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Open Commitment: Communicative Technology and the Struggle for Gay Romance in Contemporary Vietnam¹

Abstract

Since the mid-2000s, the widespread usage of the Internet, social networking sites, and messaging applications has enabled young Vietnamese to engage in forms of relationship-building beyond parental control and governmental censorship (Nguyen 2007). This is particularly significant for gay men in Vietnam who generally find little support for their lifestyles in their families and communities and have turned to cyberspace as a means to find and connect with men of similar sexual orientation. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with gay men in Ho Chi Minh City and media posts on various Vietnamese gay sites and forums, such as *Gay 18+ Confession*, this paper explores how virtual communication and social networking sites/applications contribute to the configuration and experiences of romantic courtship and relationships among gay men. In foregrounding one extended gay romance story, the paper examines how advancements in communications technology, while facilitating connections among gay men, also pose difficulties for the maintenance of their romantic relationships. It highlights (1) the potential discrepancy between the model of romance and affect promoted by social networking sites/applications and that imagined by many Vietnamese gay men, and (2) the emotional and moral struggle that Vietnamese gay men experience in situating and maintaining their relationships.

Introduction

Presumably, the Internet is “virtual;” there is no string attached between the two people...A virtual love affair, no matter how much you love that person, is still virtual. You are only loving the facade that the other person is constructing.

—Post on *Gay 18+ Confession* (October 15, 2017)²

The above testimony of a gay man on *Gay 18+ Confession*, a popular Facebook group dedicated to the sharing and discussing of all things related to gay relationships in Vietnam, captures a sentiment commonly shared by the gay men in the country. In my conversations with gay men in Ho Chi Minh City, a bustling commercial center in Southern Vietnam, it appears that there is a struggle for gay romance. As the Facebook post above makes

clear, new communication technologies, such as social networking sites and gay chat applications on smartphones, seem to figure prominently in Vietnamese gay men’s experience of love and romance, offering new possibilities, but also challenges.

While the majority of research on gay men in Vietnam has focused on the relationship between homosexuality and HIV/AIDS,³ on the construction of LGBT spaces and community in Vietnam,⁴ and on the historical construction of homosexuality in Vietnam,⁵ little has been written on contemporary Vietnamese gay romance. Drawing on data collected from semi-structured interviews with gay men in Ho Chi Minh City and from media posts on a publicly open Vietnamese gay Facebook group, I explore the contour of contemporary gay romance in Ho Chi Minh City, as gay men utilize and incorporate new communicative technologies in their search for love.

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In this paper, I feature a single love story of Khoi and Minh,⁶ a gay couple in Ho Chi Minh City, to highlight how virtual communication and social networking sites/applications both facilitate and engender anxieties in romantic relationships among gay men in late-socialist Vietnam. Through the story of Khoi and Minh, I argue that the study of new communication technologies, including dating apps and social networking sites, need to take into account the cultural contexts in which users are embedded and ethical values through which users see the world. Recent studies on dating and hook-up apps have explored how these apps mediate sexuality and intimacy, generating new ways and possibilities for users to construct identities on and off-line,⁷ to connect with one another in both virtual and physical spaces via geo-location,⁸ and how app users utilize, resist, and challenge digital structures and processes in their experiences, perception, and construction of sexuality and romance.⁹ These studies, however, tend to focus, on the one hand, on Euro-American contexts and on the other hand, on users' usage of and interaction with one another on the apps, with little consideration of how users embed and negotiate the usage of new communication technologies with existing broader socio-cultural and ethical frameworks.¹⁰ By situating this paper in the context of late-socialist Vietnam, I aim to bring an anthropological perspective to the study of communication technologies by attending to how Vietnamese gay men navigate the tension between the model of "open romance" facilitated by gay social networking sites and apps, and the Vietnamese cultural model of *tình cảm*, "a moral sentiment of care and concern for others out of mutual affection and attachment,"¹¹ that emphasizes commitment and responsibility.

