"DISCREET ONLY":

AN EXPLORATION OF DISCREET PRACTICES ON GRINDR IN A MISSISSIPPI TOWN

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
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by

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ABSTRACT

This research, drawing from a content analysis of 420 Grindr profiles and 13 in-depth qualitative interviews with out, gay and bisexual men, examines discreet practices and how out gay and bisexual men navigate them on Grindr, a smartphone-dating app. I define discreet practices as the visual and linguistic patterns cultivated on Grindr through interaction and profile construction that reproduce the closet. The content analysis revealed specific visual and linguistic patterns that helped users assert their legitimacy as discreet. Visual practices of discreet follow three distinct patterns: the use of a blank, shirtless, and clothed headless torso profile, all of which bolster a sense of confidentiality. The latter two profiles communicate maleness directly through the emphasis placed on the male body, while the blank profile does not. To compensate for a lack of visual proof of maleness, blank profiles employ the use of specific language that evokes typically masculine coded activities and speech, like hunting and using the words "dude" and "buddy." Interviewees discussed how they have learned to navigate and strategically deploy discreet practices on Grindr in order to compensate for their non-discreet presentation (i.e. the use of a face picture, use of feminize language). When Grindr users "do discreet" they are participating in practices that stabilize hetero-masculine performances in a queer space. These practices also reify stereotypical masculine tropes that perpetuate gender and sexual oppression by discursively defining the parameters of acceptable gender expression.

DEDICATION

For WRW,

whose quest for knowledge knew no bounds, but time.

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I would also like to thank the participants of this study whose identities as out, gay and bisexual men in Mississippi provided great insight into their experiences. Thank you for opening up and sharing your story with me, without your participation in this study would not have been possible.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Originally launched in 2009 as a "geo-social networking application geared towards gay, bisexual and bi-curious men," Grindr has changed the way many gay and bisexual men interact with one another in both positive and negative ways (Grindr 2015). Users are able to create a personal profile that includes the options to display a photo, personal body statistics (i.e. height, weight, age, etc.), and a short biography. A user's profile is displayed alongside a cascade of other local profiles that are linked through Grindr's location-based software (See Figure 1). Users are able to message any profile that is visible to them. These messages are held in a separate folder in the application (See Figure 1). Discreetville is a town located in northern Mississippi, with a population around 20,000 people and is about 75 miles from a major metropolitan city. This town, home to a university, is generally considered to be one of the most progressive communities in Mississippi, an ultra-conservative state. This presents a unique setting to study Grindr and the men who use it.

This research examines discreet practices and how out gay and bisexual men navigate them on Grindr, in Discreetville, Mississippi. Discreet emerged as one of the most prominent identifiers in the Grindr profiles I collected and observed in this region. This term not only frequently appears in profile biographies but is also a filtering option through the "Grindr Tribes"

filter. These filters allow for a user to select a "tribe" (i.e. twink, jock, bear, daddy, etc.) that they either identify with or are interested in. When these filters were introduced in 2013, discreet appeared next to other tribes like Bear, Twink and Jock. What is most intriguing about discreet as a tribe is that while the other tribes are considered subcultures within the queer community, discreet reflects both a subset of Grindr users, and something that is accomplished. In other words, discreet is something any Grindr user can achieve, if done correctly. So even a Bear or a Twink, both subcultures in the queer community can be discreet. For the purpose of this study, I define the term discreet, in the context of Grindr, as an individual who attempts to assure other users that any interaction they have will remain secretive and confidential, while still maintaining a masculine self. However, simply saying one is discreet is not enough to accomplish discreet. In order to validate one's discreet identity on Grindr users must deploy discreet practices, consisting of distinct visual and linguistic patterns on their profiles and through messages that bolster a hetero-masculine presentation of self.

Recent studies explore how gender performances are constructed through language and visuals in online contexts (Payne 2007; Burrows 2012; Latinsky 2012; Fullick 2013). While other studies have examined racial and gender inequalities on Grindr (Raj 2011; Miller 2015; Tziallas 2015; Jaspal 2017), there is a major gap in the literature surrounding the term discreet and how it is used on Grindr (Miskolci 2015). Much of the current literature surrounding Grindr and other gay dating apps has largely focused on major metropolitan areas (Blackwell, Birnholtz and Abbot 2015; Brubaker, Ananny and Crawford 2016) or even global settings to examine trends in gender presentation and sexual experiences of users (Race 2015; Davis, Flowers, Lorimer, Oakland and Frankis 2016). Little to no attention has been paid, however, to how these types of apps are being used in rural contexts, especially in the Southern United States. This is

significant because of this particular region's unique social and political climate that is largely

overlooked in analysis of gender and sexuality.

Table 1: Grindr Cascade and Message Folder
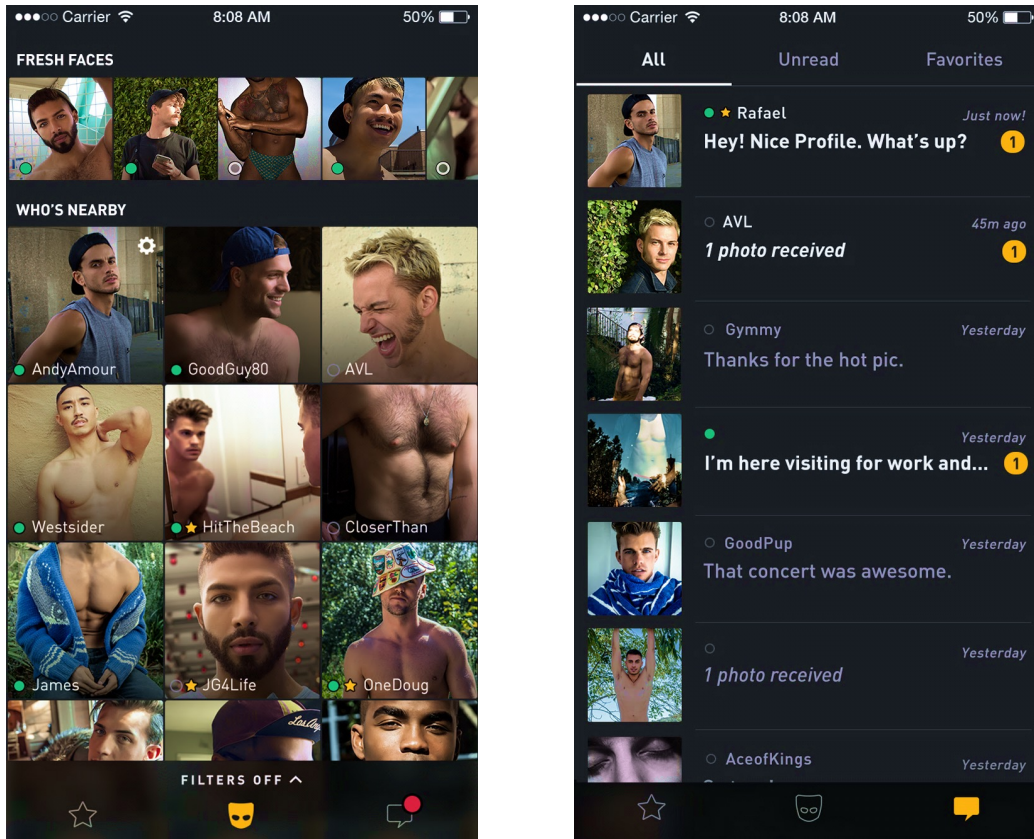
Above are examples of Grindr's profile cascade (Left) and the message folder (Right). The profile cascade is the immediate display a user can access when the app is launched. Photos courtesy of Grindr Press Assets (https://www.grindr.com/press/).

This study explores how discreet practices are influenced by region and geographic

location and play an important role in structuring the type of masculine expression that is

acceptable on Grindr. I approached this project from two methodological angles: 1) a content

analysis of profiles observed in Discreetville, Mississippi; and 2) a series of semi-structured face-

to-face interviews with out gay and bisexual men who use Grindr. My research project is driven

by the following questions: What does discreet look like on Grindr? How is discreet accomplished? How do out gay and bisexual men in Discreetville, Mississippi navigate these discreet practices? By examining discreet practices on Grindr, I will show how location and hegemonic masculinity work in tandem to constrain and police non-normative gender expression in a virtual space marketed towards gay and bisexual men. The next chapter places this study in the context of the current literature that explores gender performance in online dating, masculinities and "The Closet." In chapter three, I describe the research design and methodology I followed to collect the data used in this study. I also speak to the ethical concerns surrounding collecting data from Grindr and the importance of maintaining confidentiality of both interviewees and of the individuals whose profiles were observed on Grindr.

Chapter four, "What is Discreet" explores how discreet practices are accomplished through specific visual and linguistic patterns. By first establishing the possible reason behind the pervasive nature of discreet profiles in Mississippi, I explore the social and political context of queer life in the state. I then define the specifics of the visual and linguistic patterns of discreet practices on Grindr. Visual practices of discreet ensure and bolster a sense of secrecy and follow three distinct patterns: the use of a blank, shirtless, and clothed headless torso profiles. The latter two profiles communicate maleness directly through the emphasis placed on the male body, while the blank profile does not. To compensate for a lack of a visually cohesive masculine identity, these profiles employ the use of specific language that evokes typically masculine coded activities and speech. The language observed in discreet profiles exaggerates and emphasizes masculinity while also repudiating femininity. This chapter also explores how out gay and bisexual men draw on their own experiences on Grindr to imagine and define who is doing discreet on Grindr. While not all interviewees are "doing discreet" through the construction of

their Grindr profile, they do admit to deploying discreet practices in an attempt to secure both intimate and non-intimate interaction from other Grindr users.

Chapter five, "Navigating Discreet" examines how out gay and bisexual men navigate discreet practices on Grindr. Interviewees, who are not usually discreet, place Discreetville's geographic location as a main constraint on the pool of potential partners available to message and this gives them reason to employ discreet practices to their own benefit. Learning the visual and linguistic components of discreet practices is complex and involves positive and negative feedback through interactions with other Grindr users. Although interviewees in this study rebuke discreet profiles, they also admit to deploying discreet practices, in both profile construction and through interaction with other Grindr users. In the conclusion I emphasize how these findings point to how discreet practices valorize and eroticize masculinity and devalue and shun feminine men and any non-normative gender expression on Grindr, a space created and marketed toward gay and bisexual men.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

While sociological analysis of online dating has examined gender performance in web-based contexts, (Best and Delmege 2012; Latinski 2012; Fullick 2013) it has recently shifted focus to examine how digital technologies, like smartphone dating apps, are transforming sexual relationships and experiences (Payne 2007; Raj 2011; Miller 2015; Race 2015). In this chapter I place the current literature surrounding online dating applications, gender performance, and the closet in conversation with my own study that examines how discreet practices are accomplished on Grindr in a Mississippi town.

Gender Performance and Online Dating

The sociological exploration of online dating has largely focused on the experiences of heterosexual men and women (Best and Delmege 2012; Fullick 2013; Kreager, Cavanagh, Yen and Yu 2014; Mortensen 2015), with a few exceptions beginning to explore the ways queer individuals navigate this new medium of interaction (Burrows 2012; Latinksky 2012; Blackwell et al. 2015; Race 2015; Brubaker et al. 2016). A number of studies have pointed to the ways individuals have used images and language to communicate their own gender, performances and affective behavior (Burrows 2012; Latinsky 2012; Fullick 2013; Clarke and Smith 2014;

Mortensen 2015). Overall, this work is guided by a social constructionist theoretical understanding of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) and gender performativity (Butler 1990).

