

The Communication and Psychology of Identity on Mobile Dating Apps
for Men Who Have Sex with Men

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the use of mobile dating apps for men who have sex with men (MSM), the privileging of masculinity in these online spaces, and related effects on attitudes about masculinity, the body, and the self. Using self-categorization theory as a framework, the study explored how men infuse masculinity/femininity and body language into their profiles in order to create symbolic boundaries between a masculine in-group and a feminine out-group. Findings indicated a clear preference for masculinity. Drawing on selective self-presentation and the online disinhibition effect, the current work also investigated how patterns of usage and personal attitudes impact visual self-presentation, how visual choices impact the use of language, and how visual self-presentation is related to demographic and attitudinal variables. The results indicated a connection between the amount of app usage and face-disclosure. Shirtless photos were significantly related to age, self-perceived masculinity, anti-effeminacy attitudes, and drive for muscularity. Finally, priming theory was used to examine the relationship between app usage and attitudes. Findings indicated connections between usage and self-perceived masculinity, internalized homonegativity, collective self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction, as well as social connectedness and anti-effeminacy attitudes for some men. Age, race, relationship status, education level, geographic location, and outness all served as important moderators.