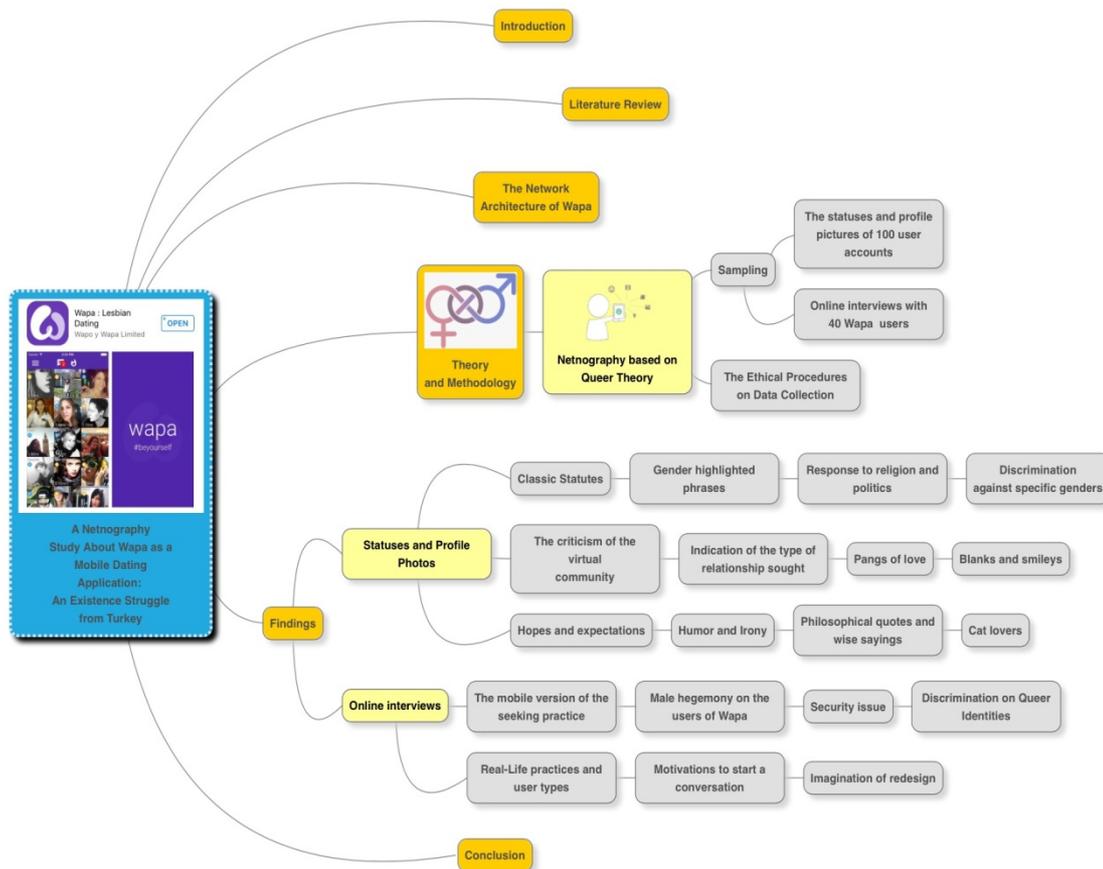
**Figure 1.** The basic mind map of the research

According to queer theory, some forms of sexuality and desires are privileged by social structure. In addition, some bodies are considered more important than others. Those considered insignificant are marginalized and exposed to political violence (Butler 1990). In this context, this research aims to reveal both female and male masculinity forms in different gender types in virtual mobile communities with examples of Wapa users from Turkey. This netnography study provides insider observations about a lesbian MDA and also gives details about the communities that occur in mobile environments in the context of social dynamic.

**Review of the Literature**

Wireless communication has diffused faster than any other communication technology in history. Before the spread of mobile technologies, time and space were the fundamental, material dimensions of human existence (Castells, et al. 2007). However, the present generation work long hours and have little time to socialize. MDA technologies, as a wireless communication type, promise true love just a swipe away in a "timeless time" by providing a spatiotemporal communication environment. In this context, mobile dating can be defined as an ongoing communication type among potential partners using mobile apps. Actually, Internet dating is not a new social experience; mobile technologies enable one to check suitable candidates at

virtually any time. Location-based features of applications also facilitate the process and transfer performances to a real communal environment.