One particular study noted how dating profiles listed lifestyle indicators, such as bike riding and other activities as a way to indirectly communicate their gender identity (Fullick 2013). In order to be successful in such a space one must learn how to properly interact through observation of and interaction with other user's profiles. Melonie Fullick (2013) coined the term *new literac*y as a way to describe this process. In the virtual dating world, language is a key indicator in preference (i.e. interest in music, movies, food and physical activities) and often communicates ideal body types (Burrows 2012; Latinsky 2012) and racial preferences (Raj 2011). The mimetic use of stereotypical and culturally informed bodily ideals demonstrates how hegemonic scripts are reified through language in virtual space. When it comes to dating and "hook-up" smartphone apps like Grindr, there is a distinct lexicon that users must learn and use effectively to elicit responses from other users.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In her book *Masculinities* (1995), R.W. Connell introduces a framework for understanding how masculinity is categorized and performed. There are four tiers of masculinity—hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalized—that create a hierarchy that ultimately places emphasis on one form of masculinity and the policing of others (Connell 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and subordination of women" (Connell 1995: 77). The established accepted answer to this question of legitimacy plays out through the "correspondence between cultural

ideals and institutional power" of any given society (Connell 1995: 77). Masculinities are placed in a hierarchy that delineates hegemonic ideals at the top and all others below it. Hegemonic masculinity encompasses a variety of practices that reify the subordination of women and any other type of masculine practices that may deviate from the currently accepted hegemonic ideal. The queer community, especially gay men are often associated with femininity and because hegemonic masculinity seeks to create a gender relation that places women in a subordinate position to men, gay men pose a threat to hegemonic gender stability (Connell 1992, 1995). The assumption of heterosexuality within the context of gender hegemony is what places gay masculinities at the bottom of the gender hierarchy.

Once the understanding and legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity is established—for Western culture this is typically middle class, heterosexual, cis-gender, white men—then all other masculinities that do not match this are then marginalized. Whenever considering the context in which certain types of masculine performances are considered to be hegemonic, "marginalization is always relative to the authorization of [the proper definition] of the dominant group" (Connell 1995: 81). The relative instability of such definitions of what is considered hegemonically masculine leaves room for a renegotiation of the hierarchical tiers of masculinity and new definitions can be established within different social contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). When it comes to discreet practices on Grindr, hegemonic masculinity is reflected in the ways through which femininity is repudiated and queer expressions of masculinity are marginalized and relegated to the least desirable group on Grindr.

Masculine Language

An essential component to understanding how discreet practices are accomplished on Grindr is through the strategic use of language that evokes hegemonic masculinity. Sociologists and Linguists have looked to how both straight and queer men employ language to construct their masculine selves (Baker 2003; Brekhus 2003; Payne 2007; Kiesling 2007, 2011). My study aims to expand on how masculinized language is deployed in a queer virtual space to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and relegate any type of feminine coded expression to a subordinate position. Linguist Scott Kiesling (2011) theorizes that the performance of masculinity is not a singular act, but a mutual exchange between audience and individual. While observing casual conversation between fraternity members, Kiesling (2011) noted how their masculine selves were produced simultaneously from a desire to come across as masculine, but also to shape and police others' masculine presentations. This desire is accomplished through language informed by four cultural discourses—gender difference, heterosexism, dominance and male solidarity—all rooted in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (Kiesling 2011).

This understanding of how masculinity is accomplished through language is reflected in Payne's (2007) analysis of Gaydar, a gay dating website. The term "straight-acting" is commonplace on profiles on a variety of gay dating websites and apps. Payne (2007) complicated the meaning of this term by extending its assumed meaning of "masculine-acting" to one that could also imply an individual's desire for discretion when participating in intimate acts with other men. This finding is reflected in my own content analysis of Grindr profiles, where many of the biographies included explicit and implicit connections to discreet and masculinity.

After analyzing almost three decades worth of personal advertisements that appeared in a gay magazine, Baker (2003) came to a similar conclusion about the fetishiziation of masculinity in gay personal advertisements. However, Baker (2003) attributed the spike in language usage in gay personal advertisements that reflected stereotypical heterosexual masculinity to the stigmatization associated with gays being "disease spreaders and potential proselytizers" in the 1980s and 1990s (258). What is important about this study is how Baker (2003) links certain types of masculine language being more prominent during specific socio-historic contexts that are hostile towards same-sex desire. Context remains vital to understanding how discreet practices come to dominate interaction on Grindr in Discreetville, Mississippi. Hegemonic masculinity is a theoretical concept that runs through much of the literature discussing how masculinity is accomplished through language and thus provides a useful framework to understand discreet practices on Grindr.

The Closet & Region in Context

The closet has long been used as a metaphor to describe the relationship between a queer individual's disclosure of their non-heterosexual identity and their public life (Seidman 2002). This term is often associated with ideas of oppression and stigma mandated by local, national and global attitudes towards same-sex desire (Seidman 2002; Dean 2014). Much of the literature that examines the closet has explored its function in the workplace (Giuffre, Dellinger and Williams 2008; Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger 2009; Orzechowicz 2010; Willis 2011) and the shifting attitudes towards coming out (Guittar 2014; Savin-Williams 2016). Some literature proposes that the relevance of the closet is waning and that because of increased visibility and legal victories securing civil rights for LGBTQ folks, we now live "beyond the closet" (Seidman,

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Meeks and Traschen 1999; Dean 2014). These types of studies often ignore the broader implications of space and place and render the experiences of queer individuals outside of more liberal and metropolitan contexts invisible.

The literature focusing on the closet within workplace contexts provide an interesting and helpful framework to understand how gay-friendly spaces can maintain and reproduce oppressive conditions. Even when a company frames themselves as "gay-friendly" and supports inclusion of LGBTQ folk, inequalities still persist. Often gay and lesbian workers in these "gay-friendly" workplaces tend to distances themselves from queer expressions of sexuality and gender in order to avoid stereotyping and sexual harassment (Giuffre et al. 2008). So here we see how the closet continues to be a coercive and regulatory force that demands queer people to fall-in-line with heteronormative practices of gender and sexuality out of fear of social retribution.

This study aims to fill the major gap in the literature that has largely ignored how region, specifically the southern United States, influences the ways out gay and bisexual men navigate the closet in virtual contexts. Previous literature has examined Southern and rural queer life (Howard 1999; Dews and Law 2001; Gray 2009; Kazyak 2012) and how living in these contexts can influence the physical performance of gender, often resulting in queer persons embracing masculine performances to avoid social retribution. However, this study seeks to extend the analysis into virtual space where, through analyzing Grindr and the men who use it, we can further uncover the nuances of how the closet is maintained through visual and linguistic means.

III. DATA AND METHODS

When I started this project, I set out to examine how men construct masculinity in virtual space. I collected 845 screenshots of Grindr profiles from June 2-5, 2016. The collection took place at different times of day to expand the potential for a variety of profiles across the area. I then performed a content analysis of collected profiles, utilizing a grounded theoretical approach that allowed for themes to arise from the data collected (Strauss and Corbin 1998). I subsequently conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with out gay and bisexual men who have active or have had an active Grindr profile. Each interview utilized a questionnaire that guided my discussion with the participants (See Appendix A). This research design was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in May 2016. These two processes analyzed how discreet profiles accomplish discreet masculinity though visual and linguistic means as well as how discreet is perceived, navigated and resisted by out gay and bisexual Grindr users in Discreetville, Mississippi.

Grindr Profiles and Content Analysis:

I collected data for the content analysis by creating a new Grindr account, using an email address specifically created for this study. I had a personal, active Grindr account when I started this project so the creation of a separate Grindr profile, which was not used for personal reasons,

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removed any potential conflicts of interests. The creation of this unique email address coupled with the use of a new blank profile removed all previous interactions I had with local users and gave me greater access to the online Grindr population. It also ensured a more ethical collection and analysis of local Grindr profiles.

After creating the new account, I collected the data by taking screen shots of every publicly displayed Grindr profile in my area. Some profiles were online at the time of collection, while others were not, as a profile typically remains visible for as long as an hour after a user logs off. As long as a profile is visible or has been messaged before, it can be messaged again at any time. The only thing that would eliminate the potential for interaction is if one user blocks another. This makes Grindr's interface unique from other dating applications because whereas on Tinder, another dating app, individuals have to have a mutual interest in one anther to be able to "match," Grindr allows for all users to message each other.

I initially collected this data set in June 2016 on three different days (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) and at three different times. Starting on June 2nd and 3rd, 2016 I took screen shots of Grindr profiles at 12:00pm, 12:00am and 2:00am. During this period I collected 394 profiles. After consulting with my thesis advisor I reached the conclusion that instead of collecting three times a day I would only collect twice a day. My reasoning behind this was because there was no discernable difference between profiles—in distance and type—that were online at 12:00am and 2:00am. However, there was a much more diverse group of observable profiles between the times of 12:00pm and 2:00am. The second round of profiles were collected on June 3rd and 4th at 12:00pm and 2:00am, respectively. This collection period yielded 248 profiles. The final collection period took place from June 4th to June 5th, 2016 and followed the exact same time patterns as previously mentioned and yielded 203 profiles. A total of 845 profiles were collected

from June 2-5, 2016.

While using the research-based profile I created especially for this project, I did not message nor reply to any Grindr user, although I received a number of messages from other users. Over the course of the collection period, my blank profile received 21 messages from 15 different users, within a period of 3 days. The messages ranged from "What's up?" to asking "Top?" (inquiring into one's preferred sexual position during penetrative sex). I was also asked "What are you looking for?" This phrase is code for: "Are you looking for a hook-up or just chat?" within the context of Grindr based interactions. I also received several face pictures from other blank profiles. I interpreted this as an effort on their part to solicit a response from me, another blank profile. These messages were deleted after I recorded them in my field notes.

Through logging onto this separate profile, I was able to view other users' profiles that were located near my geographic location in and around Discreetville, Mississippi. This location was chosen for two reasons: 1) it was convenient for the primary investigator and 2) because of Mississippi's reputation as being both a socially and politically conservative state. A discreet profile can fall into the category of being "blank" or a "headless torso." A blank profile has no information provided and all optional descriptions are left entirely blank, including the profile picture. A headless torso typically has a little more information provided, but obscures the face through a strategic cropping that places greater emphasis on the users clothed or shirtless body. These profile types are explored further in chapter four.

Discreetville is located in northern Mississippi and is also situated roughly 75 miles from a major metropolitan city, yet is surrounded by a mostly rural landscape. It is also home to a major research university. Given the unique geographic location of Discreetville, the profiles I collected accounted for a wide range of individuals seeking same-sex intimacy. I was able to

observe these profiles through Grindr's GPS based software. Grindr limits the number of profiles a user can view to the nearest 100 profiles when using the free version of the app and up to 300 if the user subscribes to their Grindr Xtra service[1]. I used the free version of Grindr, thus limiting each collection period to around 100 profiles. Grindr's GPS based technology allows users to view and interact with profiles in their immediate geographical area. However, depending on the user saturation of the area the nearest profile can range from a few hundred feet away up to 75 miles. There is an optional feature on a profile that allows one to disclose their distance from other users (e.g. 100ft, 1 mile, etc.). Although I did not record any one profile's specific distance, I did note in my field notes that the farthest profile observed was 75 miles away.

