DIGITAL INTIMACIES, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

International Conference

PROGRAMME

25-26 SEPTEMBER 2025

UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA | ITALY

Index

THE DIGIT PROJECT

Summary

Teens use digital media to explore and experiment with intimacy and their gender identities, develop interpersonal relationships and community connections and access identity-specific resources and services from the relative safety of anonymity. The aim of this project is to analyse how Italian teens (re)define their understanding of gender and intimacy by engaging with digital media and incorporating it into their daily lives.

Main Objectives

The project has 3 main objectives:

1. Producing an important contribution to the field of gender and media studies in terms of knowledge about digital media, young people, gender identities and intimacy;

2. Promoting relevant transformative cultural changes by providing accessible instruments to educators and policymakers;

3. Promoting teens' critical literacy and gender awareness, helping them to better understand and question the logic of platforms and digital media.

To address these goals, after a systematic literature review, a multilevel mixed-methods approach was implemented across four main phases of research activities involving teens aged 16-18 from different Italian regions.

Research activities

The main research activities were as follows:

1. Focus groups employed visual design methods to explore the field;
2. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to explore the relationship between digital practices, gender and intimacy in teens' everyday lives;
3. A national survey was used to generalise the qualitative results; and
4. Final dissemination.

The methodological rationale entails the creation and coordination of a Young Researchers Group (YRG) that comprises youths aged 16-18 with different gender identities and sexual orientations. The YRG supports the entire research project by participating in the co-construction of the instruments for the empirical work and in the design of formative events and communicative artefacts for young people.

The results are disseminated, step by step, throughout the entire project, with both 'traditional' and innovative dissemination tools that are used to address different audiences.

Follow the DIGIT project on:

Website
www.digitalintimacies.eu

Bluesky
@digitprin.bsky.social

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Consortium
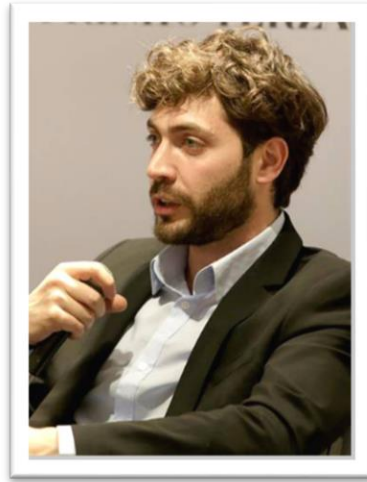

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Principal Investigator

Cosimo Marco Scarcelli, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA) at the University of Padua.

He teaches Media, Gender and Sexuality and Digital Intimacies. Furthermore, he is a member of the Social Sciences doctoral programme board.

He is the Chair of the Bachelor's degree programme in Communication.

His research interests focus on digital cultures in relation to sexuality, intimacy, gender, love and emotions, masculinities, and ponographies.

He is involved in numerous national and international research groups and has published scientific essays, including the books: "Young People and the Smartphone" (Palgrave, 2022, with P. Magaudda and M. Drusian), "Intimità digitali" (FrancoAngeli, 2015), "Sociologia dei New Media" (UTET 2018, with R. Stella, C. Riva and M. Drusian), and "Gender and sexuality in the European media" (Routledge 2021, edited with Despina Chronaki, Sara De Vuyst, and Sergio Villanueva Baselga). His publications include numerous articles and book chapters in both national and international contexts. Additionally, he has served as Associate Editor for Wiley's Encyclopaedia of Gender, Media & Communication.

He is one of the editors of the Journal of Gender Studies (Taylor and Francis) and the Digital Intimacies book series by Bloomsbury. He is also a member of the scientific and editorial boards of several international and national journals and book series.

He has been chair of the Gender & Communication section of ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association) from 2018-2021, after serving as vice-chair of the same section for the periods 2015-2016 and 2016-2018.

In addition to his academic work, he is involved in various training programmes for public and private institutions on topics related to young people's use of digital technologies.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

Aims & Topics

The digital space is gradually contributing to shaping the concept of intimacy, transforming what was once considered the exclusive domain of the private sphere into a continuous flow of data, desires, and connections. From social media to dating apps, from digital tools for self-expression to algorithmic imaginaries, intimate relationships are constantly redefined in the digital environment in increasingly complex and multifaceted ways. For young people, digital media has become an essential part of their everyday lives, as they are the fastest group in taking up, transforming and abandoning new technologies. In their daily media practices, young people establish, maintain, and perform relationships while negotiating the need for privacy with the desire for visibility. Digital platforms act as affective architectures, creating new marketplaces where emotions, identities, and relationships are continuously profiled and monetized.