Communication Technology and Youth Sexuality in Post-Economic Reform Vietnam

The *Doi Moi* ("Renovation") economic reforms of 1986 brought about dramatic social transformations to Vietnam, including a shift from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, increased access to global cultural trends, and enhanced information technology. The introduction of Internet services in the early 2000s and their subsequent expansion in Vietnam have provided Vietnamese

youth with resources and spaces to socialize and construct new identities. According to statistics from the World Bank, the percentage of people using the Internet in Vietnam has increased from 1.2% in 2001 to 46.5% in 2016.¹² While the fall in the cost of Internet services and the expansion of Internet cafés in urban centers in late 2001 allowed more and more young people to access Internet forums and chat rooms, the introduction of smartphones since 2008 has brought about the development of social networking applications that enable them to find and connect with others in close proximity and over long distance.

The availability and increased accessibility of these technological resources have contributed to new patterns of romance and courtship among Vietnamese youth, offering young people not only greater privacy for engaging in intimate affairs, but also a connection to the global community. Nguyen¹³ documents that the Internet has not only provided a means for young people to connect and chat without being overheard by their parents, but also allowed them to engage in relationships with multiple individuals at once. More generally, Ngo et al.¹⁴ have shown that the Internet has facilitated an open sharing and discussion of sexual experiences and knowledge, and that Vietnamese youth incorporate this information into their understanding and experiences of love and romance. Compared to the generations of their parents and grandparents, it is more commonplace for youth in post-economic reform Vietnam to engage in premarital sexual relations and unmarried cohabitation.¹⁵

In facilitating and enabling connections beyond both parental control and governmental censorship, these technological advancements are particularly important for the LGBT community in Vietnam. Since 2012, Vietnam has been recognized by the international community for having instituted progressive measures when it comes to LGBT rights. In 2013, the Vietnamese state formally removed the provision in the Vietnamese Marriage and Family Law of 2000 that explicitly prohibited same-sex marriage, even though it still has not legally recognized same-sex marriage. Moreover, since 2008, various Vietnamese non-profit organizations (VN-GOs) have developed various programs to support LGBT youth and to publicly advocate for LGBT rights. These organizations, with the permission of

the local government, have successfully organized large-scale gay pride parades and flashmobs across the country, focusing on combating social stigma and encouraging LGBT youth to embrace their identity.¹⁶ Despite this new visibility, homosexuality in Vietnam is still perceived with ambivalence. The media, individual families, and the educational system in Vietnam continue to enforce heteronormativity and portray homosexuality as a sexual deviation.¹⁷ As such, LGBT youth in Vietnam have found refuge in the virtual world, where they can safely connect with people of similar sexual orientations.

Gay Virtual Visibility: Crafting Selves and Seeking Partnership

I first met Khoi, the main protagonist in our love story, in a chic coffee shop on a rainy afternoon in June 2016. A jovial individual, Khoi was 30 years old and had recently finished his Master's degree from Europe. Over a cup of cappuccino, Khoi revealed that he first came out to his parents in 2006. After consulting many books and magazines on homosexuality, he had come to realize early on that homosexuality was not simply a phase for him, and there was no internal conflict, as he recalled. Khoi's first introduction to the gay dating scene was through an online forum called *Táo Xanh* (Green Apple), one of the earliest forums dedicated to all matters pertaining to homosexuality in Vietnam. Created in 2005, *Táo Xanh* contained various discussion threads allowing people not only to share their experiences with gay romance, but also to make new gay friends. In addition to its advice columns where members gave each other consultation on how to deal with family pressures and social stigmas, the forum featured a section where gay men can post pictures and information about themselves with the hope of finding new friends and potential connections. During the interview, Khoi revealed that the cyber structure of the forum provided a certain "script" to the process of relationship building: a person first selected men in whom he is interested, chatted with them using Yahoo! Messenger, a popular instant messaging platform in Vietnam in the early 2000s, and if everything went well, the two parties would exchange number and set up a date.

The online environment allowed Khoi to develop a process of filtering potential dates. In addition to pre-selecting people based on criteria like height, age, educational status, Khoi paid attention to how a person represented himself in photos and in writing, particularly word choices. "You can tell a lot about someone's character depending on the words they chose to use," Khoi remarked. As Freedman observes, the different components of Internet dating, such as profile information, pictures, and instant messages, together constitute not only a "detailed portrait" of the prospective matches, but also a "system of checks and balances" that can prolong the virtual interpersonal engagement.¹⁸ Forums like *Táo Xanh* and instant messaging clients like Yahoo! Messenger therefore encourage gay men not only to disclose themselves to a certain degree prior to the actual meet-up, but also to select people based on certain criteria.