Although much of my study's focus is on the college town of Discreetville, I collected the screenshots during a time where there are few students in the city itself. To avoid an over saturation of transient Grindr users, I wished to observe how permanent or semi-permanent residents used this app. A June collection period allowed for me to uncover a wider range and scope of users that would have been more difficult to acquire access to during the fall when Discreetville would be filled with visitors on the weekends for home football games.

Analysis of Profiles

I coded and analyzed the data using a grounded theoretical approach that allowed me to adapt my research questions to focus from the data collected (Strauss and Corbin 1998). I used a hard copy of an Excel workbook to create open codes by hand. This copy was subsequently destroyed after I transferred the codes into the qualitative analysis software NVivo. I then started

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[1] Grindr Xtra is a subscription based service that provides additional special features, like push notifications, more profiles to view and having access to more filtering features. As of March 2017 a Grindr Xtra subscription rate is $11.99 a month.

the axial coding process in the same NVivo file. This process collapsed broader categories

initially observed into more concise and specific themes surrounding the concept of discreet. The

NVivo codes were stored in a password-protected folder that was only accessible by me, the

principal investigator.

Once the Excel database had been completed I coded each profile as either "discreet" or

"non-discreet." I first looked at profiles that selected discreet as their primary "Grindr Tribe."

Since only 12 percent (N=50) of the 420 profiles observed selected the discreet "Grindr Tribe." I

decided to expand the code to account for the more nuanced ways that convey discreet to other

Grindr users. Discreet profiles do not use a face picture or use a headless torso. These identifying

markers are the basis of the discreet code that was used during the open coding stage of analysis.

Looking past the "Grindr Tribe," I found many profiles did not select a tribe at all. Around 68

percent (N=287) of the 420 observed did not select a Grindr Tribe on their profile. Since so few

profiles actually selected a "Grindr Tribe" I expanded the code to include those profiles that did

not use a face photo in their profile. I ended up coding all profiles that were blank, a variation of

the headless torso, or non-human based (i.e. meme, general photography, etc.) as discreet. Any

profile that used a face picture I coded as non-discreet because these profiles, even if they used

discreet language elected to display a photo that would make their identity visible to other users,

thus disqualifying their ultimately discreet status.

In-depth Qualitative Interviews

I obtained 13 interviews total, lasting 1-2 hours each in a private recording space set aside

to conduct interviews. These interviews were collected from February 2015 to February of 2017.

The first cohort of interviews yielded three participants and was conducted while working on an

undergraduate independent study. The aim of the independent study was to explore the construction of virtual queer masculinities. I had a number of recruitment issues that were caused by the time constraint of the spring semester. The independent study culminated in a presentation at a local gender studies conference. I revised my interview template for the MA thesis, yet my independent study data remained relevant and important to the analysis (See Appendix B). After gaining IRB approval for my MA research, I conducted 10 more interviews, starting in June 2016 and ending in February 2017.

Given the anonymous nature of Grindr, I had to recruit participants through a variety of methods. I first started by reaching out to two non-heterosexual men that I knew personally. After the first interview, I gave these participants my business card and asked them to refer anyone who might be interested in participating to contact me. This snowball method did not yield any new participants. At this point, I turned to the use of promotional flyers and public recruitment presentations to generate interest in the project (See Figure 2). I visited a number of classes at a local university, where I explained my project and asked if anyone was interested or knew of any one who might be interested in participating. To protect students' confidentiality, I distributed a flyer to everyone in the class. I also sent this flyer to local LGBTQ organizations in the area via email and through the organization's private and public Facebook pages. The flyer distribution was the most successful method of recruitment, accounting for 11 of the 13 participants, most of whom (Ethan, Cameron, Daniel, George, Harry, Kenneth, and Neil) I met for the first time when we sat down for the interview.

Prior to starting the interview, I distributed and reviewed the informed consent document with the interviewee (See Appendix C). Each interviewee also completed a demographic survey (See Appendix D) to provide basic background information that could be used during the coding

and eventual analysis of the interview. I used an audio recorder and took extensive notes during the interview. I started the interview asking participants about their general experiences on Grindr. I also asked questions relating to how they constructed their own profile and how it changed over time. I asked questions like: What sparked your interest in Grindr? After downloading Grindr, how did you go about creating your profile? I eventually added questions like: "What do you think being "discreet" looks like?" after discreet emerged as a major theme in the content analysis of Grindr profiles.

Figure 2: Promotional Flyer

Do you want to participate in a unique, cutting-edge study about the performance of masculinity on the smartphone dating application, Grindr? Contact Ian Whalen, MA candidate in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for more information! Email:

Basic Information:
- Who: Individuals who use or have used Grindr
- Interviews are **totally confidential**
- Duration: 1-1.5 Hours
- Topics range from how you discovered and use Grindr to your personal experiences navigating this online dating app
- Interviews can be done either in-person, via phone or Skype

Contact Ian Whalen to find out more!
  Email:

Above is the promotional flyer used to recruit participants for this study. All identifying information has been removed. Photo courtesy of Grindr Press Assets (https://www.grindr.com/press/).

In order to better triangulate my interpretation of the data I observed in the content analysis of Grindr profiles, I asked the interviewees to fill out a Grindr profile template twice. I first asked them to fill out the template to reflect what they considered to be their ideal or most

attractive profile. I then asked them to fill out the template to reflect the profiles they thought got the most responses from other users (See Appendix E). The first two interviews of the second stage utilized the aforementioned Grindr profile template. I discontinued the use of this part of the interview because I found it be redundant and not all too revealing. This section was transformed into a series of questions asking the participant to verbalize what they saw as the most and least successful profile on Grindr in Discreetville, Mississippi. After discontinuing the Grindr template activity I decided that for the remainder of the interviews I would ask participants to define each of the Grindr profile section options from letters E. through I. (See Appendix E). This formatting change was vital in helping reveal how out gay and bisexual men are learning and deploying discreet practices on Grindr through their strategic use of language and visuals.

Confidentiality and Research Ethics

When I set out to design how to ethically collect data from Grindr, I familiarized myself with the terms and conditions that every user agrees to follow. I discovered that I would be violating Grindr's terms and conditions if I directly solicited other users to participate in my study through the messaging feature. However, I could not find anything that prohibited me from observing and recording information from visible profiles. Once I clearly established what I could and could not do with the app, I proposed to the IRB how I would collect data from Grindr profiles. In the approved protocol I outlined that I was privy to the sensitive nature of collecting data from participants without their direct consent. Since some of the Grindr profiles I observed not only had face pictures, but also screen names and social media links, I thought it prudent on my part to eliminate any and all links between my database and the individual profiles.

After taking screen shots of the profiles on my phone I uploaded the images to my computer and stored them in a secure and password-protected folder. Once the upload was complete I permanently deleted the images from my phone. I then created a PDF file consisting of profile screenshots for each batch of collection times. An Excel workbook was created to record a basic description of the profile picture used, the personal statistics, biography, *Grindr Tribe* and the language used in the headline and personal biography (See Appendix F). I described each profile picture using one of the following codes: Art (non-human), Blank, Face Pic, Shirtless Headless Torso, Clothed Headless Torso, Internet Meme, and Nature Based Photo. Using these codes helped remove any potential links between the data and the observed population. The Grindr Tribe is a profile filter that allows a user to identify as belonging to "a community or group that best describes [them]. So whether [they are] a Bear, Clean-Cut, Daddy, Discreet, Geek, Jock, Leather, Otter, Poz (HIV-Positive), Rugged, Trans or Twink, there's a Tribe for [them]" (Grindr 2013). This feature was added in 2013 as a new way to filter search results when looking at profiles.

Once the data was extracted, the PDF was promptly deleted from both my computer and the password-protected folder it had been stored in. While recording the data into the Excel workbook I ensured all personal information listed in a profile (actual name, social media links, Snapchat, and/or KIK user name, etc.) were redacted and not included in any subsequent data analysis. The Excel workbook was encrypted and securely stored in a password-protected folder that was only accessible by me, the principal investigator.

Likewise, all interview data was stored in a password-protected folder and was only accessible by me, the principal investigator. I assigned pseudonyms to all participants. All names, locations, and information that I perceived as possibly compromising were either

assigned pseudonyms or redacted entirely from the transcript. I used the transcription software Express Scribe to transcribe all interviews. I then coded the interviews by hand and the hard copies of each interview were stored in a locked file cabinet. These copies were destroyed after the codes were transferred to the qualitative software NVivo. The file containing the coded interviews was stored in a password-protected folder that was only accessible by me, as the principal investigator. Each interview was transcribed, coded and analyzed through a grounded theoretical approach where an open reading and subsequent close readings allowed for themes to emerge from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Given the social climate and general attitudes towards homosexuality in Mississippi I found it important to go beyond what was required by the IRB to further ensure that confidentiality be maintained throughout this study. Noting Humphrey's (1970) ethical controversy surrounding his own data collection of men engaging in public sex acts with other men, I was aware that my own data, while virtual, still rests in a grey area that could fall victim to the same types of criticism if I did not design my own data collection in a way that made tracing any one user back to their corporeal self next to impossible. Whereas Humphrey (1970) collected personal information of the men he observed without their consent to a follow up with a future interview, I systematically eliminated any possible identifying language and images from my database and did not ask my interviewees to disclose any personal information about their own Grindr accounts. If they did, I followed the same methods I used to ensure confidentiality with respect to the Grindr profiles collected for the content analysis portion of this study.

Research Participants

The interviewees' pseudonyms, age and race are outlined in the Table 1. To summarize,

the racial make up of the group is about 93 percent (N=12) White and 7 percent (N=1) Black. All

of the participants had completed some college, with some having advanced degrees.

Interviewees listed their relationship status as single. It should be noted that all participants were

affiliated with a local flagship university either as a student, faculty or staff member. Nine

participants identified as gay men, while three participants identified as bisexual and 1

participant identified as queer. Out of all 13 interviews only one participant defined their gender

identity as queer while the rest identified as male.[2]

Table 1: Participant Pseudonyms, Age and Race

Pseudonym	Age	Race
Alan	23	White
Ben	26	White
Cameron	35	White
Daniel	31	White
Ethan	22	White
Freddie	20	White
George	21	White
Harry	28	White
Jeffery	21	White
Kenneth	20	Black
Louis	19	White
Morton	21	White
Neil	20	White

The queer pride organization that I used as my main access point for recruitment is

majority white. This combined with my own identity as an openly gay white man gave me easier

access to white gay and bisexual men. The gay community is no stranger to racial homophily and

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[2] The reason why some participants identified either their sexuality or gender identity as queer
was because the demographic questionnaire was formatted in way to allow the individual to self-
describe these aspects of their identity (See Appendix D).

racist tendencies (Phua 2007; Raj 2011; Han and Choi 2013; Femlee and Kreager 2014;

Lundquist and Lin 2015), so that was likely a major contributing factor to the reason why the

participants I recruited were overwhelmingly white, out, gay and bisexual men.

