

# Queer (post-)migration experiences: Mexican men's use of gay dating apps in the USA

Sexualities

2021, Vol. 24(8) 1003–1018

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DOI: 10.1177/1363460720944591

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## Abstract

Drawing on an ethnographic research in Mexico City, this article focuses on the use of geo-localized gay dating apps among Mexican queer migrants returning from the USA. Based principally on in-depth interviews and participant observation, this article aims to grasp how the participants have come to use these technologies when arriving in the USA. I argue that gay dating apps impact the trajectories of my informants and that their involvement in these networks is intimately linked to their migration experience. Furthermore, I suggest that these technologies contribute to fill a lack of sociability in the host country and influence queer sexual subjectivities after relocation.

## Keywords

Mexico, queer migration, same-sex sexuality, social media, transnational migration

## Introduction

During the last decade, gender and sexuality studies as well as mobility studies have paid further attention to queer migration. Various scholars (Cantú, 2009; Carrillo and Fontdevila, 2014; Luibhéid, 2008; Mai and King, 2009; Manalansan, 2006; Peumans, 2014; Ryan-Flood, 2015; Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, 2015) have conducted research on the complex interplay between queer

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sexualities and migration trajectories. A few of them (Alcade, 2018; Vasquez del Aguila, 2015) have even paid attention to the case of queer migrants returning to their country of origin. As Carrillo and Fontdevila (2014: 920) pointed out, 'in general, prior work on LGBT immigrants has shown that sexuality-related motivations propel their international relocation – that they leave their countries of origin believing they will be able to live their sexuality more freely'. Carrillo (2004: 58) thus defines sexual migration as an 'international relocation that is motivated, directly or indirectly, by the sexuality of those who migrate'. However, focusing on the USA–Mexican context in particular, Carrillo, in his most recent work (Carrillo, 2017), challenges the idea that queer migrants moving from Mexico to the USA necessarily do so because they perceive their home country as homophobic and their host country as a more open-minded society. In a similar vein, Cantú (2009: 119) argues that 'many of these men come to the USA seeking a "place" where they might have more opportunities to not only explore their sexuality more freely but also develop other aspects of themselves that are constrained by other factors linked to homophobia and heteronormativity'. Indeed, it seems problematic to theoretically dissociate sexuality from other dimensions of LGBTQ migrants' life, such as socio-economic conditions, professional opportunities or even cosmopolitan aspirations.

That is why 'queer migration' is the concept that best encompasses both the guiding line of this research and the experiences shared by the participants. My understanding of queer migration draws from the conceptual framework developed by the Queer Migration Research Network – especially by Luibhéid (2008) – and Manalansan (2006). These researchers view queer migration as a research area that analyses the mutual and multiple relationships between sexuality and migration, but also goes 'beyond migration and sexuality strictly defined' (Luibhéid, 2008: 169) by considering the restructuration of power relations and inequalities through mobility. With this article, I therefore wish to contribute to the queer migration framework as an inclusive concept suggesting that queer migrants' sexuality impacts both migration trajectories and post-migration experiences. Thus, the term 'queer migration' as I will refer to it throughout this article does not refer to an identity label but rather emphasizes the fluidity of sexual identities and subjectivities in a context of migration. Finally, this article refers to the migration condition as the experiences of these men in the USA, even though their involvement in geosocial dating apps in Mexico City (which I refer to as post-migration experiences), after they returned, is discussed later.

Regarding the influence of social media on queer identities, some pioneering studies (Mowlabocus, 2010) already considered this issue as a fundamental change within contemporary gay male subculture. However, the way these technologies are used by queer migrants and their influence on their migration trajectories are poorly acknowledged. Most studies (Dhoest, 2016; Dhoest and Szulc, 2016) on queer migrants and social media tend to further take into account networks such as Facebook or dating websites, even though they briefly mention the use of smartphone apps. Yet, most recently, a few researchers (Cassidy and Yang Wang, 2018;

Shield, 2017) suggested that dating apps are often a way to accelerate integration for queer migrants. During my investigation, the prominence of gay dating apps naturally came up in the stories of two of the informants. That is why this study examines more specifically their trajectories.

