

7 - 9 November 2025

Bangkok , Thailand

Digital Resistance in a Patriarchal City: Lesbian Identity and Self-representation on Dating Applications in Guangzhou, China

QIANTING HUO

Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Abstract

This paper explores how lesbian-identifying women in Guangzhou, a city shaped by persistent patriarchal norms and heteronormative expectations, use mobile dating applications—specifically The L, LesPark, and LesDo—as platforms for identity negotiation, resistance, and community-making. Drawing on in-depth interviews and digital ethnography with 15 local app users, the research investigates how these platforms serve not only as spaces for romantic connection but also as strategic tools for constructing and performing non-heterosexual identities in a social context that demands conformity and discretion.

By employing a qualitative feminist methodology and theoretical frameworks including intersectionality, counterpublic theory, and digital self-presentation, the study demonstrates how queer digital practices allow women to reframe their identities, selectively disclose personal information, and curate online visibility in ways that contest dominant gender ideologies. Many participants reported using pseudonyms, coded visual markers (e.g., rainbows, “T/P/NL” labels), and platform-specific community features (such as livestreams and queer forums) to express solidarity and belonging while maintaining safety.

The findings highlight how dating apps become sites of resistance and feminist agency within urban China, where offline public spaces for queer expression remain limited. These digital tools enable users to blur the boundaries between private and public identity, create emotional intimacy under constraints, and form local networks that extend beyond the romantic to the political. The paper concludes by arguing that digital queer spaces, when grounded in localized cultural practice, offer both refuge and resistance in a male-dominated society, and should be recognized as critical arenas of everyday activism.

Keywords: Lesbian Dating Apps, Digital Identity, Queer Resistance, Patriarchal Norms, Feminist Methodology