In addition to the homogenous nature of the racial makeup of the participants in this

study, they all disclosed they were out of the closet and open with their sexuality to some degree

or another.[3] This limited my own ability to analyze practices of discreet from the point of view of

discreet identified Grindr users. My own "outness" could have been possibly interpreted by some

as not discreet. So even with assurances of confidentiality made explicit on flyers and in

presentations, participating in the study might have been seen as too risky, socially speaking, for

discreet individuals. However, five of the participants stated in their interview that they had used

Grindr while still being in the closet and presented as discreet through specific visual and

linguistic patterns. Once they came out, many abandoned these visual and linguistic elements,

and began strategically employing them only when trying to engage with a discreet profile on

Grindr. Over the course of the interviews participants revealed their motives behind their choice

to be discreet. They also described whom they saw as the most likely use a discreet profile. The

participants also contemplated the reason why someone would be discreet. So while I was unable

to recruit any "discreet" users, I was still able to gain valuable insight into how and why discreet

profiles and individuals are so pervasive in Discreetville, Mississippi.

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[3] All but two participants said they openly shared their gay or bisexual identity with friends and
family, with one of the two participants, George (21), saying that while he was "out" to most
people he was not "flashy" about it. Meaning he does not wish to politicize his identity and keeps
his private sexual life separate from his public life.

I have been a Grindr user off and on since I was 18 years old. Over the years I have accessed Grindr in national, international, rural, suburban and urban settings. My own use of Grindr has allowed me to be familiar with the nuances of interaction between users in this virtual context. Although my own "learning" of how to use Grindr is different from many of the users I interviewed, there are similar themes and patterns that emerged consistently throughout each narrative.

When I first downloaded Grindr in Discreetville, Mississippi I had to learn the right language and images to use to successfully communicate with other users. I experienced positive and negative feedback through interactions with a number of profiles over the years before this study. During this learning process I was able to adapt my profile and the way I interacted with other Grindr users to what worked most successfully in Discreetville. So my familiarity with learning the language of Grindr in Discreetville allowed me to more easily explore and understand what profiles were trying to communicate to their viewer. The analysis of Grindr profiles and conducting interviews with other Grindr users allowed me to grow more critical of many of the assumptions I made throughout the course of conducting this study. These assumptions included: my own knowledge of Grindr and the experiences I have had on the app over the years and not pushing interviewees on subjects that were common sense to those already using Grindr but might seem foreign to anyone else. However, my own identity as an out gay man made it easier to establish a rapport early on with interviewees because of our shared experiences on Grindr.

As a highly visible and active member of the local LGBTQ community in Discreetville, Mississippi, I was presented with a number of difficulties in terms of recruiting discreet

participants for the interview portion of this study. So instead I decided to focus my recruiting efforts on out, gay and bisexual men. I utilized my personal connections with a local queer pride organization as my main entrée into the population I wished to study. These personal connections proved useful in recruiting out participants. The participants from the first cohort of the project (Jeffery, Kenneth, and Louis) were all recruited through announcements made via mass email to the organization's listserv. The majority of participants from the second cohort were also recruited through this organization, mainly through the flyer posted on various social media accounts, including Facebook. Two participants (George and Harry) were recruited through the distribution of physical flyers all around the local university campus.

When I originally proposed this project in the summer of 2016, my research aim was to explore the performance of queer masculinity in virtual spaces. My intended analysis of Grindr and interviews of Grindr users drew heavily upon the sexual fields theoretical approach (Martin and George 2006; Green 2008, 2014). This approach sought out to explore how erotic capital functioned on Grindr and how users learn the logic of this unique sexual field. However, after data collection was completed and through taking a grounded theoretical approach it became increasingly clear that discreet was becoming a more prominent and important phenomenon to explore. This led me to shift my focus away from the sexual fields approach and move towards a theoretical approach that examined how discreet practices shape the closet in Mississippi. Grindr presents a new terrain that has yet to be meaningfully explored in Mississippi, let alone the southern United States and this study aims to explore one facet of this larger phenomenon: how discreet practices define and constrain expressions of queer masculinity in a space designed for queer men.

IV. WHAT IS DISCREET?

This chapter draws on a content analysis of 420 Grindr profiles and 13 semi-structured qualitative interviews to explore how Grindr users define and "do discreet" in this Mississippi town. I categorized about 60 percent (N=256) of the 420 profiles observed as "doing discreet." Meaning that these profiles either had a blank, headless torso or any other non-face picture as their default profile picture. In addition, each of my interviewees pointed out that discreet users outnumber all other types of profiles, especially those that include a face picture. In order to better explain how out gay and bisexual men navigate discreet practices, this chapter examines how users characterize and "do discreet" on Grindr. Previous scholarship has looked at discreet on Grindr and understood it as a type of negotiation that ensures safety from moral and physical backlash (Miskolci: 2015). My definition builds on this notion of discreet negotiation but understands it as an act that is accomplished through distinct verbal and visual cues. I first explore how social and political conditions reinforce "the closet" in the Mississippi. I then discuss discreet logic and the role of discreet aesthetics, looking at how they are locally produced and are reinforced through language and visual representations on Grindr.

Queer Politics in the South: Progress and Pushback

On June 26, 2015 the United States Supreme Court, in a landmark decision, ruled that state-level bans on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, thus legalizing marriage for gays and lesbians throughout the country. However, in response to strides made by the LGBTQ community in securing more civil rights and increasing their visibility, a number of states started to pass so-called "religious freedom" bills. In particular, Mississippi passed HB 1523 or the "Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act." The stated intent of this legislation is to serve as legal protection of an individual's "sincerely held religious belief" in matters of marriage, housing, employment, and adoption. It also lent symbolic support to conversion or "pray the gay away" therapy (See Wolkomir 2006; Barton 2012; Gerber 2015). The version of the bill that Governor Phil Bryant signed defined marriage as between "one male (man) and one female (woman)" and gender as being "an individual's immutable biological sex as objectively determined by anatomy and genetics at the time of birth" (HB 1523: 2016). This bill was a direct response to the Supreme Court ruling. In June of 2016, a federal court issued a preliminary injunction against the bill, declaring it unconstitutional. As of the spring of 2017 the bill sits in limbo awaiting an appeal.

In response to HB 1523 being signed into law, LGBTQ organizations and allies in Discreetville, Mississippi, reacted by organizing protests and creating initiatives that assured the LGBTQ community they would not face discrimination in local businesses. In 2014, Discreetville also passed a non-discrimination policy that specifically included protection for the LGBTQ community. While this town is seen by some as an oasis of progressive and liberal ideology in a hyper-conservative state, there are still instances of homophobic violence. This violence manifests itself verbally and physically within the town. Most notably, in the fall of

2013 audience members directed homophobic slurs at an actor performing in a local theatre

production about the reaction to the hate-motivated murder of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old

gay student at the University of Wyoming. The response to these harmful remarks from both the

university and the city was swift and condemning. For the first time in the university's history

the president publically acknowledged the LGBTQ community and committed the university to

fostering a more inclusive environment. This incident triggered the administration to create a

committee on LGBTQ affairs on campus, which reported to the president to make

recommendations to improving campus climate. It is telling of where the university stood on

LGBTQ issues that it took such an extreme display of homophobia to acknowledge the existence

of the LGBTQ community on campus, as well as the need to develop an infrastructure of

support. Following the local and national backlash to this homophobic event, the university

required that all individuals who attended the performance participate in a mandatory group

mediation exercise. While this exercise addressed the incident, it did not single out the actual

individuals responsible for this homophobic incident. Even though the university and community

claimed to value the LGBTQ community, incidents like this demonstrate how local political and

social culture of the university reinforces the closet by providing too few resources to LGBTQ

students, staff and faculty on a so-called progressive campus.

Closet Culture

Whereas other scholarship has explored the closet, its function and its possibly changing

nature (See: Seidman et al. 1999; Coates 2007; Guittar 2014), I contend that the discreet

practices on Grindr in this Mississippi town speak to a larger phenomenon where the closet is

constantly being reproduced through interactions, both virtual and corporeal. I define closet

culture as the policing of perceived threats to the institution of heterosexuality, through both

subtle and explicit acts of verbal and physical violence. Much of the work examining closet

culture examines its role in the workplace and how queer individuals strategically navigate it

(Giuffre et al. 2008; Williams et al. 2009; Willis 2011; Orzechowicz 2016). However, I see

closet culture as being produced when heterosexist politics and practices translate into

interpersonal interactions that inherently devalue same-sex desires and render queer individuals

invisible in public spaces in and beyond the work place. During his interview, Alan (23), recalled

an incident where he and a friend were harassed and stalked at a local bar by a group of men:

> At one point [the bartender and patrons] came out back and me and Dylan were
>
> on the swings just drinking and they told us to get the fuck out…So we were
>
> going out and Dylan had to be a little smartass…and was saying shit on the way
>
> out and that's when all of them started following us outside [the bar] and followed
>
> us all the way up to [a nearby apartment complex]. They were calling us faggots
>
> and queers and everything. Then one guy shoved me down and that was when
>
> Dylan turned around, saw me on the ground and flipped a switch and charged at
>
> the guy. This guy was like eight feet tall and two hundred something pounds, and
>
> I'm just sitting here thinking like this is worst-case scenario, like do not get in a
>
> fight. So I got up and I like grabbed Dylan and got him across the parking lot.
>
> Some of the dude's friends were kinda holding him back but not very well and
>
> they kept following us for a while until we got home.

This story exposes the very real dangers of being perceived as gay in public, even in a town some of the interviewees, including Alan, consider progressive. Alan later recalled that in that moment he knew "[he and his friend] were not protected" and that it was best just to avoid further conflict and retreat home. Closet culture manifested itself through not only the verbal assaults directed at Alan and his friend but climaxed with Alan being physically attacked because of his perceived homosexuality, rendering he and his friend's existence unwelcome in public spaces.

Alan went on to articulate the physical and economic consequences associated with navigating closet culture. Acknowledging how precarious life can be for an out queer person in Mississippi, Alan noted in the interview that since HB 1523 was signed into law he had become worried about his new landlord, stating:

> If he came in and just didn't like anything about the way I lived, the way I talked
> he could evict me and I'd have to try to find a place to live at the last minute and
> he'd keep this month's rent and me not have anything to do.

So again we see how out queer men are pressured to constantly check themselves to make sure homosexual desire remain hidden because in this state, queer expression can potentially create a dire economic situation where one can lose their place of residence.

Ben, a 26 year-old bisexual white man, described his frustration with outside advocacy groups being ignorant to the social dynamics of the South and their inability to understand the serious social ramifications of coming out in a hostile environment:

That's one thing I kinda realized when other advocates wanna say: 'Oh just come

out,' you know, that doesn't work past Tennessee down, Kentucky down. That

doesn't work, you will die, you can die; families aren't as strong as you think they

are, blood is not as strong as you think it is. They will either kill you or hurt you

or in case of a lot of my college friends, their parents will take away everything.

For Ben, visibility comes at a very real price for some LGBTQ individuals in the South. Ben's

statement of "you will die, you can die" reflects the very real threat public displays of queerness

pose to the lives of LGBTQ individuals. But it can also be interpreted as a social death, where

being cut off from family and peers will ostracize queer individuals. This too can translate into

queer folk taking their own lives and becoming destitute (CDC 2016a). These risks of being out

of the closet —threat of verbal and physical violence, economic insecurity, displacement and

loss of social standing—when combined create a social context for the prevalence of discreet

profiles on Grindr.