MDAs gained popularity after the introduction of the dating app Tinder in 2012, but the trend began in 2008 with Grindr, a location-based app for gay men (Stampler 2014: 43). According to a recent survey conducted among 2001 American adults between June 10 and July 12, 2015, 15 per cent of the participants used online dating sites or mobile dating apps, an increase of 11 per cent over those who reported doing so in early 2013. Furthermore, 41 percent of Americans stated that they knew someone using online dating, and 29 per cent were found to know someone who met a spouse or long-term partner via online dating. The age factor is an important variable for utilization rates because young people, 18 to 24, used these apps more than older users aged 55 to 64 (Smith 2016). Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare rates for other countries due to a lack of data.

Even though MDAs have many positive features, they have also caused problems such as "sexting," which can be defined as the exchange of naked or semi-naked images via mobile phones (Albury and Byron 2014: 138). An app called "Girls Around Me," for instance, was pulled from the Apple's App Store because it collected information from public pages showing a map with real-time GPS data and pictures of women and men in their vicinity. This was determined to be a "stalker app" (Daniels 2015).

A comparison of utilization rates by gender shows that dating sites are more popular among same-sex couples (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). The main reason for this is that most same-sex couples are isolated from society in many countries. Although the U.S. Supreme Court legalized gay marriage nationwide in 2015, homosexuality is still a taboo in many countries (Frey 2014, Ilga 2015). For those who are discriminated against by their families and society in general, using MDAs has become the best available way of finding partners or living as a homosexual couple.

A review of relevant literature on MDAs shows that the most popular research topic concerns habits and purposes. It also shows that the most frequently studied sample is that of gay men using Grindr. The findings of these studies are summarized below.

A research study about Grindr conducted by Blackwell et al. (2015) provides some clues about gays' mobile dating habits. Thirty-six semi-structured interviews with users from Ithaca and Chicago indicate that participants viewed Grindr as a virtual place where they could verify their gender identity fearlessly and honestly. They thought that Grindr was more authentic than the real world in certain ways since being in the same physical location did not reveal any details about gender preference. Most preferred to talk to users with face pictures instead of headless torsos and landscape/blank photos. Some users didn't like certain reasons for others' presence on the site such as "just being a friend," because intentions other than sex were contrary to those of the application. This research also allowed the authors to compare the usage habits of respondents in small cities with those in large metropolitan areas.

A quantitative study about Grindr gives information about the purpose of usage according to the uses and gratifications theory. This study involves two empirical analyses of reasons for using Grindr. The six motives cited in the results are social inclusion/approval, sex, friendship/network, romantic relationships, entertainment, and location-based searching (De Wiele and Tong 2014).

Another study based on uncertainty management theory revealed how uncertainty affects information-seeking behavior. The results of this research indicate that goals and concerns were found to indirectly affect information-seeking behaviors through the desire for uncertainty, suggesting that a complete understanding of uncertainty-related issues within the Grindr context requires attending to several individual and contextual factors (Corriero and Tong 2016: 137).

In an online experiment on Grindr and other similar apps, researchers examined anti-effeminacy attitudes and behaviors within the queer community. Both effeminate and anti-effeminate profiles were created with the same profile picture, and reactions were measured. Results indicate that the use of femme-phobic language in dating profiles negatively affects perceptions of potential mates (Miller and Behm-Morawitz 2016).

Although the most studied issue is usage habits, MDA performances of different sexual identities other than gay men are still a neglected field as shown in the literature. Consequently, the findings of the present research can create a sample for both performance-based studies and research on lesbian MDAs.

### The Network Architecture of Wapa

Wapa is a free, popular, user-friendly lesbian dating application. The word *wapa* is the colloquial version of *guapa* which means *beautiful girl* in Spanish. When a user registers for the app, a warning appears on the screen: "I will not post any sexual photos or text on my profile and I understand that Wapa is not a sex app." The catchword of the app is "Be yourself," with the hashtag #beyourself. During registration the user has to identify herself as female. A user needs just a nickname or username to become a member of this virtual community. Other details of the users are optional. Other details such as the user's age, height and weight are optional, as is sharing a profile photo. Users can also share a status profile that cannot exceed 25 words.