As of 2015, *Táo Xanh* has officially become defunct. In its stead are Facebook and smartphone applications that provide much wider and more instantaneous connectivity among gay men. Compared to forums, Facebook is a much more powerful social networking site due to its ability to search for people, to send instant messages, and to connect with gay men outside of your network through Facebook's "Friend Suggestion" function or Facebook groups dedicated to gay-themed interests and discussions. One such well-known Facebook group, *Gay 18+ Confessions*, features daily anonymized testimonials submitted by gay men all over Vietnam sharing their romantic and sexual experiences, as well as a weekly "match-making" section that showcases selected members who want to look for friends and partners. What distinguishes *Gay 18+ Confessions* from older forums like *Táo Xanh* is its integrated experience, where gay men can browse profiles of other gay men openly and talk with them directly all in the same program.

While Facebook is not originally designed to be a gay space (even though it has, to a large extent, served that function for the gay community in Vietnam), smartphones apps such as Jack'd, Grindr, and Blued are created with a gay clientele in mind. These gay male social networking applications (GMSNAs) allow those who have smartphones to connect with gay men within certain geographical

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proximity using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology. On these GMSNAs, a gay man can see pictures of potential partners who are close to him and send instant messages to those in whom he is interested. On Jack'd and Grindr, for instance, gay men are given the option to select and filter men based on the criteria of preferred sexual positions (top vs. bottom), ethnicities, "gay tribes" (e.g. twink, bear, daddy), and the type of relationship they are looking for (e.g. long-term dating, friends with benefits, hookups). Some of these GMSNAs, such as Tinder, can also "streamline" the selecting process by asking users to swipe right on those they like and left on those they do not and then only connecting people who happen to like each other. In large urban centers in Vietnam, such as the bustling commercial center of Ho Chi Minh City where I conducted my research, the majority of gay men use at least one of these GMSNAs to talk and connect with other gay individuals close to them. Gay-themed Facebook groups and GMSNAs provide gay men with a sense of "intense sociality" that is predicated on the "multiplication and complication of intimate relations, the promiscuous mingling of self with other."¹⁹ As Khoi observed above, these online resources allow and encourage gay men to manage their self-images and how they are viewed by others.

While it can be easy for people to construct certain favorable images online, the real test is when gay men take these online connections offline to ascertain compatibility. However, it is also in these physical encounters that online self-presentation has its limitations. Khoi discussed in our interview how someone behaves during the date can be a deal breaker for him, even if they have connected online previously. Khoi, for example, tended to pay attention to how his date talks to the waiting staff at a coffee place. One of his dates in the past would knock a spoon against a tea cup to get the attention of the staff, and to Khoi, that demonstrated a condescending attitude.

To be Committed or to be Open: Competing Gay Romance Scripts

At the time of the interview, Khoi had been in a 5-year committed relationship. The relationship had started in 2011. Between 2006, when he first came

out, and 2011, Khoi had had a couple of one-night stands, four short-term relationships (each lasting around 4 months), and one three-year relationship. All of these previous romantic engagements were with people whom Khoi had met on the *Táo Xanh* gay forum. His current relationship, however, was something different. Khoi met his current boyfriend, Minh, at a play in 2011. The meeting was purely accidental: an online acquaintance of Khoi had bought a ticket to the play, but he could not go, so Khoi asked for the ticket. Khoi saw Minh at the play and struck up a conversation. "It was not love at first sight or anything. I don't believe in that," Khoi remarked. Khoi noted something different between the way he interacted with Minh and those guys he met online. To begin with, Khoi admitted that Minh was not the type of guy that he normally found attractive physically. While Khoi, being a tall person himself, tended to like people who are at least 5'7" tall, Minh was only about 5'2". When meeting guys online, Khoi could easily find people who fit his series of criteria regarding age, height, weight, and educational status and bypass others.