Doing Discreet

This section explores the ways individuals "do discreet" through their profiles by pulling

from data in both the content analysis and in-depth qualitative interviews. Interviewees identified

discreet profiles as the most popular and prominent type of profile they see whenever they access

Grindr. When asked to expand on who and what they see as discreet, two major themes emerged.

First, discreet profiles have a specific look—limited or no personal details, a blank or headless

torso profile picture—and employ language that simultaneously evokes hegemonic masculinity

and secrecy. Second, discreet profiles are used by either older men or closeted frat guys

(fraternity) who are experimenting and/or on their way to coming out of the closet. This interpretation of discreet users by the interviewees was explained through their own use of discreet as a "stage" in their own coming out process, which they mostly dropped once they came out of the closet to family and friends.

*Visual Patterns of Discreet Aesthetics:*

"They're Mostly Blank Profiles"-Kenneth, 20-Year-Old Gay Male

Discreet has a specific look that employs certain visual aids to assert its existence. When directly asked what discreet looks like on Grindr most interviewees stated the same thing: blank or headless torso profile picture and limited biographical information. This claim was reflected in the content analysis of Grindr profiles, where about 60 percent (N=256) of the 420 profiles observed were coded as discreet because they did not use a face picture in their profile. Out of the batch of profiles coded as discreet, about 41 percent (N=106) of them left their profile picture as the default blank silhouette. The majority of profiles who did not use a face picture also did not supply personal statistics or biographical information. The rest of the profiles coded as discreet provided information in one or more aforementioned sections. I also observed that discreet profiles utilize headless torsos, or chin-down pictures. These visual aids are the first step in establishing and securing a discreet identity on Grindr.

Three main visual degrees of discreet that dominate Grindr are: 1) the blank, 2) shirtless-headless torso and 3) the clothed headless torso. These three visual types all convey varying degrees of discreet (See Figure 3). The blank profile with limited or no information provided is the ultimate discreet. The headless torso types draw from the collective understanding that blank

is the most discreet, but in order to entice other users to interact with them, these profiles display

and emphasize a male body without a face.

Figure 3: Degrees of Discreet
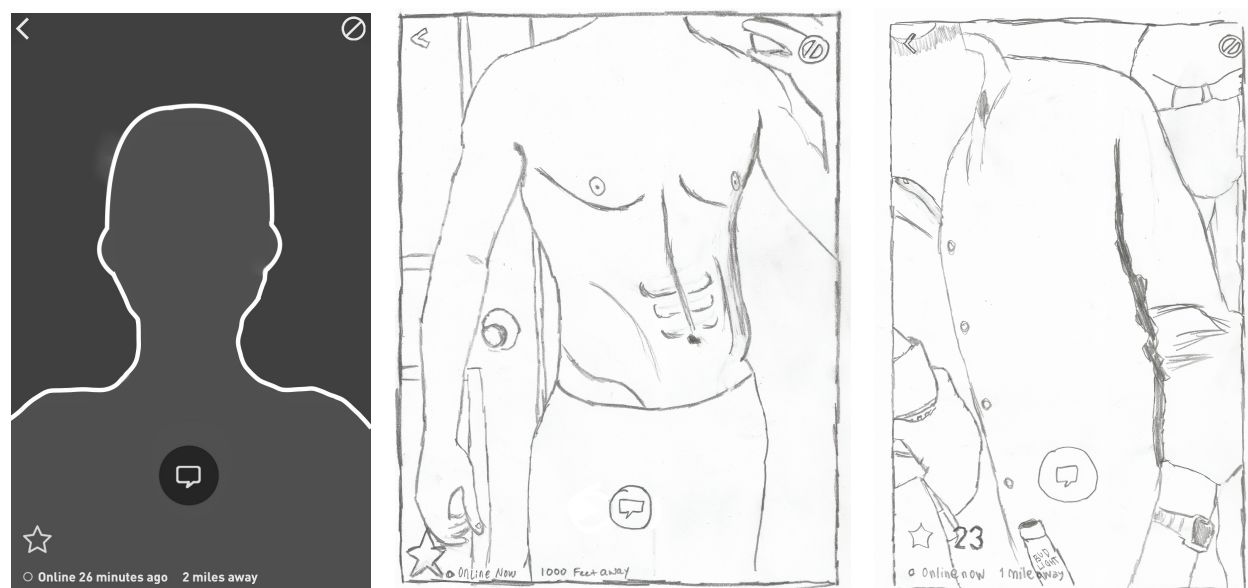
Above are examples of a typical blank profile (Left), shirtless-headless torso profile (Center) and clothed headless torso profile (Right). The center and right images are composite drawings of typical discreet profiles. This was done in order to protect the confidentiality of individual Grindr users.

It should be noted that when you create a profile on Grindr there is an automatic default

picture, which consists of a black and grey color scheme and displays a masculine silhouette. If

the user chooses not to upload a personal photo the default remains and is considered to be a

"blank" profile, which is a common expression in Grindr vernacular. Blank profiles are doing

discreet through constructing a profile that lacks any type of personal information that then

communicates a casual attitude towards both sexual intimacy and chatting in general. If a profile

is blank or headless it can be interpreted, and was by a number of interviewees, as not taking

Grindr too seriously and signals to other users that because their profile is presented in this way, they are your average guy that is "just checking things out." The content analysis revealed that 48 percent (N=51) of blank profiles identified their race as white, while 23 percent (N=24) of blank profiles identified as non-white. However, about 29 percent (N=31) of blank profiles did not identify their race and the majority of interviewees noted that if a profile omits a race it can mean that they are either white or non-white.

The shirtless-headless torso profile photos are edited to place emphasis on an athletic body. Both white and African American discreet users utilize this type of profile. There were few examples observed of other body types utilizing a shirtless headless torso. This type of headless torso may have better opportunities to expand their options for hooking-up by displaying their shirtless body in ways that will attract other users who are seeking intimacy with a person of that body type.

The clothed headless torso profile type emerged as another visual pattern of "doing discreet" on Grindr. These profiles most commonly employed the use of preppy, tailgating type visual aesthetics. Preppy dress typically entails button up shirts, khaki or dress pants. These profiles use a cropped photo, which obscures the face still and shows them in typical preppy dress, sporting a red solo cup in one hand and woman in the other. Using a woman in a discreet headless torso profile is a way to communicate to other users that you can pass for heterosexual in public. Women are used as props that mark heterosexual identity and status. Freddie (20), says these profiles communicate a particular degree of straight-acting and passing in public: "I feel like there is usually a girl on their arm in their picture. Either their friend or something where like if someone will see their profile and be like: 'Oh they look straight, they're attractive.'" For Freddie, this type of profile communicates to other users that they are straight acting and because

perceived "straightness" is prioritized and eroticized, and is also attractive. This statement

reflects how doing discreet places hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) in a fetishized position

creating a sexual hierarchy where those who embody and communicate it effectively are

perceived as the most attractive and desired.

The degree to which a profile is perceived as discreet is communicated through the user's

default profile picture. Profiles that use face photos are understood as being the least discreet and

least desirable because of its association with being out. For example, Kenneth a 20 year-old

African American male noted:

> You do get more attention if you post something that is more scandalous or like
>
> your face isn't in it all. There's no mystery associated with having your face and I
>
> feel like [other Grindr users] know what they are getting into and they'll
>
> stereotype you.

Having a face picture is a disqualifying marker that signals discreet users to proceed with caution

when it comes to interacting with those types of profiles. The type of stereotyping associated

with having a face picture is that of being out, feminine and lacking the ability to do discreet.

This idea is reflected in comments made by Louis, a 19-year old gay white man:

> I have my face in my profile now, but most of the time I don't and it's because I
>
> want people to respond to me. It may not even be a question that they may not be
>
> attracted to me, but because I'm showing my face they'll automatically just be
>
> like: 'He's too open.'

Louis realizes that having his face picture marks him as "too open" and therefore non-discreet. Openness is equated with being open with one's sexuality, which can be understood as being out of the closet. Since a face picture signals openness, it also signals *outness*. In other words, showing one's face on Grindr marks you as open and out with your same-sex desires, and this presents a threat to discreet users who are wishing to retain their hetero-masculinity through the repudiation of anything associated with femininity, especially queer men.

Understanding how the degrees of discreet operate on Grindr is vital to how interviewees presented themselves on Grindr. Kenneth along with a number of other interviewees noted how having neither a profile picture nor personal information was the most extreme example of discreet, while a headless or "chin-down" profile was also discreet but to a lesser extent, albeit more intriguing.

Given the social climate that is seldom supportive of open expression of same-sex desire by men, it was not that surprising to the interviewees that the majority of profiles in this area are discreet. Alan (23), stated:"You get way more responses when you don't put a face pic of yourself because it is easier for the other disembodied people to talk to you *safely* [Emphasis added]." Discreet profiles are looking for ways to ensure that their personal identity was protected and one way this was accomplished was through the careful selection of what picture to use in their profile. The *safety* Alan describes is safety from any threat to the discreet user's own heterosexual status. When two discreet users are talking to one another they share comfort in the assumption that their same-sex desires will be only shared between the two of them and not broadcast to a wider public.

Discreet users who use cropped photos that obscure their face participate in a system that reinforces an idea of safety and security. If discreet users mainly message one another, there is a shared understanding that both would maintain confidentiality and not discuss the intimate interaction shared between one another with anyone. While some out users do receive messages and have intimate relations with discreet profiles the process to assure other discreet users that they too can maintain secrecy is a much more arduous and complicated process. How interviewees navigate discreet culture will be further explained in the next chapter.

Linguistic Patterns of Discreet:

"Not Out and Don't Plan to Be"-Discreet Profile, Biography

This statement echoes one of the core tropes of doing discreet correctly: expressing one's desire not to be out of the closet, but also seeking intimate interactions with persons of the same sex. Doing discreet is complex and involves a multitude of crediting and discrediting markers. Crediting markers include not displaying a face picture on one's profile, and displaying little to no information in the biography section. Discrediting markers include any association with queer culture and/or femininity. As stated in the previous section, a blank profile or a headless profile picture are key crediting features of a discreet profile. However language plays a significant role in establishing a discreet identity as well. Discreet speech acts actively create discursive boundaries between crediting and discrediting linguistic expressions of masculinity. For example, one discreet profile wrote in his biography:

Open-minded, laid-back, and sane guy. Into sports & anything outdoors. Camp,

hunt, fish, shoot, drink etc. Voracious reader, Bacon is good! Good food, good

drink & cool buddies. Wide variety of interests. Wry humor. Age is not an issue.

Since the user is disembodied from their profile, the usual markers of physical masculinity have

to be expressed through language. This particular user frames his masculine self through relying

on normative tropes of masculinity, including being outdoorsy, liking to eat and drink with his

buddies and having an interest in masculinized sports. These descriptions mark this particular

user as performing masculinity in a way that other users will find appealing because it signals

their straight-acting presentation of self, which is most popular self-presentation on Grindr in

Discreetville. Even though this profile provides more personal detail than most other discreet

profiles, it is done in a way to establish a masculine identity that other discreet users will find

more immediately attractive and safe. The language used in this profile eliminates the need to

prove one's masculinity through chatting. Once this is properly established and is unchallenged

then the user can more easily secure a chat or hookup.