As Laurent Berlant (1998) noted, these "contradictory desires" are intrinsic to the intimacy of daily life. By welcoming the ambiguities and paradoxes of intimacy, connection and identity, the field of digital intimacies contends with the constant interplay between public and private in everyday life. How is intimacy experienced in a context where everything seems mediated through algorithms and regimes of visibility? What new forms of affection, sexuality, and bonds emerge in the digital daily lives of young people, and what risks do these transformations entail? How do young people draw on, negotiate and transform representations and models of intimate relationships?

This conference invites researchers to investigate the multiple ways in which young people interact with, negotiate, and reinvent intimacy in a progressively digitalized world. Intimacy is not limited to romantic or sexual relationships, but includes a broader spectrum of dimensions, such as friendships, family bonds, personal identity, and emotional well-being. We welcome approaches that move beyond and challenge heteronormative, Western-centric notions of intimacy, inviting broader and more inclusive conceptualizations.

The goal of the conference is to create a critical discussion space to reflect on the opportunities, challenges, and contradictions inherent in digital intimacies, exploring its intersections with the social, cultural, and technological dimensions of daily life. While the digital offers new possibilities for connections, self-expression, and identity construction, it simultaneously raises questions about privacy, surveillance, commodification, and inequalities

Scientific Committee

Cosimo Marco Scarcelli (University of Padova)

Francesca Comunello (Sapienza University of Rome)

Lorenza Parisi (Sapienza University of Rome)

Valentina Fedele (Link Campus University)

Ines Amaral (University of Coimbra)

Sofia Caldeira (Lusófona University)

Despina Chronaki (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

Sander De Ridder (University of Antwerp)

Sara De Vuyst (Maastricht University)

Jamie Hakim (King's College London)

Maria Josè Masanet (Universitat de Barcelona)

Katrin Tiidenberg (Tallinn University)

Sergio Villanueva Baselga (Universitat de Barcelona)

Organizing Committee

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Maria Francesca Murru (University of Bergamo)

Geraldina Roberti (Sapienza University of Rome)

Vittoria Bernardini (University of Padova)

Raffaella Maiullo (Sapienza University of Rome)

Rachele Reschiglian (University of Padova)

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Jessica Ringrose

Professor Jessica Ringrose (she/her) PhD (York University Canada) is co-Director of the Centre for Sociology of Education and Equity at IOE UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, London UK. She also is the cofounder of Postdigital Intimacies research network. Prof Ringrose is an internationally recognized and widely cited expert on teens and social media, youth activism, young people's gender and sexual cultures, sex education and digital literacy in school settings. She had been privileged to collaborate on these topics with colleagues in Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, Chile, The Netherlands and more. She has also worked with a wide range of global and UK stakeholders to shape policy and practice in areas of education, gender, media and communications and justice, and her research recently informed the Online Safety Act, UK. Her recent projects focus on developing educational interventions to prevent tech facilitated gender based and sexual violence, online misogyny and transphobia. In 2020 she was the recipient of The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Distinguished Contributions to Gender Equity in Education Award. She co-authored Digital Feminist Activism: Women and Girls Fight Back against Rape Culture (OUP, 2019). Her latest book, *Teens, Social Media and Image Based Abuse* is out in 2025 with Palgrave.

Paul Byron

Paul Byron (University of Technology Sydney) researches young people's digital cultures of care and informal support, including LGBTQ+ young people's peer-based mental health support on social media. He is co-chair of Australian chapter of the International Partnership for Queer Youth Resilience (INQYR), and author of the book, *Digital Media, Friendship and Cultures of Care* (Routledge, 2021). He is currently researching TikTok cultures of queer and trans mental health support.

GENERAL PROGRAMME

25 September 2025

08:30 – Registration opens
09:00 – 09:30 – Institutional greetings and opening remarks | Room: Aula Magna
09:30 – 10:30 – **Keynote Lecture**: *'Post-Digital Intimacy as a Research Framework'* - **Jessica Ringrose**, University College London (UK) | Room: Aula Magna
10:30 – 11:00 – Coffee break
11:00 – 12:00 – **Roundtable**: *'Digital practices, Gender, and Intimacy in Teens' everyday life'* | Room: Aula Magna
12:00 – 13:30 – **Parallel Sessions I**
13:30 – 15:00 – Light lunch
15:00 – 16:30 – **Parallel Sessions II**
16:30 – 17:00 – Coffee break
17:00 – 18:30 – **Parallel Sessions III**