The meeting with Minh was not planned, and there was no screening process involved. Moreover, compared to the other guys online, Khoi did not feel the strong need to engage in sweet talks with Minh; he simply enjoyed Minh's company. After that first meeting at the play, he and Minh exchanged contact information and started to hang out rather often. Whenever Minh went out to do something, Khoi would find an excuse to join him. At the time, Khoi was a teacher, and Minh was a freelance graphic designer. After work, Khoi would grab dinner with Minh, whenever possible. The transition from "like" to "love" occurred about one month after their first meeting. Khoi was the one that proposed to make the relationship official. For Khoi, the transition was marked by what he described as a feeling of "emotional selfishness" on his part. In the first two weeks of getting to know each other, Khoi did not care if Minh was hanging out with other guys. By the third week, however, Khoi developed a distinct sense of discomfort whenever Minh was going out with other people and not with him. At the end of the fourth week, Khoi confessed his feelings for Minh and asked him to be his boyfriend. Minh said yes, and they announced it to their close friends.

Khoi also changed his Facebook status to “in a relationship,” but he could not specify with whom he was in a relationship because he did not want his school to know.

Khoi and Minh’s relationship did hit several rough patches along the way. In late 2013, there was a short period of time when Khoi and Minh both neglected each other’s feelings. It started when an ex-boyfriend of Minh, who happened to live close to Khoi, began to hang out more with Minh. This ex-boyfriend would come over to Minh’s house and pick him up to go to the gym, the same gym where Minh and Khoi usually went. In fact, all three of them tended to work out at the gym around the same time. Despite knowing that there was nothing going on between Minh and the ex-boyfriend, Khoi was annoyed that Minh seemed to neglect him. It was during this time that a few gay men on Facebook started friending and chatting with Khoi. Khoi enjoyed the attention and flirted with some of them through texting, all the while making clear that he was in a relationship and was not seeking a lover. Unfortunately for Khoi, Minh somehow managed to find these flirty texts and got angry. Minh ran away for a few days without telling Khoi, leaving Khoi frantically searching for him.

The biggest challenge to Khoi and Minh’s relationship was in late 2014 when Khoi went to Europe to pursue his graduate studies. This was the first time that Khoi and Minh were separated by great physical distance for an extended period of time. They texted and Skyped each other regularly during the first nine months of their long-distance relationship. Things started to change around June of 2015, when they communicated less and less. This pattern continued for another three months, resulting in Khoi and Minh breaking up with each other in September of 2015. Khoi initiated the break-up. During the first month after the break-up, Khoi was using some gay chat apps, including Jack’d and Grindr, to meet people around. He found two friends with benefits, but he was not keen on developing anything long-term with these guys. However, after that first month, Khoi stopped using these apps because he realized that he might have been too hasty with the break-up, that he felt guilty, and that he wanted to rebuild the relationship with Minh.

In late December of 2015, Minh arrived in Eu-

rope to start his own study-abroad program. Khoi and Minh reconnected and agreed to meet each other in January of 2016. Khoi found out that the reason why Minh had communicated less and less a few months earlier had been because he did not want to burden Khoi with many of his problems. Saving to study abroad for Minh was no easy feat because his family was not wealthy, and he had to rely solely on the financial help of his sister. Khoi apologized for his hastiness and asked Minh if he wanted to get back together. Minh did not decide to get back with Khoi until four months later. During these four months, they communicated more regularly, even though they were still technically broken up. Khoi also found out that Minh, during this time, had “fun” with a couple of guys while traveling around Europe.

In Khoi and Minh’s story above, Facebook and GMSNAs played a major role in the configuration of their relationship at two turning points. The first turning point was when in late 2013, Minh started hanging out more with his ex-boyfriend, thus leaving Khoi feeling annoyed and frustrated. As Khoi was feeling neglected, a few gay men started adding and flirted with him on Facebook. Khoi enjoyed the attention and responded with some flirting himself. When Minh found out about these texts, it drove a wedge in their relationship, resulting in Minh leaving Ho Chi Minh City for a few days without telling Khoi. Another important turning point in their relationship was during the break-up from late 2014 to early 2016, both Khoi and Minh used GMSNAs in Europe to connect and hook up with other gay men. This had also caused uneasiness in Khoi and Minh’s experience of their relationship.