Discrediting feminine behaviors and attributes such as "being out" or referencing

anything related to queer culture, is another key observed linguistic pattern of discreet. Some

profiles explicitly state "no fems/out guys" in their profile, while others are more covert in their

dismissal of feminine behavior in men. The statement "sane guy," as displayed in the previous

quote, appeared a number of times during the content analysis and was often coupled with anti-

fem or masculinized rhetoric. This statement reflects the idea that if men display any type of

effeminate behavior they are insane or abnormal. Discreet profiles construct discursive

boundaries of gender performance that associates negative characteristics with femininity.

One blank discreet profile described himself as "laid back, easy going country boy! No drama allowed! Hit me up and see what happens!" The word drama is a coded expression that is linked to expressions of femininity. This term only appeared in discreet profiles of self-described "normal masculine guys" who wanted to "just talk to other men." The juxtaposition of drama with laid back and easy going country boy, links the former term to femininity while associating the latter terms with masculinity. Being a laid back and easygoing country boy is communicated in discreet profiles through expression like "looking for a cool buddy to hangout with" and "cool guy just looking around." These expressions are seen as a crediting expression of discreet while drama is seen as a discrediting and feminine attribute that is avoided and shunned.

Interviewees also understand how language used in discreet profiles communicates the importance of conforming to typical masculine practices on Grindr. George (21), commented: "[On Grindr] you're still supposed to present yourself as this masculine person, not as feminine person, specifically just masculine and not feminine at all." While George just simply accepts the dominant role masculinity plays on Grindr, Cameron (35) understands masculinity as something that is highly desired on Grindr:

> There is this whole 'DL (Down Low) masc (masculine)' looking for 'DL masc' type of thing happening [on Grindr in Discreetville]. I don't know if it's like a fetish or a niche within the [LGBTQ] community, but I guess [Grindr users] just want this straight acting masculine identifying man.

Both interviewees know that profiles that exhibit aspects of hegemonic masculinity are not only common but are also a coercive force that determines how users construct their Grindr profiles.

While George connects doing discreet to doing masculinity, Cameron sees discreet practices as contributing to the eroticization of hetero-masculine presentations of self on Grindr.

Many profiles participate in this type of masculine posturing that asserts their masculine identity as something essential and important to how they act as a person. Masculine posturing is the strategic employment of masculine words and phrases that emphasize a casual attitude and a nonchalant disposition towards other potential viewers. For example one discreet profile stated in the about me section of their Grindr profile that they are "looking for a buddy to hang out with and drink with." Drawing from a "bro discourse" this user is able to demonstrate his masculinity through posturing himself as being a regular guy who just wants to hang out and have a drink. This profile is not a unique case, out of the 420 profiles analyzed, phrases like "looking for a chill buddy" or "I'm a normal masculine guy" were commonly associated with discreet profiles, which appeared 98 different times during the content analysis. By explicitly stating that feminine qualities are not desirable and "acting like a guy" is more desirable, discreet profiles draw discursive boundaries around acceptable and unacceptable masculine performances. Those who do not conform to the standards of doing discreet have a difficult time soliciting and receiving messages from discreet users, which are the majority on Grindr in Discreetville.

Anti-feminine or femphobic language is a prominent and important feature of masculine posturing. Terms like "no fems" and "not into out guys" demonstrates how "outness" is associated with femininity and deemed the opposite of discreet. A couple of interviewees noted that they saw femphobic expression by discreet users as telling of how those individuals were marking the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable expression of masculinity. Cameron, a 35-year-old white gay man, expanded on this idea by stating: "I mean like I often see people say "no fem" and describe themselves as masculine. So that definitely makes me think

40

they have issues with [more effeminate men]." Cameron and other interviewees all expressed

some level of awareness that their own outness needed to be downplayed on their own profile in

order for discreet men to talk to them. This awareness is informed through the process of

viewing discreet profiles, realizing that "no fem" is a coded expression meaning a litany of

things, including not wanting to associate with out gay and bisexual men.

Creating a masculine self through the repudiation of femininity is only one way

discreetness is accomplished. Another way of doing discreet is through the reiteration of one's

own degree of discreet through explicit repetition of the word discreet and assurances to other

users that they are masculine. One profile in particular stood out as demonstrating this method of

reiteration. It superficially used the word discreet in the headline, "about me," biography and

"*My Grindr Tribe*" section. In this profile's biography the user states: "Versatile top here. Very

discreet. Not out and don't plan to be. Hmu [hit me up]." This profile successfully accomplishes

discreet through the reiteration of his discreet identity. Repetition of the word discreet throughout

the profile helps establish confidence in his own doing of discreet, while reflecting his own

degree of discreet to others. The linguistic patterns observed in profiles like this rely on

masculine posturing to bolster their disembodied masculine identity and to successfully "do

discreet."

Perceptions of Discreet:

"It's People Who Don't Want Their Identities Leaked"-Kenneth, 20-Year-Old Gay Male

So who are these mysterious men who create discreet profiles? Since the population I

interviewed were all out bisexual and gay non-discreet men, I am unable to fully answer that

question from the point of view of a self-identified discreet user. However, the participants in this study all discussed and outlined their experience with Grindr to communicate the type of person who would most likely use a discreet profile. Ethan a 22-year-old white gay man sees discreet users as "just a lot of closeted frat guys." When asked to elaborate on what discreet looks like he continued:

> Well what discreet looks like here is...like button-up, nice clothing or body pics, especially like really built guys will post body pics and say discreet...or it's like married men, usually older...I mean there are variations but generally that is what you see.

So the perception is that discreet men are not only "closeted frat guys" but they are also "older married men." This group of men is perceived by their out counterparts as being members of the community at large that still pass as heterosexual, participate in heterosexual institutions, but still seek intimate interactions with persons of the same sex.

Interviewees also assumed discreet profiles to be young (18-23 years-old), athletic or average build and white or older men who are just now exploring their sexuality. Some interviewees are hesitant about communicating with a totally blank profile because they assume that those profiles are, as Harry (28) put it: "mainly older people who may not have gotten to explore their sexuality in their younger years and are now utilizing Grindr to explore that side of themselves." In addition to being a blank profile, discreet profiles also leave most if not all other personal statistics blank. Leaving particular sections blank, especially weight and body type may

communicate that the user is overweight while leaving the age blank meant that the user is an older adult. For Cameron (35) leaving the weight section blank: "means you have body shame, and you are afraid to be judged for your body." When considering what is at risk for these individuals who have created a bifurcated sexual identity it is important to examine the structural roots of why it would be necessary to maintain such an identity.

Politics of Fear

Discreet practices are rooted in a fear of being associated with out queer men and queer culture in general. The state of Mississippi, ruled by conservative political and religious ideology, produces a titanium closet that places queer life in a precarious position (See: Gray 2009; Barton 2012). A position where one's own sense of individual identity is never truly secure and whose stability is held hostage by the whims of conservative ideology. Reinforcing the titanium closet is accomplished when an individual, wanting to act on their same-sex desire, is forced to assess the potential risks and benefits that accompany such desires. For those who are not out of the closet, being forced to weigh the risks of being outed, is seen by all of the interview participants as a major contributing factor to the prominence of discreet profiles on Grindr. Recent scholarship (Ward 2015; Silva 2017) has pointed to heterosexuality becoming more flexible, especially amongst straight identified white men. While these men may not identify as queer they are still participating in acts generally coded as homosexual and are fearful of being outed and having these desires made public. "Doing discreet" ensures that the same-sex desires of straight or questioning men remain a veiled, or closeted aspect of their identity and simultaneously secures their heterosexual privilege.

Many interviewees see the fear of losing one's social standing and heterosexual privilege as central to why some Grindr users adopt discreet practices. The separation of one's intimate desires from what Ethan sees, as "everyday life" is an important distinction that reflects the values surrounding sexuality in Mississippi. Ethan (22), contextualized the risks of being outed in this region stating:

> [Discreet users are] in social circles where being gay is not okay and so if they are outed it would be bad for their social standing or their family or their faith. So people have to, you know, be able to exercise like sexual discretion and like do what they need to do sexually but not have that fall into their everyday life.

It is fear that drives the process of creating a bifurcated sexual identity. A bifurcated sexual identify is when a queer individual divides their social life into two distinct and separate spheres: private and public (Chauncey 1994). The private sphere is where they express their queer identity, including acting on their same-sex desires. The public sphere is where a queer individual retreats back into the closet to avoid any threat to or loss of personal safety. In other words, passing as heterosexual is essential to the construction of the public sphere.

Some participants discussed their early use of Grindr and the fear they felt about possibly being outed. One particular interviewee, Ben a 26 year-old bisexual white man, recalled a time where he feared not just being outed but being thrown into the gay scene:

When I was on the grind, (sighs) early on with Grindr…you know, the

community in [city name redacted] had a couple of gays on [Grindr]. Well I

remember getting on somebody's [profile] and checking their Instagram. I was

just curious if we followed the same people. Well I started looking and I was like

'oh my god I know him from Grindr! And him and him!' and I'd click on

[Instagram profiles] and I realized that they all followed each other. So then I got

this fear, this paranoia of 'They're all fucking each other…They're all spreading

STDs around with each other.' I was like fearing for my life because at the time it

turned me off that you would just kinda get thrown into a community, umm…and

just really be spread around, and well known. I was in fear of that…I mean I was

in the closet!

Ben's fear of being "spread around" and "well known" reflect the fear and shame associated with

sex, especially non-heterosexual sex in Mississippi. Ben's interpretation of how other gay men

know and follow each other on social media, means that they are all engaging in unprotected

promiscuous sex together, is rooted in the gay male stereotype that emerged during the

HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s (Shilts 1987; Gould 2009). Given the social and political context

in Mississippi and its negative attitude towards any type of sex education that is not abstinence

only, these myths about sex, especially sex between men continue to persist. When these

stereotypes go unchallenged they help reinforce the fear that Ben and many other interviewees

expressed when talking about sex and coming out of the closet.

While Ben associated being outed with being thrust into a dangerous sexually

promiscuous queer community, other interviewees reflected on their time in the closet as a way

to frame their empathy towards discreet profiles. Freddie, a 20 year-old white gay man, recognizing the complexity associated with exploring same-sex desire in a college town in Mississippi, noted:

> People are gonna be here for four plus years and they are from the South and so they aren't out and so when they get to college they want to experiment, but if they find that [acting on same-sex desire] is not what they want, they don't want people to profile them for the rest of the time they're here. They don't want everyone to be like 'oh he was on Grindr one time and he's gay.' [Discreet users] are worried that people are gonna characterize them as [gay] for the rest of the their time here, so they don't want to put their face out there so people won't judge them.

The empathy expressed in Freddie's statement demonstrates how interviewees frame their understanding of why discreet is as popular as it is in this college town. Freddie's awareness of not only the sexual politics associated with coming of age in Mississippi but also the importance of Grindr in the exploration of same-sex desire helps construct a more sympathetic view towards discreet users.