26 September 2025

10:00 – 11:00 – **Keynote Lecture**: *'Rethinking mental health, care and friendship through TikTok's resonance'* - **Paul Byron**, University of Technology Sydney (Aus) | Room: Aula Magna
11:00 – 11:30 – Coffee break
11:30 – 13:00 – **Parallel Sessions IV**
13:00 – 14:30 – Light lunch
14:30 – 16:00 – **Parallel Sessions V**
16:00 – 16:30 – Coffee break
16:30 – 18:00 – **Parallel Sessions VI**
18:00 – 18:30 – **Closing remarks and concluding discussion** | Room: Aula Magna

PARALLEL SESSIONS

25 September 2025

Parallel Sessions I (12-13.30)

S1: Platformed Dating & Intimate Infrastructures
Chair: Francesca Comunello (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula Magna

Hot or not: How the choice architecture of dating apps shapes intimate valuation practices
Juulia Heikkinen (University of Helsinki)

Contractual Empowerment: Dating Apps and Patriarchal Romantic Contracts
Erinne Paisley (University of Copenhagen)

Love, Family, and Algorithms: Digital Mediations of Intimacy among Middle-Class Youths in New Delhi
Simpi Srivastava (Nanyang Technological University)

Reclaiming Offline Intimacy: Youth, Speed Dating, and the Anti-Swipe in Urban India
Shirin Bismillah (University of Roehampton)

S2: Intimacies in Algorithmic Environments
Chair: Sander De Ridder (Antwerp University) | **Room**: Aula Valeria Solesin

Curated Selves, Algorithmic Intimacies: Negotiating Identity and Image Among Young Chinese Gay Men on Blued
Runping Zhu, Yihan He, Zhanbo Shi, Dinghui Zhou, Chuqiao Liang (Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University)

Resigned yet Anticipating: Emotional Algorithm Calibration in Digital Intimacy
Wei-Ping Chen (National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University)

Algorithmicized Girlhood: Exploring how Algorithmic social media Influences the Sexual Self-Perception and Wellbeing of Teenage Girls
Chiara Fehr (UCL Institute of Education)

Digital Intimacies and Youth in Iran: Navigating Desire, Surveillance, and Resistance
Shahriar Khonsari (Freelance Researcher)

S3: Gaming, Intimacy & Affective Economies
Chair: Manolo Farci (University of Urbino) | **Room**: Aula 3

Leveling Up Intimacy: Gaming Communities, Datified Bonds, and the Emotional Economies of Young People's Digital Lives
Ayse Asli Bozdag (Bahcesehir University)

Playbour of Love: Networks of Care and Negotiations of Agency in Otome Game Communities
Yutong Wang (Tampere University)

Pixelled Bonds: Digital Intimacies Formed Through Gaming Among Queer Youth in Denmark
Burcu Gumus (Aarhus University)

Digital Gambling and Intimacy: The Impact of Gamblification on Young People's Online Social Relationships
Pedro Fernández-de-Castro (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya)

Parallel Sessions II (15-16.30)

S4: Digital Imaginings of Consent
Chair: Cosimo Marco Scarcelli (University of Padova) | **Room**: Aula Magna

"Do you consent?" Reimagining digital consent among young people in a hyperconnected, AI-driven world
Barbara D'Ippolito (Independent Researcher)

Discomfort as Disorientation: Exploring Men's Experiences of Creating 'Nudes' to Share with Women
Rikke Amundsen (King's College London)

*"It's just a bunch of f*****g words": Young people's views on the law in relation to sexual image sharing*
Louisa Street (Keele University)

'Safe uncertainty' and the reimagining of intimacy: Young people, digital cultures, and everyday negotiations of consent and connection
Emily Setty (University of Surrey)

S5: Contesting Digital Masculinities
Chair: Francesca Ieracitano (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula Valeria Solesin

Unpacking the Manosphere: how young men navigate anti-feminist and gendered online spaces. An ethnographic study with male teenagers from Barcelona
Anna Iñigo, Maria-Jose Masanet (University of Barcelona)

Digital masculinities: affective dimensions of men's rights communities in Italian digital spaces
Manolo Farci, Elena Ceccarelli (Università degli studi di Urbino Carlo Bo)

Cyberflashing: Women's Perceptions of Men Who Cyberflash
Lorraine (Lorrie) Hayman (University of Galway)

Swiping Masculinity. The self-representation of masculinity in dating apps. A case study of Milan
Michele Varini, Cesare Russo (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan)

S6: Identity, Emotions and Mental Health
Chair: Lorenza Parisi (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula 3

Longing for Connection, Fearing Closeness: Rethinking Intimacy Among Generation Z
Brigida Orria (Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II)