This article focuses on Mexican queer migrants returning from the USA and their use of geo-localized gay dating apps while they were abroad. One of the main arguments of this study is that dating apps significantly impact the trajectories of my informants, both as queers and as migrants. They shape – or reshape – the way they negotiate affective relationships and sexuality. I argue that the use of gay apps plays a major role in the redefinition of queer sexual subjectivities while abroad. Yet, I do not only show how gay dating apps reshape sexualities and networks of relationships after relocation, I also discuss the context in which the participants have come to use these tools. Indeed, they discovered gay apps in the USA, not in their home country even though they are available there too. Therefore, this article demonstrates that the use of such mobile technologies must be regarded as a full dimension of the migration experience for the participants.

## Methodology

The findings presented here are the result of a five-month ethnographic fieldwork with eight participants, aged from 24 to 32 at the time of the research, who self-identified as gay or bisexual. This qualitative research is based on in-depth interviews, informal conversations and participant observation. Although the participants have different social backgrounds, the majority of them come from the lower middle class and are *mestizos*.<sup>1</sup> Some of them were born in other regions in Mexico but they all identified Mexico City as their ‘home’.

I met the participants through common friends and geosocial dating applications. We saw each other on a regular basis in various contexts where I conducted participant observation: groups of friends, family, city walks, gay venues, university campus, etc. I also carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Spanish, which was the informants’ native language. This research would not have been possible without geo-localized dating apps. First of all, I contacted most of my informants through these apps. They were useful both for contacting the informants and understanding certain realities of the Mexican gay subculture. Almost all my informants were familiar with the use of these tools and when the question came up during the interviews, my own experience enabled me to understand the framework of this online environment, at least in the Mexican context, as I did not use these apps in the USA (which may limit the findings presented here). Thus, I downloaded two dating apps: Grindr and Tinder (the characteristics of these apps will be detailed later on). As my profile did not contain any description, I had to explain my role and my position as a researcher before starting to chat with potential participants. I introduced myself as a foreign social scientist currently doing an investigation on gay men who had migrated to the USA.

## Exploring gay dating apps: An entry into the host society

Geosocial dating apps emerged quite recently (in the late 2000s and early 2010s) and have an increasing influence on gay and bisexual men (Badal et al., 2016). Most gay apps do not offer any platform for computers or laptops, which means that they are only available through smartphones and tablets. Mobility is thus the *raison d'être* of these applications. They are new instruments of mobility because people do not only use them at home on their laptop, like dating websites, but rather in the streets, at work, at university, in public transport, and so on. Thus, dating apps challenge the usual framework of other social media because they are location-based.<sup>2</sup>

While prior research (Dhoest and Szulc, 2016; Shield, 2017) underlined that queer migrants had already experienced these social networks in their countries of origin, in my investigation, I was surprised by the fact that all the participants who used gay apps discovered these technologies in the USA, after they arrived, even though they do exist in Mexico. For at least two of them (Antonio and Ernesto<sup>3</sup>), the use of geo-localized gay dating apps played a major role during their integration in the host country. I argue that gay apps significantly impact the trajectories of these participants, both as gay/bisexual men and as migrants. They often represent for them a major tool to enhance their integration in the USA. Indeed, as these men are not necessarily used to the same gender and sexual norms than those of their country or origin, these tools therefore represent a way to enter this new system. Even though most users do not always meet all the persons they chatted with, many of them spend a considerable amount of time on these apps. For these men, gay apps are part of their daily routine and they use them more than any other social media, including Facebook. It is then reasonable to believe that gay dating apps have a significant impact on their lives.

### Antonio

Antonio was 27 years old at the time of the research. He migrated to Dallas (Texas) in 2014. Before migrating, he was studying social development at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and then working for a Mexican company for very low wages. Antonio travelled legally to the USA with a tourist visa but already knew he was going to stay more than the allowed period and then become undocumented. He went to his aunt's place and started to work in the gardening sector in order to increase his income. For Antonio, the decision to migrate was therefore motivated by working conditions and economic opportunities. His homosexuality did not play a role in his decision according to him. Antonio self-identified as homosexual long before he migrated, at the age of 21. He also came out to his closest friends and sisters at that time. When he was 25 he dated his first boyfriend and told his mother he was gay.