Like Khoi and Minh, several Vietnamese gay couples have expressed similar ambivalences and frustrations towards social networking sites and applications. Doing a quick search on *Gay 18+ Confession*, a Vietnamese gay Facebook group dedicated to gay men sharing their romantic and sexual experiences, one is immediately struck by the commonness of gay men feeling angry, frustrated, and troubled that their boyfriends are using GMSNAs. On these self-confessional posts, many gay men recount stories of how they are either aware of or taken aback by the fact that their boy-

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friends have been using GMSNAs to flirt and/or to hook up with other “lovers,” how they have to create a fake account to expose their boyfriends’ lies, and how they are distraught that their boyfriends do not seem to respect their commitment to each other. At the other extreme, some gay men who are still single and currently looking are frustrated that all of the guys they talk with online, while already taken, are still interested in flirting and hooking-up. One such user on *Gay 18+* posted: “What the f***? Why do gay men who already have ‘husbands’²⁰ continue using Jack’d, Grindr, Hornet? They are that deprived? Them f***ers keep getting me interested and then later confess that they are already taken.”²¹ Another user on the same Facebook group questioned, “Does real love exist in the gay world? It seems like everybody only wants sexual pleasures. Having fun like that, aren’t they afraid of HIV/AIDS or STIs?”²²

Khoi and Minh’s story and these brief Facebook posts highlight the fact that Facebook and GMSNAs promote a certain model of relationship—one that focuses on the appeal of the multitude of options, of potentiality, and of experimentation. This stands in contrast with the ideal of the monogamous and long-term committed relationship that many gay men, both in interviews and through online posts, have expressed. It is important to note, however, that in many cases, the appeal of GMSNAs does not reside so much in the actual act of meeting with gay men in real-life. Tziallas argues that gay men are attracted, even addicted, to GMSNAs because they “‘gamify’ socio-sexual interaction, ultimately doubling as do-it-yourself amateur porn platforms.”²³ GMSNAs make the interactions legible and controllable, while replacing the typical goals of achieving high scores in computer games with the promise of accumulating and acquiring erotic images and chats. Tziallas aptly points out that GMSNAs are built on a sense of choreographed frustration, that is, a frustration that is temporary and that motivates the users to try harder and harder as in video games.²⁴ This correlates with the sentiments expressed by the gay men on *Gay 18+ Confession*: Vietnamese gay men are generally frustrated by GMSNAs and by the fact that their boyfriends use them, but they continue to use them.

Care and Responsibility in Technology-Mediated Romance

The two models of relationship, while coming into tension with one another, are not mutually exclusive. Returning to the story of Khoi and Minh, in late December of 2015, Minh arrived in Europe to start his own study-abroad program. Khoi and Minh reconnected and agreed to meet each other in January of 2016. The couple got back together before Khoi’s graduation from his Master’s program in May of that year. Unfortunately, the couple had to be in a long-distance relationship again as Khoi needed to return to Vietnam upon his graduation. As Khoi was preparing for his trip back to Vietnam, Minh asked Khoi what would happen to their once-again long-distance relationship if one of these days, he could not keep to himself (*giữ mình*) and had sex with other men. “I told him to do whatever he needs to,” said Khoi, “because I don’t want him to feel bad about it.” Khoi continued:

“At the end of the day, sex is human’s natural need. I wrote Minh an e-mail one day after he asked me, saying that if he ever needs human contact and sex, don’t feel bad doing it. I might feel a bit hurt by it, but what can you do, right? Even I am afraid that I cannot keep to myself sometimes. It’s something you have to accept in a long-distance relationship. However, I am almost certain that no matter who Minh hangs out with, he cannot find a person like me. I don’t express my love for him by words, but by my actions. Nobody can care for Minh the way I do.”

Khoi was convinced that Minh’s hooking up with other guys would not undermine the facts that they were still in a committed relationship. In navigating and negotiating the two models of relationship, Khoi makes a distinction between physical and emotional fidelity in which emotional fidelity is more central to the continuation of the relationship than the physical aspect. Emotional fidelity, as Khoi conceived, is sustained by his commitment to caring for Minh and to providing both moral and financial support for him. Khoi felt a strong sense of responsibility as Minh’s partner and was willing to make sacrifices for him, even if

that meant letting Minh have sex with other men.