In search of a sense of self: Digital media as a site of self-identity-development in young people with mental health difficulties
Reidar Schei Jessen (University of Oslo)

To understand and to be understood: Young people's perceptions of peer support for mental health in social media
Essi Holopainen, Meri Kulmala, Anu Katainen, Anna-Maija Multas (University of Helsinki)

The intimate relationship with clothes: a gendered perspective
Romana Andò, Leonardo Campagna (Sapienza University of Rome)

Parallel Sessions III (17-18.30)

S7: Everyday Practices of Digital Intimacies
Chair: Geraldina Roberti (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula Magna

Youth and Media Relations in the Context of Everyday Life Practices
Gamze 3.Karakaya (Ankara University)

Flirting on Instagram and not on Tinder: affective codes, relational media practices and adolescent intimacy languages
Marta Meneu (University of Valencia), Anna Íñigo (University of Barcelona), Maria José Masanet (University of Barcelona)

Navigating, Advocating, and Strategizing: Exploring Social Media Practices of Netherlands-Based LGBTQIA+ Youth of Color
Joey R. Stofberg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Seval Gündemir (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Serena Does (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; Verwey-Jonker Institute)

Critical approaches to LGBTIQ+ media from teenagers perspectives: Pro- and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses within a transmedia ecosystem
Vítor Blanco-Fernández, Anna Iñigo (University of Barcelona)

S8: Sex Education & Teaching Intimacies
Chair: Valentina Fedele (Link Campus University) | **Room**: Aula 3

YouTubers as Sex Educators for Youth in the Digital Age
Maya Magnat (Independent Researcher)

#Romantasy and Raunch Culture: Exploring Young Women's Sexual Literacy on BookTok
Claudia Cantale (Università di Catania)

The Flags: An Educational Game to Promote Emotional Intelligence in Digital Dating
Kamyab Ghorbanpour (Tilburg University)

Teaching Digital Intimacies in the Gulf
Leila Tayeb (Northwestern University in Qatar)

S9: Dating App Practices & Cultural Contexts
Chair: Lorenza Parisi (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula Valeria Solesin

Digital Intimacies and Safety: How Indian Women Navigate Patriarchal Norms on Bumble
Benson Rajan (Queensland University of Technology)

Constructing 'Light Relationships': Exploring the Motivations of Chinese International Students Using Dating Apps in the Netherlands
Mingshu Yang, Daniel Trottier, Yijing Wang (Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication)

Digital intimacies on Tinder: cross-cultural comparisons of South African and Australian dating profile creation
Mthobeli Ngcongo (University of Johannesburg)

From Match to Meaning: Exploring Intimate Journeys Through Dating Apps
Noé Klein (Université du Québec à Montréal)

26 September 2025

Parallel Sessions IV (11.30-13)

S10: Ethical and Methodological Challenges in Researching Digital Intimacies
Chair: Valentina Fedele (Link Campus University) | **Room**: Aula Valeria Solesin

Zine-Making as Research Brave Space: Navigating Methodological and Ethical Challenges in Researching Digital Sexual Intimacies
Rachele Reschiglian (University of Padova)

Parental consent: an ethical dilemma for research on digital intimacy with LGBTQ+ youth
Benjamin Foley (Dublin City University)

Queer Digital Lives: Understanding datafication's impacts through creative, collaborative approaches
Liv Owens (City St George's, University of London), Elisabetta Ferrari (Aarhus University), Lily Bichard-Collins (University of Glasgow)

Using life stories' methodology to research young people, sexualities, and media. The SEXMEDIA methodological toolkit
Vítor Blanco-Fernandez, Laura Fernández, Maria-Jose Masanet (Universitat de Barcelona)

S11: Queering Digital Intimacies
Chair: Frederik Dhaenens (Ghent University) | **Room**: Aula Magna

Ace Gaze: Asexuality on TikTok
Ela Przybyło, Derek Sparby (Illinois State University)

Queer men's online practices of intimacy: Chemsex in the digital landscape of Grindr
Vincent Gaillard (Northumbria University)

Queer desire and motivation: Individual factors shaping the queer experience in sexting
Mária Juríková, Iveta Jansová, Vojtěch Dvořák, Karolína Bieliková (Masaryk University)

"Only Northeast Contact": Affective Emotions and the Racialisation of Young Northeast Indians on Gay Dating Apps in Delhi
Lobsang Norbu Bhutia (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Navigation of privacy and visibility in the digital space: A case of young queer people in Nepal
Shubha Kayastha (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University)