The application offers the users a list of women deemed as potential friends. One's location is an important criterion because a user can find someone who lives nearby and communicate with her directly. Within the chat there is an option for sending additional photos, videos, and locations. The interface features other buttons that can help users find suitable candidates. In searching for profiles, a user can push a "paw" sign to indicate she is impressed by someone, and may suggest having a drink together. This sign that evokes the cat image is not a random choice. A cat refers to a "licking" subtext, often used in lesbian jargon.

Users can designate some accounts as favorites. Members also have options for removing or blocking a person with whom they do not wish to communicate.

Although the App is free, a minimum donation of 10.49 Turkish Liras (almost US$3.50) upgrades a membership. In that case, members gain "Tracks" as a premium feature that lets them see those who have viewed their profile as well as their reactions. There are also ads that appear on the screen while users are on the app.

Some mechanisms protect users on the app. A user can report someone for a number of reasons: being abusive, using an offensive photo, using someone else's photo, being a sex worker, being underage, or stealing someone's former profile. Users can also stipulate other reasons. The following warning is sent to new users:

> "Welcome to Wapa! If you uploaded any photos, they'll be hidden until we've had a chance to check them. We're determined to make Wapa a safe and fun place for girls who want to meet so please read our rules…Violators of these rules will be deleted without warning! Thanks. Wapa"

For this reason, whenever a user uploads a new photo, she should wait for approval by the admins. In such a case, the warning "Some of your photos have been locked because they await approval by the Wapa staff. It won't take too long so please be patient!" appears on the screen.

According to research, photos can be shared at the beginning of a conversation on Wapa as on other online dating apps. This is different from earlier online chatting systems where photo exchanges take place soon after a short period of interacting (Jones

2005). This also introduces ethical considerations involving security and privacy.


**Theory and Methodology**

In these authors' research Kozinets' netnography method was used within the context of queer theory and mobile technologies. Netnography examines the existing interactional practices in virtual communities using a qualitative, systematic, and effective method. It helps identify cultural and contextual aspects of communications taking place on online environments (Kozinets 2010). Queer theory includes all sexual categories except the normalized heterosexual "male-female" dichotomy. In this regard, not only gays and lesbians but also various sexual identity categories such as cross-dressers, butches, and hermaphrodites are included. According to Halperin (2003), "queer" is an umbrella term that implies sexual radicalism and fluid gender possibilities and also distances them from "normal", legitimate, and dominant. Within this framework, both participant observation and online interviewing techniques of netnography are used together to analyze male and female masculinity practices and self-presentation types on a mobile dating app.

The term "mobile ethnography" was not used throughout the present study in order to avoid confusion. Although this designation is used as a contemporary and effective research method via a smartphone data gathering application (Muskat et al. 2013), previous studies defined the term as a method involving participation in patterns of movement while conducting ethnographic research (Sheller and Urry 2006: 217) like "walking with" or travelling with people (Urry 2007). In other words, *mobile ethnography* is commonly used for analyzing "non-places" such as practices of "in transit" performances (Gottschalk and Salvaggio 2015). Therefore, in order to avoid confusion of concepts, the method used in the present study is called netnography.


*Sampling*

At the outset, this researcher spent time on Wapa to understand the structure of the mobile virtual community in general, and then selected a suitable sample. This sample included 100 profile contents, including written and visual information about users, for analyzing self-presentation types. In addition, online interviews with 40 Wapa users from Istanbul and Ankara were conducted. This sample was considered adequate because the researcher noticed that similar narratives and varieties in answers were noted in other accounts as well. During the research, a semi-structured online interview with each participant was conducted through the

private message option of the app. Interviews were conducted in May and June 2016. Some participants preferred to give answers by e-mail, while others chose to respond using the Wapa app. The age range of participants was 21-38 with the median age of 27.5. The diverse occupations of the participants include student, academic administrator, dentist, architect, designer, athlete, lawyer, executive, psychiatrist, manager, and pharmacist.. If answers were difficult to understand, clarification was sought via direct correspondence.

*Ethical procedures on data collection*

Participants were provided with a consent form regarding the research design in order to ensure ethical procedure. This form also included information about anonymity and ethical details about the research. They were also informed that they were free to leave the study at any time. In addition, identities of the virtual community members were anonymized so that participants would feel free in responding to questions and understood that the researcher did not infiltrate the community with a false account.