As previously mentioned, the social stigma that many still associate with public displays of queer expression in the South is one of the major contributing factors to the pervasive nature of discreet in this college town. Discreet profiles are frequently associated with fraternity culture, especially the preppy headless torso type. Some interviewees spoke to the problems of being gay in a fraternity. Three interviewees disclosed that they rushed, with only one still an active

member in a fraternity, while many interviewees spoke about people they knew or had interacted with on Grindr who were in fraternities. This fear experienced by these individuals stems from a variety of sources, one prominent one being the fear associated with loss of fraternal membership. Other potential losses include one's social capital, familial relations, and being financially cut-off. Interviewees identified these losses and see them as reasons why active fraternity members would be discreet on Grindr. Alan described his experience with moving here and learning some of the difficulties some experience when participating in fraternity culture:

> When I got [to college] and met several people, especially fraternity people, who had totally different relationships and dynamics with their family and friends, I realized how much of an impact it could have on their safety and their actual success in their careers and fields of study.

The fraternity brothers Alan had interacted with through Grindr exercised discretion with the utmost delicacy in their use of a variety of discreet profile types. Fraternities are fertile grounds for social networking and building social capital, so any perceived threat to the possibility of forming those connections is strategically avoided. These risks and costs to one's personal life, if outed, remains at the forefront of discreet users' profile construction. So while many interviewees found discreet users' existence to be troubling and frustrating, they were still understanding, to a point, about the reasons why someone would want to be discreet. The perceived social repercussions are rooted in the reality that for many queer people who come out in the South, their social ties are at risk of being severed or severely damaged (Gray 2009; Barton 2012).

Discussion

This chapter explored the ways discreet profiles are created, maintained and perceived. "Doing discreet" consists of an adherence to a very specific set of aesthetic principals that emphasize masculinity. The visual patterns observed in the content analysis of 420 Grindr profiles revealed the pervasive nature of the blank and headless torso profile. These profiles communicate secrecy and anonymity to other users as important characteristics to subscribe to if they want to have successful interactions with these users. The linguistic patterns employed the use of strategic masculine posturing that relied on masculine tropes that aided in accomplishing discreet practices. Discreet sets the tone of all interaction on Grindr. It defines the boundaries of masculine expression through the monitoring and policing of other users' presentation of queer masculinity and sexual desire. A hierarchy is created and reinforced through language that draws upon gender tropes to reinforce discreet as being at the pinnacle of masculine expression and desirability on Grindr.

This chapter also explored how out gay and bisexual Grindr users imagined what discreet looks like and why it is so common on Grindr in Discreetville, Mississippi. Interviewees propose that discreet men are scared of being outed by other users and/or being associated with out gay men. These users are assumed to not want to lose their heterosexual privilege, even as they solicit sex with other men through Grindr, a dating app that is marketed to young gay and bisexual men. The interviewees were not totally unsympathetic to discreet users. They too related to the fears experienced while they were in the closet as well as their own ongoing fear of safety in a hostile region. In the next chapter I explore how out gay and bisexual users navigate and deploy discreet in Discreetville, Mississippi.

V. NAVIGATING DISCREET

This chapter examines how out gay and bisexual men navigate discreet practices on Grindr. The out gay and bisexual men I interviewed for this study were no strangers to the discreet profile and often expressed frustration about their seemingly ubiquitous presence and ever-expanding grip on Grindr in Discreetville. Yet while holding a certain disdain for discreet users, the majority of interviewees engage with discreet users, often adopting the same visual and linguistic practices. Interviewees understand that their desires to secure a possible hook-up cannot be met if they do not learn how to deploy discreet practices correctly. This realization predominantly takes place through interaction with profiles but more intensely in conversations with discreet users on Grindr. During these interactions, interviewees learn what constitutes discreet and learn how to exploit it for their own benefit. In the next section, I show how politics of place affect how and why people come to use Grindr and subsequently learn how to use it *correctly* in different geographical settings. The subsequent section explores how interviewees learn discreet practices and in turn alter their profiles and the language they use during interaction with discreet profiles to meet the discursive demands of discreet. I then look at how out, gay and bisexual men deploy discreet in ways that better assure the possibility of sexually charged social interaction in discreet-centric contexts, like Discreetville, Mississippi.

Limits of Location

When users launch Grindr their geographic location determines which users they have access to message. Grindr produces its own unique patterns of desirable and eroticized masculine performances depending on the users in any given geographical context. This presents unique challenges to individual Grindr users situated in more rural and queer-hostile spaces. Grindr users learn how to navigate these contexts through interaction. However, when a user is first exposed to a new area, like Discreetville, learning how to navigate it can prove to be complicated and frustrating.

When interviewees began to explore their same-sex desires, they turned to Grindr as a way to further explore themselves. Louis, a 19 year-old white gay man considers Grindr to be the "gold standard of gay dating apps, not in terms of quality of the app but more for the amount of people on there." As of 2013, Grindr has over 5 million users globally and over one million users who use the app daily (Woo 2013). The fact that interviewees were familiar with Grindr, the most popular and most recognizable gay dating app, is unsurprising. Many of the interviewees first heard about Grindr through media or word of mouth. For some interviewees, downloading Grindr was their first encounter with queer culture. However, for the majority of interviewees downloading Grindr was seen as a way to see who else was gay in their local area. Interviewees growing up in Mississippi, a state notorious for condemning and policing queer sexuality and gender performance (Barton 2012; HB 1523 2016), sought out others who were experiencing similar struggles on Grindr as a way to better understand their emerging sexual identity. Grindr became a proverbial light at the end of a very dark tunnel for interviewees because it provided a semi-private space for them to explore their same-sex desires in the absence of a gay bar. For

Harry, a 28 year-old gay white man, Grindr became an outlet for exploring his same-sex desires in both sexual and platonic ways:

> I thought it was interesting to connect with other gay guys, not specifically sexually, but...umm...like I've only been to a gay club once or twice, so I really thought it was interesting to be able to interact with other gay guys, which is something I hadn't really done in the past, or growing up.

So while growing up in the Mississippi, Harry was unable to explore these desires openly and Grindr provided the outlet to connect with other gay men. Harry's interactions with other users were both platonic and sexual in nature and helped him form a better sense of connection with other gay men he interacted with on Grindr. This is vital to a community that often functions in small-disconnected pockets throughout the rural south, where queer individuals feel isolated and alienated (Howard 1999; Gray 2009). This was especially the case for Kenneth, a 20 year-old black male, who expressed the isolation he felt in high school: "Well it was a public school in [a rural county] and I didn't know any gay people until like I got [to college]. Gay people were like an alien to me." When Kenneth came to college in Discreetville, he had no personal connection with any gay people and through Grindr he started interacting and meeting up with local gay men. Grindr provided entre to a community that was inaccessible to Kenneth before downloading the app. Like Kenneth, most interviewees shared that Grindr was a medium that made an invisible queer community immediately visible to them. However, interviewees also became disillusioned with Grindr after realizing that the majority of profiles were not only discreet, but were mainly looking for casual sex and not a relationship or platonic friendship.

When Harry first downloaded Grindr, he had been living in Discreetville for a few years

and was unfamiliar with dating apps, but quickly realized that it was not so much a dating app as

it was for:

Horny people looking for a hook-up, and there's no gay bar or anything to go pick

up guys, so it makes sense.

Harry understands, albeit is disappointed, that the majority of users on Grindr just want to hook-

up and are not relationship oriented because of the lack of a physical space for queer men to

meet. Discreetville's semi-rural and Southern geographical location makes it next to impossible

to build and maintain physical queer spaces, like gay bars and clubs. So without these physical

spaces for gay culture and community to thrive, Grindr provides the next best thing and allows

men who have same-sex desires to safely explore their identity without threat of violence or

retaliation.

Grindr is a contested virtual space that follows exclusionary patterns where queer and

feminine expressions are rendered to an undesirable subordinate position. The discreet profile

dominates the cascade of profiles one can view while in Discreetville, Mississippi. Many

interviewees see the pervasive nature of discreet profiles as a marker of Discreetville's

geographic location and distinguish it from other experiences they have had while traveling

elsewhere. Jeffery, a 21 year-old white bisexual man who had recently traveled to a few major

metropolitan cities stated:

So like [Discreetville] you'll have maybe 20 or 30 profiles that are local and then

it'll start showing you folks from [other cities] that are further away, but in a

larger city the furthest person away will only be like 6 miles or something. In an

urban area you have more people, which means you have more gay people, and

those gay people are likely more open and not just headless torsos.

In Jeffery's experience, when he travels outside of Discreetville, especially into urban areas, he

notices that Grindr becomes significantly more saturated with users that are "more open and not

just headless torsos." The users he sees tend to not follow discreet patterns as strictly as is

familiar in Discreetville. While his estimation of how many active profiles there are in

Discreetville is relatively low, it still reflects the idea that many other interviewees expressed

about how small the LGBTQ community feels in Mississippi. His comment about there being

more openly gay people on Grindr in bigger cities and "not just headless torsos" reflects his

knowledge about how pervasive discreet is in this college town.

More than half of the interviewees described how Discreetville's location in semi-rural

Mississippi limited their potential intimate partner selection. In other words, Discreetville's

small, out LGBTQ population was a hindrance to the pursuit of intimacy with other men. Daniel,

a 31 year-old white gay man, elaborated on how living in Discreetville means having a small

selection of men to choose from:

I was talking to somebody not too long ago about how I love going to

[Washington] DC where you can pull up however many people [on Grindr] and

the furthest one is 5,000 feet away. Whereas, when you come back to

[Discreetville] the furthest person is 60 miles away. It's such a smaller pool here.

Daniel's experience outside of Discreetville allows him to realize the constraints placed on partner selection within this context. The "smaller pool" he refers to describes the perception that there were few viable options of compatible men who are on Grindr in Discreetville. Since discreet profiles dominate Grindr's landscape in Discreetville, profiles that do not follow discreet practices are a minority. This places out gay and bisexual men who do not follow discreet practices, liked Daniel, at a disadvantage when using Grindr to secure both intimate and non-intimate interactions. Interviewees recognize their minority status on Grindr when using a face picture in their profile and since they see discreet profiles as unlikely to want anything more than casual sex the "pool" shrinks only to encompass the few other profiles interviewees perceive as potential candidates for a serious relationship. Echoing the concern about a small dating pool, Ethan a 22 year-old white male, spoke about his frustration with dating men in town:

[In Discreetville] the pool is limited. So that's why I like don't really use it here because you already know the people in [Discreetville] that you'd probably be compatible with because it's such a small town.

Discreetville makes it more difficult to date, but turning to Grindr was a viable option until Ethan learned that the majority of users employ discreet practices that code serious same-sex relationships as a negative. Ethan's view of compatibility is defined through his desire to have a serious relationship, something that lasts longer than a one-night stand. While many interviewees

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expressed their desire to be in a committed monogamous relationship, many see Grindr as a "hook-up" app where finding a boyfriend is next to impossible.

Interviewees frame their selection pool on Grindr as being constrained by discreet profiles because of their assumption that discreet users are closeted. For example, Harry (28), cites discreet users as one of the main reasons why he thinks it is impossible to date in Discreetville:

> I don't think there's a large pool and the pool that's there, I think a lot of them are not comfortable...they're the discreets or the questionings. And it's a small town so I don't go on dates or anything because I don't think that's possible here.