S12: Women's Online Subjectivities
Chair: Lorenza Parisi (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula 3

Nostalgic futures: Young Women's Perspectives on Tradwives
Alyssa Niccolini (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Seeking Intimacy Strategies Online: Young Chinese Women, Gendered Advice, and Post-Feminist Discourses on Xiaohongshu
Shuangyunyi Chen (University of Sheffield)

Re-virginisation and Amplified Intimacy
Hande Güzel (University of Cambridge)

Women's Sex(t)ual Subjectivities in Sexting in Turkey
Didem Salgam (Independent Researcher)

Parallel Sessions V (14.30-16)

S13: Data, Platforms & Intimacy
Chair: Lorenza Parisi (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula 3

Young People as Users and Data Producers in Menstrual Tracking Apps
Gabrielle Lavenir, Marion Coville (Université de Poitiers)

Risky Reprofutures: Young adults in India navigating sexual intimacy through Femtech apps
Paro Mishra (IIIT Delhi)

From Segmentation to Immersion: Young people, platform power, and family intimacies in Europe
Mariya Stoilova, Sonia Livingstone (London School of Economics and Political Science)

(Im)mobility and Affective Aesthetics: Exploring Chinese Youth Postdigital Intimacies
Zixi Zuo (Independent)

The tongue on the mic. The semiotics of aural desire in digital intimacy, from pornophony to ASMR
Gabriele Marino (University of Turin)

S14: Digital Affects & Everyday Politics
Chair: Francesca Comunello (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula Magna

"It's there, every morning, in your phone:" Ambivalences and tensions in everyday engagements with feminisms on Instagram Stories
Sofia P. Caldeira (Lusófona University)

Selfies, Surveillance and Sisterhood: ''Postfeminist Affective Life on Instagram''
Hande Akyıl (İstanbul Bilgi University)

Young Women's Digital Sexual Subjectivity: Digital Affordances and Navigation of Vulnerability
Rachel Levi Herz (Bar-Ilan University/The Open University), Dana Kaplan (The Open University)

Between Screen and Reality: Digital Violence and Teen Identity in Adolescence
Marica Spalletta (Università degli Studi Link), Antonella Mascio (Università di Bologna), Simona Tirocchi (Università degli Studi di Torino)

S15: Identity and Intersectional Structures of Intimacy
Chair: Cosimo Marco Scarcelli (University of Padova) | **Room**: Aula Valeria Solesin

How much Strangeness is Good Strangeness? Negotiating Intimacy, Caste, and Religion in the Digital
Shraddha N.V. Sharma (Tata Institute of Social Sciences)

Alternate Geographies of Encounter: Identity and Intimacy in Digital Sexual Cultures
Sakshi Nain Bishnoi (Independent Researcher)

Reflexive Racialisation and the Overlapping Intimacies of Asian Australian Podcasting
Tisha Dejmanee (University of Technology Sydney)

Dating, Disconnection and Digital Labour: How young women navigate dating apps in their thirties
Maddison Sideris (The University of Melbourne)

Parallel Sessions VI (16.30-18)

S16: Digital Violence & Intimate Harm
Chair: Paola Panarese (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula 3

Hidden Harms: Digital gender violence and the everyday normalization of abuse among youth
Chiara Gius, Claudia Capelli, Rosa Sorrentino (University of Bologna)

Co-Producing Care: Navigating Data Harms with Young People in Canada
Joanna Redden (Western University), Meghan Voll (Western University), Janelle Allan (Western University), Francis Léveillé (Concordia University)

Disrupting sexualised deepfake abuse: exploring young people's (post)digital sexual ethics
Ruby Sciberras (Monash University)

Mediated Gender Visibility: Coping with Online Sexual Harassment in Türkiye
Aysima Kiris (Middle East Technical University), Umut Fatma Beşpınar (Middle East Technical University), Hilal Arslan (Middle East Technical University)

S17: Negotiating Dating and Sexual Norms
Chair: Francesca Comunello (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Room**: Aula Valeria Solesin

Challenging the Charmed Circle? A focus group study on sexual norms among Flemish young people
Leontine Hellemans, Frederik Dhaenens (Ghent University)

Digital enclosure of dating among young adults in Ljubljana, Slovenia
Anamarija Šiša (University of Ljubljana)

Negotiating Gender Norms Through Location-Based Dating Apps in an Anti-Gender Society
Aylin Sunam Audry (Kadir Has University)

Dating in the Age of Inflation: Financial Narratives and Gendered Expectations in TikTok Relationships
Mariia Timofeeva, Yosra Hosam Eddin Jarrar (American University in Dubai)