**Findings**

This researcher opened an account on Wapa to make ethnographic observations and discover sexist patterns on the app. Wapa could then be analyzed as a mobile gender space and users would understand by viewing the researcher's profile status that a study was taking place.

The researcher used the account several times a day for two months to obtain details about the lesbian MDA environment and to ensure adequate examination of gendered communication practices.

The study was conducted in both Ankara and Istanbul where the large population favors visibility to other users of Wapa. There were no significant differences between the interface experiences of users in these two cities, which could be defined as the metropolises of Turkey. However, Istanbul can be regarded as a cosmopolitan city so there were more foreign accounts from that area. This research focuses only on users from Turkey and did not include foreign accounts in the sample.

Interestingly, a number of participants believed that Wapa was not valuable for academic research and asked a number of questions about the aim of the study. They expressed the thought that they did not want to be part of a commercial research study that would only focus on developing the MDA technology. The importance of the study for social policy regarding gender was very important for them; therefore, the focus of the research on gender issues was briefly explained.

During the online interviews, some of the participants asked the researcher whether she was homosexual. Upon learning that the researcher was not, they stated that they would not make advances to her and would simply answer the questions. This was also significant for reducing the possibility of sexual attraction.

The participants responded in a generally positive way, though a small number of users claimed that they were not experimental objects and refused to participate.

Capitalization, spelling mistakes, punctuation and long awkward awkward spaces sometimes seemed random at first glance, but they may have had different and important meanings. Therefore, in detailing the data, the text is presented as written on the screen with no correction.

While analyzing the profile contents (pictures/statuses) and online interviews, questions, similarities, and insights were noted. The data were divided into diverse categories under two headings: *Statuses and Profile Photos* and *Online Interviews.*

*Statuses and Profile Photos*

I will discuss the status and profile photos of Wapa users from Turkey under this subhead. They use English words, phrases, and abbreviations that non-members of the community may have difficulty understanding. For instance, the term "butch" refers to a woman whose appearance is similar to a man's. In other words, "butch" can be defined as a lesbian identity manifested by clothing style, hair style and behaviors like those of a man. "Trans" is used as a shortened form of "transsexual." Users communicate in mostly informal spoken language rather than formal language. Half-Turkish and half-English expressions are also widely used. Some Wapa users oppose following Turkish grammar rules, declaring "Forget the rules of language! Your greatest achievement in life should not just consist of being familiar with rules!" Emoticons are also commonly used as a characteristic of the Internet culture. The status of the users as an identifier can be examined under these categories:

- *Classic Statuses:* A small number of users write their actual given names and surnames, and share hobbies and links on their Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter accounts.

- *Gender highlighted phrases:* The statuses like "Tell the kids colors have no gender," and "gray between black and white," can be examples of this subcategory.

- *Response to religion and politics:* Although it is assumed that homonegativity may be found in all religious traditionsrecent research shows that Islam is the most homonegative religion with the highest percentage of those opposed to having homosexual neighbors, and this has remained constant in the past 20 years. (Jäckle, 2015). Turkish President has publicly criticized the West for prioritizing gay and animal rights over those of refugees (Sims, 2016). In this context, both religion and politics are the targets of lesbians in Turkey. The users of Wapa react by writing, "The biggest crime in the constitution is me," "Rebel againstthe goings-on," "Girls who resist are beuatiful," "I will work hard for being a fair God," and "I forgive God" in their user accounts.

- *Discrimination against specific gender identities:* Although lesbians complain about discrimination, they too use discriminative phrases. Especially butches, transsexuals, and users who share a random niche without photos may elicit negative reactions from lesbians. Expressions such as "Feminine women preferred," "Only feminine," "Butches and trans, stay away from me!" "Butches and masculine women, please don't contact me," "Solo femminili," "Feminine looking for a feminine," and "Couples, bisexuals, butches and unstable characters don't wait" are examples of this phenomenon. On the other hand, other users opposed to this separation labeling indicate "Not all short-haired women are butch," "All that glitters is not gold and "Not all short-haired women are trans," "This is the year 2016!" and "This is an app for all women so all should be free to write me. No problem ☺."