Antonio discovered gay apps through his cousin, a heterosexual Mexican girl who had been living in Dallas for a long time. He asked her if she could drive him

to a gay bar in Dallas as he wanted to experience gay nightlife in the USA and his cousin told him about the apps. Antonio told me he never heard about these in Mexico City. He describes his discovery as follows:

These social networks are just for sexual encounters. You have a profile and you find all kinds of profiles where people describe their dick for example. Like 'it's 18 centimeters'. They tell you about their skin color. Or they just put a picture and a brief description of who they are and what they're looking for. And they say 'I like white guys, tall ones, fat ones'. I discovered all that when I was there, in Dallas. [...] With the men I was working with in the gardening sector, I realized these networks were very popular there. Everybody used them. They [his Mexican colleagues] were heterosexuals but they used them as well. They showed me thousands of apps where they were chatting. And they were dating all kinds of girls through these apps. There are some apps where you can choose like race, sex, age, etcetera. So there are like filters. And then you find supposedly what you're looking for. In essence, it's pretty much the same thing [as the gay apps]. In general, they fuck her only once and then they look for others.

Antonio describes the functioning of the gay apps and the way people are classified according to physical characteristics. He quickly observed how Mexican *mestizos* are perceived within the Texan (online) gay community and told me it could be an asset. As Antonio is mainly top/active during sexual intercourses, his Mexicanity was often valued in Dallas because of the *macho* fantasy still attached to many Mexican or Chicano men in the USA (Cantú, 2009). Despite his skin color and his accent, Antonio did not feel discriminated during his use of dating apps (online) nor with the people he met through them (offline). In contrast, although he never mentioned homophobic behaviours among his relatives in Mexico City nor in his workplace and neighbourhood in Dallas, Antonio felt oppressed in these heteronormative environments. While he told me about the very first time he used the apps, Antonio said that he was amazed by the number of users 'of all types' connected around him in such a small perimeter (a few hundred metres) while he was in Dallas, a trend that he rarely observed in Mexico City. This feeling of 'being just one among many others' was something totally new for him, which encouraged him to further explore this unknown environment.

His testimony also exemplifies how the discovery of these networks may occur. As Antonio said, he did not hear about dating apps in Mexico with his gay friends, but instead, he discovered their existence in the USA, through heterosexuals. While lesbian and gay research in general (Weston, 1991) and the literature on queer uses of the internet in particular (Alexander, 2004; Mowlabocus, 2010; Woodland, 2010) have acknowledged the close interconnection between members of the gay and lesbian communities, it is striking that Antonio got introduced to these networks via straight people (his female cousin and some of his colleagues). Indeed, his involvement with gay apps was initiated through his observation of straight or universal dating apps<sup>4</sup> as they were used by his Mexican colleagues. The influence

of the (heteronormative) diaspora must be emphasized: Antonio's colleagues assumed he was straight and then pushed him to create a profile on one of these apps. Antonio was initiated to geosocial dating apps *because* he was immersed in a male homosocial environment. His male peers showed him how Mexican men could have sex easily in Dallas. Interestingly, Antonio's first encounter with dating apps was therefore part of his migrant experience – as a Mexican gardener among others – rather than linked to gay socializing.

The first day Antonio used these apps, he planned a date for the following day with a 30-something Texan gay man. In the end, they never had sex but Antonio was very happy about this first encounter. Indeed, he made his first friend in Dallas. Despite several weeks he had already spent there, Antonio had his first long conversation in English with this man. Among dozens of men he met in the USA through these apps within a few months, Antonio told me that he had sex only with 'eight or nine' of them. During his stay in Dallas, Antonio kept using these apps almost every day in order to meet new friends. As he was hosted by his aunt's family, Antonio felt he did not have any autonomy. His aunt or his uncle had to drive him from their apartment to his working place every day. As he did not have a car, he could not do anything on his own. Furthermore, his aunt's family lived in an Indian district, which did not give him the opportunity to make other Mexican friends. Antonio was seeking jobs in local temporary employment agencies but did not find as many opportunities as he expected. After a few weeks in the gardening and construction sectors, Antonio progressively stopped searching and started to experience loneliness. He said several times that he suffered from this sense of enclosure.