One can argue that the distinction between physical and emotional fidelity is rendered a possibility, not simply because of the long-distance nature of Khoi and Minh's relationship, but also because of the impact of communication technology in shaping the contour of gay romance. The feelings of care and responsibility that Khoi felt for Minh appear to resonate with the Vietnamese cultural model of *tình cảm* in which individuals care for their loved ones through acts of sacrifice. As Shohet observes, love in Vietnam "entwines relations of *tình cảm*, *tình yêu*, and *tình thương* (care-, romance, and affectionate/pity-love)." ²⁵ To be in love then is to be enmeshed in ethical relationships and to engage in the cultivation of intimate affective ties. In the case of Khoi and Minh's relationship, new communicative technologies come to intersect with Vietnamese cultural conception of love and romance, and the young couple have to negotiate the socio-ethical expectations afforded by these forces. I contend here that in the context of Vietnam, new communicative technologies for gay men should not be seen as only promoting a form of neoliberal self and endlessly open relationships; rather, they are incorporated into young gay men's negotiation with Vietnamese model of love and romance predicated on care, sacrifice, and responsibility.

Conclusion: Technology and the Configuration of Gay Romance in Vietnam

It is important to note that the love story of Khoi and Minh cannot be taken as representative of how all gay men experience and conceptualize

romance in contemporary Vietnam. At the same time, their story does reflect certain common elements of Vietnamese gay romance as shown through the different Facebook posts by other gay men. Through the analysis of their love story and of public posts on *Gay 18+ Confession*, this paper has explored some of the new ways that gay romance is conceptualized and experienced in contemporary Vietnam. I have demonstrated that while advancements in communication technology have allowed gay men to connect with one another more easily, they have also posed new struggles in the experience and sustainability of romance.

Social networking sites and applications promote a model of relationality that emphasizes sexual open-ness and experimentation, a model that is in tension with the ideal of the monogamous committed relationship that many Vietnamese gay men have. At the same time, these two models of romance are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and gay men can negotiate between these two models to create a new structure of feeling, that is the possibility of remaining emotionally committed, while engaging in physical promiscuity. I have tried to show through the story of Khoi and Minh, the experience of gay romance and love in Vietnam, while afforded by technologies that can be found everywhere around the world, is locally and culturally situated. As Vietnamese gay men engage in the excitement of what Payne refers to as "frictionless sharing" of intimacies with others via virtual communicative technologies, they also find themselves desiring and cultivating ethical relationships of care, sacrifice, and commitment.

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Notes

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2 *Gay 18+ Confession*, October 15, 2017, Accessed November 28, 2018. To maintain the anonymity of the users of *Gay 18+ Confession*, I refrain from including the full web links to the Facebook posts.