    The discrimination forms are very similar to that of the queer theorist Halberstam's view on "female masculinity." The humiliation of masculine women and hegemony excluding butches is intensely criticized in Halberstam's study with the example of "the bathroom problem" (1998). In Halberstam's view the universal bathroom system is not adequate for different genders. This is a typical example of Cartesian dualism. If we do not recognize the gender of a bathroom user, we openly ask about it.

The person is exposed to questioning and mistreatment because of physical appearance; sometimes police or security agents are even called for verification. Similarly, Wapa is seen as a place of refuge against sexism in theory; but in reality feminine users cite female masculinity as grounds to exclude butches and transsexual women.

- *The criticism of the virtual community:* Interestingly, some users think that Wapa as an
  MDA has no purpose and that their members are not decent, yet they still use it because it is virtually their only option. Some state, "This place is really augean!" "I hate this place," "Why am I here?," and "This app is increasingly wretched," all of which support this observation.

- *Indication of the type of relationship sought:* Sometimes with the reservations expressed in the previous category, some users share their expectations in a chat room. "Even though it's a dating app we can still be friends," "Need discussion," "Really just being friends," "Only conversation," "I'm looking for a pure love," "Only sapiosexuals," "No long-term relationship," and "Only serious relationship" are exemplify the wide range of these expectations.

- *Painful past relationships:* Some users use Wapa for getting over their previous partners. They express their feelings through poetry about love with verses such as, "How many flowers were left, this time was last."

- *Hopes and expectations:* Some users express their hopes and expectations by writing status information in line with their feelings: "Search and find me in the woods," "Perhaps spring is here," "Be a rainbow in my dark world," "I believe in the impossibile," "Think positive…," "Perhaps this story starts here," and "My dream is to wake up on a woman's chest."

- *Humor and Irony:* One of the most important narratives of the status involves humor
  and irony. Popular jokes and amusing words are used to give a cheerful image. "She who is smart does not find me but crazy ones do," and "The owner of this profile does not speak with men" are examples of this category. As shown in Figure 2, this expression is supported by an image of a covered anime character. In doing so, the user makes fun of Islamic women's social media profiles, because many devout Islamist women believe that talking with a strange man on the Internet is a sin. Then the message is clear: She is not an Islamist but she also doesn't want to talk to a man.



**Figure 2.** An ironic status example with a status message of "The owner of this profile does not speak with men"

- *Philosophical quotes and wise sayings:* This status category consists of famous citations like "Veni, vidi, vici," "Carpe diem," etc.

- *Cat lovers:* A cat symbol can be used as an important indicator of being a lesbian identitiy. An Internet search containing "cat" and "lesbian" yields many cartoons, memes, blog entries, and short articles such as "What's the Deal with Lesbians and Cats?" and "5 Ways Lesbians Are Just Like Cats." Furthermore, there is a common stereotype about women who are single or living alone who keep cats for company. Some Wapa users write comments about cats in their profiles, such as, "It's all about cats," "Kitty," or "Pussycat," and thereby consciously or unconsciously support this stereotype.

- *Blanks and emoticons:* Some descriptions of profiles consist only of blanks and emoticons as part of Internet vocabulary, giving details about themselves by, ironically, saying nothing.

An analysis of profile photos shows that many do not want to use photos to avoid malicious users although others clearly share theirs. Some prefer showing blurry photos. Among other popular profile photo categories are graffiti, coffee, book illustrations, animals pictures, body features such as hair or eyes, cigarette and ashtray figures, human shadows, lesbian animations, and lesbian-themed movie posters such as the poster for the Todd Haynes film *Carol* (2015).

*Online Interviews*

Both the categorized data from online interviews and this researcher's participation as a user are shown together in this subhead. The participants of the online interview are numbered throughout the paper, with "U1" for User 1, and so forth. Surprisingly, while I searched for participants, another user explained that she, too, was a doctoral candidate engaged in a study, and we collaborated on research findings.

The responses indicate that the varied interests of participants included the desire for the following: a long-term or romantic relationship, companionship, one night stand, flirtation, sexual encounters, intimacy, spending time together, distraction, amusement, chatting, socializing, sharing experiences, and stalking ex-girlfriends. Furthermore, it was found that some of the users heard about the app from their friends, LGBT associations or ex-girlfriends, while others found it at one of the online app stores (i.e., Apple or Windows).