Antonio's involvement with geosocial dating apps quickly became the only way to escape the restrained circle of his aunt's neighbourhood and the oppressiveness of his heteronormative workplace. Antonio was not even looking for friends outside the gay apps because he was going out all the time with the men he met online. As Antonio's case illustrates, the use of gay apps may significantly impact migration experiences. These tools were the only way he found to enjoy a social life in the host country beyond his relatives. Through the use of gay dating apps, Antonio found opportunities to overcome major barriers he faced as a Mexican gay man in Texas.

### **Ernesto**

Some similarities can be found in Ernesto's story. Ernesto is a 24-year-old professional who comes from a lower middle-class family. He now works in a communication company and lives in Polanco, a privileged business district in Mexico City. When he was 22 years old, he went to San Bernardino (California) to attend an English language course for seven months. It was his first experience abroad. Before going to the USA, Ernesto had had a short sexless relationship with his first girlfriend and self-defined as *bi-asexual* because, he said, he used to like boys and

girls but was not sexually attracted by anyone. Ernesto also started to use gay dating apps while he was studying in San Bernardino:

It was out of boredom. I started school at 8am, I finished at 3pm. Sometimes, from 3 to 5, I went to the gym. In the first room I got, I had a roommate but in the second room they gave me, I was alone. [...] So I was bored in my room and one day I decided to type 'gay' in the finder of my smartphone and I found several apps. So I downloaded Tinder<sup>5</sup> and I tried for the first time. But in vain. [...] More things happened ... I mean sexually ... when I was in Florida.<sup>6</sup> Because I downloaded Grindr<sup>7</sup> when I was there. And then Hornet.<sup>8</sup>

After getting experienced in these social apps, Ernesto felt more comfortable and spent a lot of time using these networks:

I already got into libertinage haha! I derailed. From Florida to New York, the two last months in the US, I was totally liberated. If there was someone I like and that person liked me as well, I would send him a message saying 'let's meet!'. It was straight to sex with those in New York. I was already on Grindr. For me, this app is for sex, nothing else. The people I meet knew we were all looking for the same thing. I used simultaneously Grindr and Tinder. On Tinder, I met the guys before for a talk and then we had sex most of the time. Or at least we went out for dinner. On Grindr it was only sex, sex, sex. For example, one day I was in San Luis Airport for a stopover. I opened the app and there were many people connected around. I started to chat with one of them and I said 'I'm in that place of the airport' and we had sex. You see, every place I went to, every time, I had sex through these apps.

As Ernesto's case illustrates too, the use of gay social networks is often a key factor in these men's trajectories. It must be emphasized that applications such as Grindr or Tinder are therefore the only prism through which some of them started to be sexually involved with numerous partners in the USA. This also means that Ernesto (as well as Antonio) had no sexual encounters – and very few encounters *tout court* – outside these networks while they were in the USA. Ernesto is by far the participant who had met the largest number of men through the dating apps (within seven months), most of the time for sexual encounters, but not only. By using the apps, Ernesto quickly learned how to render himself legible on these virtual spaces through his appreciation of other users' strategy. Like Antonio, Ernesto did not hesitate to show his face on his profile picture to attract more users and save time during online chats.<sup>9</sup> According to him, this would have been much more difficult in Mexico City given that 'one never knows who might be connected at the same time: a neighbor, a friend, one of [his] cousins'.