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- 4 Jacob Aaronson, "Homosex in Hanoi? Sex, the Public Sphere, and Public Sex," in *Public Sex/Gay Space*, ed, William L. Leap (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 203-221; Natalie Newton, "Contingent Invisibility: Space, Community, and Invisibility for *Les* in Saigon," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016), 109-36.
- 5 Frank Proschan, "Eunuch Mandarins, Soldats Mamzelles, Effeminate Boys, and Graceless Women: French Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese Genders," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 4 (January 1, 2002), 435-67.
- 6 All personal names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the interlocutors.
- 7 Rusi Jaspal, "Gay Men's Construction and Management of Identity on Grindr," *Sexuality & Culture* 21 (2017), 187-204.
- 8 Sam Miles, "Still Getting It on Online: Thirty Years of Queer Male Spaces Brokered through Digital Technologies," *Geography Compass* 12, no. 11 (November 2018), e12407; Courtney Blackwell, Jeremy Birnholtz, and Charles Abbott, "Seeing and Being Seen: Co-Situation and Impression Formation Using Grindr, a Location-Aware Gay Dating App," *New Media & Society* 17, no. 7 (August 2015), 1117-36
- 9 Kath Albury et al., "Data Cultures of Mobile Dating and Hook-up Apps: Emerging Issues for Critical Social Science Research," *Big Data & Society* 4, no. 2 (December 2017), 1-11; Christian Licoppe, Carole Anne Rivière, and Julien Morel, "Grindr Casual Hook-Ups as Interactional Achievements," *New Media & Society* 18, no. 11 (December 2016), 2540-58; José A. Bauermeister et al., "Spectrums of Love: Examining the Relationship between Romantic Motivations and Sexual Risk among Young Gay and Bisexual Men," *AIDS and Behavior* 16, no. 6 (August 2012), 1549-59
- 10 Cho, Song Pae, "Faceless Tings: South Korean Gay Men, Internet, and Sexual Citizenship" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011), 195, ProQuest (3503211).
- 11 Merav Shohet, "Troubling Love: Gender, Class, and Sideshadowing the 'Happy Family' in Vietnam" *Ethos* 45, no. 4 (December 2017), 555-76, 568. For a comparison between *tinb cam* (moral sentiments) and *câm xúc* (emotions) in post-reform Vietnam, see Allen Tran, "Rich Sentiments and the Cultural Politics of Emotion in Postreform Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam" *American Anthropologist* 117, no. 3 (September 2015), 480-92.
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- 13 Phuong An Nguyen, "Relationships Based on Love and Relationships Based on Needs': Emerging Trends in Youth Sex Culture in Contemporary Urban Vietnam," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 02 (March 2007), 287-313.
- 14 Anh D. Ngo, Michael W. Ross, and Eric A. Ratliff. "Internet Influences on Sexual Practices among Young People in Hanoi, Vietnam." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 10, no. sup1 (June 2008), S201-13.
- 15 Phuong An Nguyen, 303-304.
- 16 Natalie Newton, "Homosexuality and transgenderism in Vietnam," in *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, ed, Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie (New York: Routledge, 2015), 255-268.
- 17 Paul Horton, "'I Thought I Was the Only One': The Misrecognition of LGBT Youth in Contemporary Vietnam," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 16, no. 8 (September 14, 2014), 960-73;
- 18 Eric Freedman, *Transient Images: Personal Media in Public Frameworks* (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 2011), 115
- 19 Sam Miles, "Still Getting It on Online: Thirty Years of Queer Male Spaces Brokered through Digital Technologies," *Geography Compass* 12, no. 11 (November 2018), e12407; Robert Payne, "Frictionless Sharing and Digital Promiscuity," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (April 3, 2014), 85-102
- 20 It is important to note here that gay men in Vietnam appear to draw on the model of monogamy found in Vietnamese heterosexual relationships that are strongly informed by Confucianism. One indication of this is the way that gay couples refer to each other linguistically. Vietnamese gay couples tend to refer to each other using the pronoun *anh/em* or *chong/vo* (husband and wife). In Vietnamese, the pronoun "anh" is used to

designate someone who is older in age compared to the speaker, while “em” is for someone who is younger in age. In a heterosexual relationship, “anh” is used to refer to the man, while “em” is used to refer to the woman. As such, “anh” tends to have the connotation of masculinity, while “em” refers to femininity. When being applied to a homosexual relationship, assuming that the two persons are of the same age, “anh” and “em” usually correspond to the “masculine” (typically designated as top) and “feminine” (bottom) respectively. Among young gay couples in Vietnam, many also use the pair “chong (husband)/ vo (wife)” to designate the masculine and the feminine gay men.

21 *Gay 18+ Confession*, March 20, 2016. Accessed October 24th, 2016. The post is no longer active.

22 *Gay 18+ Confession*, March 02, 2016, Accessed October 24th, 2016. The post is no longer active.

23 Evangelos Tziallas, “Gamified Eroticism: Gay Male ‘Social Networking’ Applications and Self-Pornography,” *Sexuality & Culture* 19, no. 4 (December 2015), 759–75, 761.

24 *Ibid.*, 766.

25 Merav Shohet, “Troubling Love: Gender, Class, and Sideshadowing the ‘Happy Family’ in Vietnam” *Ethos* 45, no. 4 (December 2017), 555–76, 557.