Most participants uninstalled and re-installed the app many times with different nicknames, often because of relationships that were painful or ended badly. When they decided to meet with another candidate, the communication took place on different platforms such as Whatsapp or other social media.

- *The mobile version of the seeking process*

Women who seek a suitable partner on Wapa have specific characteristics. Participants feel they are marginalized by society so they take the chance to meet others with similar characteristics on the Internet or in other mobile environments.

> "We are marginalized by society so we can't behave as ourselves (in real life). We have to live with secret identities. I'm free to behave as I am without lying. I believe that there are highly educated women people who use the same language as I do." (U2)

> "There is a high rate of homophobia in our country so we have to hide our sexual identities. Talking to people who have similar difficulties is a relief." (U4)

> "I can appreciate that I'm not alone in my loneliness." (U20)

Some participants emphasized that they have a limited social circle, and that using Wapa as an MDA expands this circle.

"Human diversity is more than my own social circle here." (U14)

"I was able to move from Wapa into different social circles other than those of Wapa."(U8)

MDAs are vital for homosexuals because they cannot initiate a relational talk as most heterosexuals can. One participant summed up the situation as follows:

"Homosexuals aren't as comfortable as heterosexuals in establishing relationships in Turkey. A heterosexual man can easily approach a woman he would like to meet but a homosexual woman can't do this without knowing the other woman's sexual identity. In this respect, Wapa can be defined as a facilitator app." (U12)

As specified in the answers, getting in contact with someone on an MDA is more of a necessity than just an option for lesbians in Turkey. This particular mobile environment circumvents the dangers of direct personal contact, especially in an environment of social oppression.

- *Male hegemony on the users of Wapa*

On two occasions, two imposter users approached this researcher for dating. Their profile photos showed no user image; instead, one showed a nature picture and the other, a book cover. In other words, they were men disguising their gender.

A few days later these accounts were suspended, most likely due to complaints from other users. Some said that the owners of the fake accounts unwittingly behaved like men during chats. One concluded that interestingly, as has been noted in the literature, (Zawinski 1980), lesbians can be attracted to straight men. That's why "men having sex with a lesbian couple is a popular porn category. One concludes that "being gay" or "being lesbian" has different meanings for many straight men or *lesbian* turns out to have different meanings in straight men's culture. Out of what may be curiosity, desure or a wish to be validated or to subjugate, men intrude on a sphere that is expressly part of lesbian culture.

Although the app's administrators punish fake accounts by suspending them in order to provide a secure and safe atmosphere, malicious users can easily share details of other users' personal information in communities other than Wapa. Most users are aware of this potential threat and don't share personal photos or information in their profiles. Such details are given only after the chat progresses. However, it should be noted that one can easily obtain details about other users on various search engines.

In fact, dedicated lesbian users are accustomed to this kind of difficulty and some have complained about it. They learn after extensive periods of texting that the person with whom they have been in contact is indeed a man. They sense that they are objects of the male gaze, which is a form of surveillance.

Male presence on MDAs was confirmed with the following statements:

"Men use this application because they are horny!" (U1, U3, U24, U32- Similar phrases were compiled)

"A man was harassing me by sending me naked pictures of himself."(U14)

"I came across a man once. It was really very disturbing." (U24)


An important question here is that why men try to interfere in lesbians' mobile activities many straight men think that homosexuality is an illness and believe it can be cured. (Bindel 2011). This problematic identity awareness should be examined in more comprehensive studies.


● *The issue of security*

The degree of concern about security on Wapa varies. While some accept this issue as controllable by personal behavior, others emphasize the holes inherent in MDA technology.