Ernesto's trajectory in the USA coincides with numerous changes, both in the information indicated on his user's profile and in the ways he used various dating apps. As mentioned earlier, Ernesto started to use Tinder – that he considers as less sex-oriented than Grindr – when he was studying English in California. After that,

he travelled a few months in Florida – where he started to use Grindr and Hornet – and in New York. Ernesto told me about his first steps on Tinder, a few weeks after he arrived in California. He talks about this experience as his ‘first attempt to meet other gay boys, even though [he] didn’t want anything sexual to happen.’ Ernesto’s involvement on Grindr and Hornet marks a shift in his use of geosocial apps. As Ernesto did not enjoy the same stability any more (he was travelling in Florida and New York), his chats and meetings through these apps became a way to make new connections in new cities. This stage of Ernesto’s journey also coincides with frequent changes in his user’s profile. For instance, he used to replace his pictures quite often in order to show he had travelled to various places in the USA and was therefore already integrated. Likewise, Ernesto paid attention to upload pictures presenting him surrounded by other men (most often partners and friends he had met through the apps). This, according to him, would make him more appealing in this online environment where ‘pics’ are often a key element taken into account to get in touch with other users.

Based on Antonio’s and Ernesto’s stories, I would argue that their experience of gay apps is integral to their integration process. Both Antonio and Ernesto migrated to the USA in their mid-20s. As former university students in the region of Mexico City, they had been familiar with several LGBTQ people, some of whom were already using these apps (without them knowing). Yet, they did not start to use the apps in Mexico. Indeed, Antonio and Ernesto said that their new life abroad, far from their relatives (family, friends, neighbours), enabled them to experience their intimacy in a different way. Both of them took advantage of their journey abroad to fully explore various gay apps that they now manage easily and strategically. These tools provided a sense of community that allowed Antonio and Ernesto to escape loneliness and boredom. Progressively, they felt more comfortable with their partners as they gained knowledge – both about the ‘gay community’ and the host country – and greater self-confidence as gay/bisexual men.

### **Filling a need for sociability**

As mentioned earlier, previous research on gay migrants’ use of dating apps emphasized the role played by these apps in the integration process. Indeed, as Shield (2017: 244) noted in his research conducted in Copenhagen on recently arrived migrants and their use of geosocial media, ‘for gay immigrants in particular, informal chats on gay dating platforms can be a useful way to engage initially with others in the host country and to build social and logistical networks’. This insight is essential for the present research as well. I argue here that, for the participants, geo-localized dating apps often contribute to fill a need for sociability. Finding other gay men (whether for sexual contacts or not) through these apps enables them to create new networks outside of the Mexican community they are expected to be part of. In this particular context, their sexuality cannot be solely reduced to ‘something essentially private’ (Mai and King, 2009: 297). It is a means



to explore other milieus while living abroad. For queer migrants, experiencing non-normative sexualities in heteronormative environments can bring changes impacting other dimensions of their lives (Cantú, 2009). The men interviewed emphasized the oppressiveness they faced in the USA, stuck in heteronormative neighbourhoods. Consequently, meeting various partners and/or friends online was also a way for them to enhance their integration and to gain agency in this process. Indeed, Antonio tried the apps because he was trying to escape confinement and loneliness in Dallas. Likewise, Ernesto started to use gay apps out of boredom, as he said. Thus, their loneliness in the host country undoubtedly played a role in the way they discovered these technologies.

Therefore, gay dating apps fill various needs going beyond sexual contacts. These were not only a way to get integrated in the new city, but they were also used to socialize. For the participants, searching for other men who are gay and bisexual as well does not imply looking only for sexual contacts. Sometimes, a first date reveals common areas of interest between users rather than physical attraction. As previously mentioned, the participants met the vast majority of their friends in the USA through dating apps and, very often, they never had sex with them. Ernesto, for instance, told me that he had thousands of online conversations on the same app in a year (including seven months in the USA). For him, meeting men through the networks was sometimes a way to get offered a job. For Antonio, meeting a man everyday through the apps was also a way to improve his English, as he said.

Although they mostly enjoyed their sexual experiences through these apps, the participants never mentioned sexual desire as a motivation to use them. Indeed, it seems clear that sexual contacts were in no case the only purpose of these men's involvement in dating apps, but rather a means to create social ties in the challenging context of migration. Of course, sex does remain a key aspect of their use, but more than sex per se, I would argue that gay apps also work as a way to gain further social recognition for these men. By chatting and meeting people face-to-face through these apps, Antonio and Ernesto felt socially valued, a feeling they rarely experienced outside this online community while they were in the USA.

