'Que(e)rying' identity: Intersections of straight and gay male sexual identities in 'casual encounters' ads

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Sexuality can be regarded as an umbrella term which encompasses both *sexual identity*, that is, "the social framings through which individuals and groups are socially categorised (by themselves or others) based on their sexual orientation, beliefs about their sexuality, and/or their sexual practices" and *sexual desire*, understood as erotic desires and practices (Queen, 2014, p. 204). Some researchers contend that sexual identity is inextricably linked to sexual desire and that they both should be studied together as interconnected dimensions of sexuality. Among them, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) propose a view of sexual identity as the result of *intersubjectively* negotiated both practices and ideologies. This approach takes the view that sexual identity, like any other social identity, is inherently relational, unstable and contingent on a specific local context.

An interesting example of sexual identity as inherently relational and socially contingent is the discursive construction of 'authentic' heterosexuality in personal ads posted by self-identified straight men seeking same-sex sexual encounters (Ward, 2008). An analysis of this intersection of straight and gay sexual identity may give insights into the resources people draw on to construct themselves as inhabiting hetero- or homonormative worlds, as well as the role of other socially salient categories in the construction of different sexualities.

In this study, which is a work in progress, I will carry out corpus-assisted discourse analysis of personal ads posted by self-identified straight men seeking sex with men from the 'casual encounters' section of the bulletin board website craiglist.com. The aim is to explore the intersections of straight and gay male sexual identities and to identify the attitudes and ideologies drawn on by posters to construct their sexual identity. Also, I will look at how gay and straight sexualities intersect with other socio-politically salient categories such as race, age, gender or social class. Methodologically, this study draws on corpus analytic methods such as keywords, collocation and concordance analysis, and on Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) *tactics of intersubjectivity* analytical model. By combining the two approaches, this study will provide not only some quantitative evidence of the discursive constructions of sexualities, but also some qualitative insights into the construction of straight and gay sexualities in the specific local context of online personal ads.

References

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