"As long as I do not reveal myself completely, I avoid security problems. I do not think the app is responsible for this issue." (U11, U13, U17, U18, U22, U38- Similar phrases were compiled)

"This is Turkey! The possibility of profiling would not be missed." (U9)

"The application is not reliable at all. Screenshots of profiles can be used by evil people." (U19)
"Once I met a user who was using someone else's stolen pictures." (U27)

"I have a friend who was threatened. When she wanted to end the relationship, which began on Wapa, her partner reached her sister on social media and told the sister that she was a lesbian. There is enough 'drama' in my life and I don't want new ones. Because of this, I concealed my identity." (U40)


The location-based feature of MDAs looks advantageous at first glance. However, the same function also causes unfavorable experiences in terms of security and privacy:


"One day we went to a pub in Kadıköy (a district in Istanbul) with friends. I accidentally opened Wapa and I closed it down after a short while. Somewhat later a girl came to our table and asked "Who is using Wapa at this table?" I hadn't made a coming out speech to my friends yet, so I felt terrible." (U2)


Problems caused by the location attribute have been the subject of further research. Users may not wish to be immediately identifiable to those nearby using an MDA. Also, people can stigmatize MDA users as those just looking for sex (Bumgarner 2013; Blackwell et al. 2014). These experiences reveal that there is need for a mobile literacy education for all MDA users in terms of privacy and security.


● *Discrimination against Queer Identities*

Homosexuality is broadly seen as a sexual orientation especially after the United Nations issued the first report on human rights of gays and lesbians in 2011. Although the stigma against homosexuals has declined in some parts of the world (Hirsman 2012), they are still seen in many societies as patients who must be treated. Homosexuals themselves can discriminate against people of certain gender identities such as butches, transsexuals, and crossdressers as mentioned earlier in the *Statuses and Profile Photos* section of this study. This finding was confirmed again in online interviews:


"Crossdressers are very annoying to me. I'm not phobic but exposure to their requests is tedious." (U23)

"The mannish lesbians, I mean butches, are very unattractive. They do not accept that they are women. If you remind them that they have a vagina, they cry! I'm at peace with femininity." (U34)

"Bisexuals and butches should use another application. They act kinky." (U33)

Only one participant criticized this view. According to her, because of these discriminatory categorizations, homosexuals are not strong enough:

"The society has already excluded us enough. You see statements such as 'I hate butches or trans' on Wapa. It's like saying 'I do not want to eat tomato sauce in a meal' (Tomato sauce is used almost all dishes in Turkey, i.e. it is an essential ingredient). Ridiculous!" (U20)

The finding supports Halberstam's hypothesis about inconsistencies in the definition of masculinity, which is commonly understood as only displayed by males (1998). Combining women with queer identities as "lesbian" is also problematic and presents an incomplete perspective.

- *Real-Life Practices and User Types*

Participants do not separate their virtual life experiences from the physical world. They manage both their real and virtual identities with a holistic approach.

"If you reach the meeting level after a virtual chat, this experience cannot be defined as just 'like real life'. It's already real life." (U4)

"When you meet a candidate in a real place, it's the same as reality." (U11)

"This is just a tool. There are people married with children who meet on social media. Nobody should underestimate that!" (U9)

"We cannot make generalizations by saying 'I met a very bad person on Wapa'. This person is already bad in real life." (U34)

Remarkably, a participant stressed that virtual life is more real than communal life in some ways:

"You may not notice all of someone's personal characteristics in real life. On the other hand, you do not know to whom you are talking. You can learn something about her just by the words she uses. What I mean is, you can easily see past their masks? remove their masks?" (U29)

The superficiality of relationships on MDAs was also stressed many times in interviews. Users' patience and devotion in human relations are increasingly lost in virtual environments:

"Such platforms made me superficial. If I do not like one feature of a candidate, I can easily drop her. After all, there are many women on Wapa." (U16)

"There is only a slight difference between Wapa and the online game Candy Crush: I crush people instead of sugars." (U8)

"Most females stimulate their brains with just the thought of sex here. These feelings are being exploited." (U17)

The selected users have more short-term relationships than long and strongly connected ones. This situation causes disappointment.

"Dates usually end with letdown." (U20)

"I didn't have a romantic relationship. I have had more sexual partners." (U16)
"I had one-night stands." (U19)

"Finding the right relationships in the virtual world is not easy. The long-term relationships always result from impromptu meetings (in real life) Impromptu meetings (in real life) always result in long-term relationships." (U21)

"I had some dates via Wapa but I could not categorize them as a relationship." (U22)

Only three said that they found their soulmates on Wapa (U13, U33, and U36). According to some participants, using the app just for short-term relationships is typical of the low social status of users. In other words, the app population does not reflect the real lesbian population in Turkey.