### **The migration of sexuality**

While the shift of sexualities among Mexican gay men in the USA has already been acknowledged (Cantú, 2009; Carrillo and Fontdevila, 2014; Thing, 2009, 2010), the role of geosocial dating apps in this process has been overlooked. In this section, I argue that gay apps influence the ways the participants define themselves and manage their sexual life. Drawing on Cantú's *Sexuality of Migration* (2009), I wonder to what extent the trajectories of these men could be analysed through the 'migration of sexuality' framework as well.

Since the 1990s, it has been argued (Cantú, 2009; Carrillo, 1999; Thing, 2009, 2010) that the Mexican understanding of homosexuality is shifting from a traditional definition to a more 'modern' view. In Mexico, as in most Latin American

countries, male same-sex sexuality has been perceived through a ‘gender stratified *activo/pasivo*<sup>10</sup> model of homosexuality’ (Thing, 2010: 809) according to which only the *pasivo* (sexually penetrated) partner is considered as gay – and often repressed for this reason – whereas the *activo* (sexually penetrating) partner is usually not affected by the homosexual stigma (Almaguer, 1991; Carrier, 1995). Yet, the most recent understanding of male same-sex sexuality is rather defined by the ‘object-choice gay model of homosexuality’ (Thing, 2010: 809), which prevails in most ‘western countries’. The object-choice model implies that only the partner’s gender matters. According to this understanding of homosexuality, a gay man is a man having sex with other men, regardless of his sexual role. Therefore, the conflict around both Mexican perceptions of male homosexuality also impacts the way queer people self-identify and define themselves to others through the apps. These therefore become media for the performance of sexual identities.

Ernesto, for instance, always had the *activo* role when he started to experience his sexuality in the USA through dating apps. Later, he met a man who was *activo* as well and convinced him to change his habits for one night. But the experience was disappointing and Ernesto then added on his Grindr profile that he was exclusively ‘top’. Prior to this experience, even though Ernesto had only had sexual intercourse as an *activo* in the USA, he did not want to specify his sexual role on his profile in order not to exclude the possibility of trying to perform the *pasivo* role. Ernesto’s decision to modify his user’s profile and to indicate online that he was exclusively *activo* had the automatic effect to attract only partners who identified as *pasivos* or *internacionales*<sup>11</sup> (sexually versatile). The reference to the sexual role on users’ profiles tends to further fix an aspect of their sexual identity (e.g. the category top/bottom/versatile) that was perhaps more unstable in the past. Consequently, the indications these men decide (or avoid) to specify online have direct effects on the experiences they have through these platforms. That is why I suggest that the use of gay apps induces a new relationship to sexuality while abroad. The perspective of gay dating apps provides an entry point for understanding the issues at stake regarding trajectories of identity, desire and intimacy among queer migrants. In today’s context, they appear as an essential tool to further analyse what Cantú (2009) called the ‘sexuality of migration’.

Thus, sexual experiences are integral to the migration trajectory. But this does not imply that queer sexuality is necessarily a motivation for relocation. Rather, it stresses the constant and complex interplay between migration experiences and non-normative sexualities. Thinking the ‘migration of sexuality’ through the use of gay dating apps may therefore lead us to further understand the various and changing meanings attached to sexual experiences, identities and subjectivities during gay men’s migration and post-migration experiences.

### **Queer migration and post-migration experiences**

Some of the previous insights lead me to understand these experiences as integral to the migration experience. Indeed, I would argue that feelings of loneliness,

geographical distance from relatives and cosmopolitan encounters seem to be more relevant factors for the participants than ‘American culture’ as such. Thus, I suggest that there is more emphasis on the relocation itself than the origin or the destination of the participants.

Previous literature on queer migrants’ use of geosocial media has shown that, for many of these men, navigating on gay dating apps in their country of origin – prior to their relocation – was a useful way to escape oppression they could suffer outside of these networks. Drawing on their investigation among diasporic gay men in Belgium, Dhoest and Szulc (2016: 7) have found that ‘such platforms offered the first introduction to gay culture, where they chatted before meeting men offline’. In addition, Shield (2017: 256–257) argues that ‘the ways immigrants use gay dating profiles in Denmark or Sweden do not differ greatly from the ways they used social media – even ‘gay’ social media – in their countries of origin.’ Consequently, prior research considers migrant men’s use of these tools as a continuum. However, the stories of the participants detailed earlier differ from Shield’s data. Indeed, the men interviewed here did not use such mobile apps in their country of origin, even though some of them had already come out and were involved in the gay community in Mexico City. Furthermore, the interviewees stopped using these apps when they came back to Mexico, as Antonio’s case illustrates:

People don’t have the same expectations here. For example, in Mexico there are many people hiding their face [on their profile picture] because they want to remain anonymous. In the US, at least in Dallas, no one cares. Actually, when I tried using Grindr in Mexico City, a few weeks after I came back, it reminded me of all the ghosts I wanted to forget. You know, people hiding, scared of their family, of homophobia. I had dealt with that, it’s done for me. I don’t want to go back to these issues. And people on Grindr in Mexico City are too complicated for me. So I just deleted the app, all the apps, and now I don’t use them anymore.

Like Antonio, Javier – another participant whose story is not discussed previously – also stopped using the apps a few weeks after he came back to Mexico, preferring to ‘see what may happen in real life’. These different attitudes could be partly explained by the difference of context. But I also suggest that the experience of living abroad for the first time had a real impact on the participants’ involvement in geosocial apps. Indeed, it clearly appears that the use of dating apps is directly attached to their life in the USA. Using these at home is seen as a return to a former stage of their life.

In addition, while the participants were both gay/bisexual and Mexican, it seemed obvious for them to start socializing through LGBTQ networks rather than Mexican ones. This could be explained by the heteronormativity of the Mexican diaspora in the USA (Cantú, 2009; Thing, 2009, 2010), but I would also stress that gay dating apps enable them to escape their milieu and to satisfy their cosmopolitan aspirations. Antonio, for instance, told me about his attraction

toward ‘people from other countries’:

[Talking about the partners he was looking for in the USA] I have like a fetish. I’m very attracted by people from other countries. I really like to learn from them. The Mexicans, I can already meet them in Mexico. [Talking about the partners he is now looking for in Mexico] Look, maybe it’s just a stupid dream but I intend to get someone who isn’t from here, from Mexico. I want to discover other countries. I want to experience other things. Mexican boys, I already know them. So I’d like to discover other cultures.

Likewise, Ernesto and Javier also confessed that they were first looking for foreign men when they came back to Mexico. According to Javier, ‘at first, trying to date Mexicans online, it felt like going back to the beginning’. Furthermore, despite the significant presence of Mexican men in their respective destinations, it seemed obvious for them that they were not going to look for other Mexicans while they were in the USA. Yet, unlike Antonio, his straight male colleagues were rather looking for Mexican or Latina women (generally *mestizas*) and seemed concerned by the diversity of their partners. During their stay abroad, the participants then found a way to enhance their position as cosmopolitan gay men. Now they returned, this experience provides them greater self-confidence for dating foreigners in Mexico. This is not only due to their better level of English but rather to their refusal to ‘go back to the beginning’. When Ernesto (who is *mestizo*) confessed that ‘the only Mexican boys [he] would date are *güeros*<sup>12</sup> with green or blue eyes’, he draws a clear demarcation between white partners he is looking for and non-white men he does not consider anymore *after* his relocation. This tendency must be interpreted in the context of widespread anti-indigenous racism in Mexico and anti-brown racism in the USA. In the end, despite the significant difficulties they faced in the USA, these gay men felt proud of what they achieved. Their new ‘selection criteria’ for partners, although they remain rooted in questionable hierarchies, can be understood as a way to maintain their position as cosmopolitan<sup>13</sup> gay men.