"I really don't feel like sending messages to candidates. Trust me! This is not true homosexuality." (U2)

"My purpose was finding a lover at first. Then I realized the low level of the users' intelligence." (U36)

"LGBT members are usually above average in intelligence. They are more enlightened. The only positive side of exclusion from society is that lesbians want to thrive. However, they do not fit the profile here, which I tried to explain." (U29)

On the contrary, others emphasized that Wapa is a representative sample of both Turkey in general as well as the lesbian community in Turkey.

"The general cultural level is as low on Wapa as in the entirety of Turkey." (U39)

"It's a sample of a homosexual's everyday life. You know, they are homosexual. How can it be excellent?" (U15)

"The problem is not about Wapa. I do not like the population that I'm in." (U 19)
"Everyone listens to jazz and goes to museums on Wapa ☺ Can you believe it?" (U23)

Wapa can be defined as a technological platform that affects both real-life practices and what can be learned from the platform.

Further, in the case of MDAs, virtual life cannot be considered as only a vehicle of escape. On the contrary, it is a transitive and integral part of real life.

● *Motivations to start a conversation*

Among the criteria for starting a conversation on Wapa are access to profile pictures, statuses, and the age of users. Geographic distance was also considered a significant factor. Some users believe that user photographs do not reflect reality; therefore, they cannot be the initial factor motivating a conversation.

"Images that appear on mobile screens may not be true." (U8)

"Profile photos of users are fantasies ☺ They are really unrealistic. Moreover, beauty does not last forever. Otherwise, my mother would still seem like Türkan Şoray (a beautiful actress from Turkey)." (U10)

"Sharing photos on this app is not courageous; instead it's nonsensical" (U2)

"Photos are misleading. Once I met a user based on her photo but I did not like her in real life."
(U15)

What users want to show in their profile photo is as important as how they appear on Wapa. People are not just their physical appearance. They try to impress other users with messages including transitive, fluid and multiple indicators.

- *Imagination of Redesign*

When users were asked about additional features needed on Wapa, responses varied. Age limits, anonymity, location information, hobbies, smoking habits, and a means of blocking male users were repeatedly suggested. According to users, those kinds of detail would prevent unnecessary communication and would also limit one's loss of confidence in Wapa. The elimination of infrastructure problems, such as screen freezing, was also widely identified as a problem to be solved.

## Conclusion

Internet communication, which overcomes locational and geographical boundaries, allows people a kind of ubiquity with the help of MDAs. Consequently, the boundary between real communal life and virtual life blurs with each passing day. In this context, the present research analyzed Wapa as an MDA for lesbians in Turkey. Lesbian users of Wapa feel forced to hide their sexual identities in real life. They are more dependent on a mobile interface for social contact than are heterosexuals; their struggle for existence on a mobile interface becomes more important. In other words, although the Wapa users are aware of the unsecured nature of MDAs, especially in a conservative country, they have no other chance for communicating except by mobile phones on online environments.

To provide a more holistic view of these technologies, they should be evaluated for their opportunities, possibilities of emancipation, and problems they cause. In this respect, although the MDA technology can be regarded as an opportunity to specify a preferred age range, proximity, and sexual orientation, it is also another medium that continues to produce stereotypes about women and lesbians. Problems such as stalking, sexual stereotyping, and objectification of women continue in communication forms of MDAs. In other words, mobile environments may seem advantageous at first, however, they also resist, oppose, and underestimate queer identities. Furthermore, they serve as a performance space for reproducing both male and female masculinity. Although feminine lesbians complain about negative discrimination, they themselves, are guilty of bias against various queer identities as evidenced by exclusionary statements against butches and transsexuals on some of their profile statements. Negotiations on the female body continue on Wapa, suggesting that positive aspects of MDA still need to be questioned. For instance, some use exclusionary statements against butches and transsexuals on their profile statements. Negotiations on the female body continue on Wapa, so positive aspects of MDA still need to be resolved.

There is a need for detailed studies focusing on usage practices in order to unveil the gendered nature of new technologies. Since Wapa is a location-based online dating application, the findings show only Turkey's urban lesbian mobile atmosphere. Nevertheless, those findings give some insight into both male and female masculinity and into lesbian practices on an MDA.

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