In the end, it is striking that, despite differences in their stories, the men I interviewed enjoyed ‘sexual freedom’ and greater self-confidence after relocating at some point but, paradoxically, they did not really adopt the ‘liberation narrative’ (Luibhéid and Cantú, 2005) as their own. Indeed, none of them associated these positive experiences with US values of (sexual) freedom. Then, the way they discovered these tools abroad and came to create sociability, their association with cosmopolitan aspirations and the discontinuity in their use are several factors that tend to show how geosocial gay dating apps may influence migration and post-migration experiences.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have shown that gay dating apps represent an essential insight for understanding migration and post-migration experiences and queer

sexual subjectivities for gay and bisexual Mexican men who migrated to the USA. Their original purpose (finding sex partners) is sometimes diverted for new forms of sociability, which enhance queer migrants' agency in the integration process. I have then emphasized the new context in which these men have come to use dating apps. Their discovery of the apps in the USA and their renunciation of them back in Mexico demonstrate how these are directly associated with migration experiences. Therefore, unlike the conclusions of prior research on queer migrants and dating apps, there is no continuum in the participants' use of these tools.


Thus, interviews with the participants reveal that gay dating apps contribute to fill a lack of sociability in the host country. They are used not only to find sexual partners, but also to build new networks and escape the restrictive circle of the diaspora. Consequently, the apps enable Mexican queer migrants to manage their trajectories with more agency. As the examples discussed throughout this article illustrate, and because geo-localized gay dating apps are now one of the main ways to meet partners within the gay community, it is crucial to further take into account the role played by these technologies in the experiences and the sexual subjectivities of queer migrants. Indeed, dating apps are not simply a continuity of pre-existing LGBTQ social networks but, instead, they contribute to profoundly change queer relations. Because they have an increasing influence within the gay subculture (both locally and globally), these technologies profoundly reshape gay men's relationship to intimacy, sociability and sexuality.

Finally, I believe further research on these issues may provide new insights on 'queer friendship'. In the wake of Foucault's theory on 'friendship as a way of life', some social scientists have paid attention to the reconfiguration of networks and relationships among queer people. In the early 1990s, Weston's *Families We Choose* (1991) was a powerful call to rethink gay and lesbian ways of *making* 'kinship as an extension of friendship' (1991: 118). Allen, in his ethnography (2011) of black lesbians and gay men in Cuba, conceptualized 'friendship as a mode of survival' (2011: 129) for this community and found that friendship was a powerful way to resist racism and homophobia in the Cuban context. Therefore, I would suggest that gay dating apps could also be considered as a new source of sociability for gay and bisexual men, especially in a context of migration where people often experience greater instability. Indeed, they provide a new way of making interconnected friends, lovers, and partners. They represent a new framework of relationships in a new place, far from family members, peers and other relatives.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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## Notes

1. *Mestizo/a* is a Spanish word used in Mexico to designate people of mixed descent. In Mexico, the majority of the population is *mestizo/a*.
2. Users are connected in a geographical perimeter (they can choose its scale) around their current position. This means that the circle changes while they move throughout the city.
3. All names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.
4. Antonio could not remember which apps his colleagues were using except Tinder that he also used.
5. Tinder is a mobile app where bisexual men can look both for male and female partners.
6. During his stay in San Bernardino, California, Ernesto travelled to various places in the USA.
7. Grindr is a mobile app where gay and bisexual men can look for male partners. This application is reputed to be more sexually explicit regarding the pictures shared by users and the way they chat online.
8. Hornet is more or less similar to Grindr.
9. Users who do not show their face on their profile picture are often asked to send more pictures at the very beginning of the first chat.
10. The *activo/pasivo* dichotomy refers to the top/bottom or penetrating/penetrated dichotomy commonly used in English-speaking countries to refer to male same-sex sexuality.
11. In Mexico, versatile gay and bisexual men (those who perform both roles) are usually referred to as *internacionales* (internationals). This term (often shortened as *inter*) underlines the supposed incompatibility of performing both roles with the Mexican traditional view of sexual dichotomy (penetrating or being penetrated). So-called *internacionales* are not necessarily foreigners as their label would suggest, but they are classified in a category located outside the normative system used by most Mexican gay and bisexual men.
12. The term *güero* (literally “blond”) is essentially used in Mexico to describe people with blond, ginger or brown hair.
13. This term was even mentioned in some of the interviews.

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