As Harry sees it, those who are discreet do not date. Since Harry is an out gay man, and displays his face on his Grindr profile, dating is not seen as a possibility for him because the majority of profiles in Discreetville subscribe to discreet practices that mark his attributes as feminine and undesirable, purely because they are visible. This then creates a situation where Harry has to learn to strategically deploy discreet practices if he wants to be more successful on Grindr in Discreetville. With the selection pool being as small as it is, and with the majority of users being discreet, these out and bisexual men have to learn how to successfully navigate the limits of their location. Living in Discreetville, where discreet is dominant and queer and feminine expression is stigmatized, interviewees explained the variety of ways they adapt to and deploy discreet to meet their sexual needs and desires.

Learning Discreet

This section aims to explore the ways out gay and bisexual men describe how they interact with discreet profiles and users on Grindr in Discreetville, Mississippi. Throughout the interview process many interviewees gave detailed accounts of their personal interactions with discreet profiles. Interviewees adapt their style of language and their profile photo to sync up with discreet practices that accommodate discreet users in order to secure continued interaction. This section will first explore how individual Grindr users compensate for exhibiting discrediting attributes in their profiles and employ discreet practices to reinstate their masculinity. It also examines how interviewees adapted their profile to become more appealing to discreet users. I then discuss how interviewees deploy discreet practices that legitimize them as *masculine men* while distancing themselves from being perceived as feminine by discreet users.

Profile Construction

Grindr profiles can be personalized to reflect the type of person one wishes to portray in a virtual space. As outlined in the chapter "What is Discreet?" hallmarks of properly "doing discreet" include the use of masculine visuals and language. For interviewees viewing profiles on Grindr's main profile page, these themes are easily recognizable as typically masculine tropes. However these tropes are based in specific bodily acts associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). "Doing discreet" is connected with hegemonic masculinity because for those who fall outside what is expected of their performance are violently policed and either fall back in line or rendered invisible and excluded from that space. During the content analysis portion of this project one particular profile stood out as an

example of someone trying to compensate for not following discreet practices to the ultimate

degree:

> Profile Photo: Face Pic; long hair
>
> Headline: Don't let the hair fool you, I'm masculine.
>
> Biography: Infp [personality type] Laid back guy, I enjoy reading and writing,
> video games, nature, and just hanging out doing what ever. Anything else I'm an
> open book all you need to do is ask. I like having fun as much as the next guy but
> seriously is a date too much to ask for?

This profile's default picture featured this users face and also showed his long hair: two

disqualifying markers for discreet. Not only does showing your face flag you as someone who is

potentially out and not discreet, but the photo also displays a disqualifying marker of femininity,

long hair. Both of these combined can lead a viewer to assume that this user might have more of

an effeminate affect when comparing it to other profiles types.

In an effort to avoid being ridiculed and even ignored for displaying discrediting

feminine qualities, this user describes himself as a "laid back guy." This is an example of

masculine posturing where, reliant upon dominant masculine tropes, an individual evokes the

status and privilege of maleness and heterosexuality to re-establish and reaffirm their own

contested masculinity. This particular user deploys masculine posturing through his strategic use

of phrases like "laid back guy" and "just hanging out doing whatever" as a marker of having a

nonchalant disposition that is typically read as masculine. Alongside those statements he also

plays on a softer masculinity by saying that he reads and writes. This statement coupled with his

closing sentence—"I like having fun as much as the next but seriously is a date too much to ask for?"—demonstrates how this user, while compensating for his discrediting markers of discreet, is also actively trying to appeal to those who want more than just a "hook-up." So while still trying to appeal to the dating oriented side of Grindr, this user is aware that because he has long hair and shows his face on his profile, he could be blocked and/or ignored by discreet users.

The most explicit way that one is made invisible on Grindr is through its blocking feature. This feature allows any user to block another user, rendering both of their existences invisible to each other. Every interviewee expressed that they had experienced both sides of blocking: they had blocked or been blocked by someone. However, discreet users use blocking in strategic ways that eliminate the possibility of their same-sex desires becoming public to others, especially their immediate social network. When Cameron, a 35 year-old white man, first started using Grindr, he would often change his profile photo and the wording in his biography section to see what combination would be the most successful in getting other users to message him. When he moved to Discreetville around three years ago he decided to make his profile blank, even though he was out of the closet. He wanted to see what would happen. He recalls:

> I created a profile with no pictures and put down stuff like "fun" in the name [section] or stuff like that, then you get like tons of people like chatting and checking on you, most blank…and then when you show your face and ask like "Do you want to meet up and have a drink or whatever?"…like, nobody really contacts you, they'll just block you.

Once Cameron revealed his face and started to request an in-person meeting, he was met with discreet profiles either ignoring or blocking him. Again, when discrediting markers are present in a profile, especially those markers coded as feminine, they are met with rigid repudiation. Even though Cameron did everything right in constructing a discreet profile (putting "fun" for his profile name and having no pictures), his failure of doing discreet was made known by the reaction from other users (i.e. blocking and ignoring) and was policed through exclusion and erasure. Given that it has been established that failing at "doing discreet" will most likely result in being ignored or blocked by discreet people, who are the majority of users in Discreetville, it is understandable that there tends to be a learning curve for interviewees.

Interviewees framed their coming out process through how their Grindr profile looked at different stages of outing themselves to their social network. For some "doing discreet" just came with being in the closet. However, once interviewees started coming out the more they began to reveal on their profile, culminating in posting a face picture in their profile, thus marking their symbolic transition into being an "out gay man." While interviewees viewed their shedding of explicit use of the term discreet on their profile they still were participating in discreet practices by adopting masculinized language and visuals in their profiles. However, if one is accessing Grindr from Discreetville, Mississippi, then one cannot totally abandon discreet and be truly out because, for most of the out gay and bisexual men I interviewed, they all admitted that they do talk to discreet profiles because there are few other options. So learning how to construct a profile that can be both "out and proud" yet discreet is a fine line that is only accomplished through interaction with other users.

Learning what language and visuals to use in a Grindr profile was a major struggle many of the interviewees face when creating and amending their personal profiles. For George, a 21 year-old white gay man, the biography was admittedly the most difficult to get right:

The bio was the hardest part for me to figure out because I wasn't sure what you're supposed to say. So I went to friends and was like: 'What am I supposed to put there?' and basically just copied essentially what they put 'cause I really didn't know what I was supposed to put.

In this instance, George, having already known other people who have used Grindr in the past, helped him create a profile that would follow similar linguistic and visual styles present on Grindr. Not knowing what language to use in a Grindr profile was not uncommon, although George's remedy was rare. Most interviewees did not ask friends about what to write in their Grindr biography. Instead, they had to figure it out on their own. Ethan (22), comments:

At first I put a lot of detail into it because I thought more detail meant more people would know you better and be more interested and then message you. But as time went on, I like started bare-bone stuff and like just having my face picture and my Instagram linked and just thought to myself: 'If someone is interested they'll message me.'

Once Ethan realized that being detailed in his biography was not working, he began to follow similar patterns of masculine posturing that I observed throughout the content analysis of Grindr

profiles. Whittling one's personal information down to the "barebones" is one way a user can deploy a type of masculine posturing to appear more appealing to others, mainly discreet men. By not caring about putting so much detail into one's profile, which is read as a masculine presentation, a user can accomplish discreet in such a way as to reinforce *discreetness* itself. In other words, one's own masculine posturing in profiles is a crediting marker of discreet, and if portrayed correctly can elicit more interactions from discreet users. In addition to portraying discreet correctly through visuals and language used in the construction of a profile, *discreetness* is tested through actual messages sent between users.

Deploying Discreet:

> *"I know people who are 100 percent not-discreet describing themselves as discreet"*

> *-Daniel, 31 year-old gay male*

Both discreet users and interviewees strategically deploy elements of discreet practices as a mechanism to secure the attention of other users who are being discreet. When a discreet user and an out, gay or bisexual man interact on Grindr it is typical, according to the interviewees, for those who are not considered discreet to start acting discreet in order to secure and maintain a conversation. In doing so, interviewees begin to renegotiate their relationship with the closet in order engage with discreet men. Recalling the limited selection of potential partners and the dominant role discreet plays in Discreetville, interviewees sometimes "compromise" their out identity and adopt a discreet persona in order to be able to secure and maintain conversations with potential romantic partners. Louis (19), who has a face picture on his profile and is out, described how he typically interacts with discreet profiles:

Let's say they have a blank profile and I'm trying to talk to them, I try to come

off, as 'I'm not really interested.' It's like upping your masculinity…I try to have

that I'm not concerned I'm just talking to you because I got bored and it doesn't

matter to me. Maybe I won't respond for 20 minutes. You just have to be

nonchalant. It's taken me awhile to figure it out…it's just using the right

language, like 'hey buddy,' 'What's up dude?'

Louis is "upping" his masculinity by adopting a casual, nonchalant masculine identity that does not give off any signs of being feminine and is perceived less threatening by discreet profiles. Louis is also demonstrating his own awareness of how his race may affect how other Grindr users interact with him. By using words like "buddy" and "dude" in his interactions with discreet profiles, Louis is able to assert his masculinity that can read as white and more relatable to discreet users. Since discreet users are typically considered to be white, unless otherwise stated or displayed, an integral part of learning discreet is learning the language associated with its practice and places like Discreetville, dominated by white men, follow these linguistic practices. This strategy is not unlike the masculine posturing observed in the content analysis portion of this study. However, the major difference here is that this type of masculine posturing is accomplished through private messages between two users. When trying to pursue an intimate encounter with a discreet Grindr user, out gay men learn and adopt the language of discreet in order to ensure that their efforts are successful in the end.

Louis was able to exploit discreet practices in a way to achieve a masculine status because of his understanding of how these practices work. However, Cameron's (35)

unfamiliarity with how masculine posturing is accomplished through language initially

complicated his interaction with other Grindr users in Discreetville:

> It's like another language almost. It took me like three or more months to be able
> to start understanding the wording of the thing. And then there is the in between
> meanings of the wording as well. I think the classic one word answer is the
> 'hi'...'hi'...'What's up?' and then "I'm bored" and I'm just like there is plenty of
> things to do in life (laughs)—but afterwards I realized what it meant—you're only
> looking for sex, so that's the only fun you can have. That's the most common
> thing. More explicit is like 'horny' but bored is more like we should talk and
> exchange two or three lines or maybe pictures before we actually do anything.
> And then there is like 'just chilling' and that's just like 'I can be tempted, but it
> depends on [how you look]' or more like that.

The simple one-word exchanges that Cameron would often exchange with other users were a

source of frustration because he did not understand the coded meaning behind the casual

expression. Once he looked "between the meanings" of the exchanges he quickly realized that

"bored" is code for "horny and looking" but just stated in a subtle way as to bolster the

message's masculinized affect. Learning the nuances of language on Grindr is essential to be

able to successfully navigate this space. It becomes even more important when failing to be in

the know can result in a user being ignored or blocked.

The uncertainty of success always looms over interactions between discreet and non-

discreet users. The negotiation that takes place between those who already have a face picture on

their profile and a discreet user typically followed the same pattern, best exemplified by Ben a 26 year-old white bisexual man:

> If you're in the closet and say I message a blank profile, cause I do, 'cause you get bored. And they're like: 'Oh, hi....can I have a pic?' Then they send something protruding out of themselves or a body pic or whatever. It's like okay, well: 'Can I get a face pic?' And they reply: 'Oh—I'm discreet.' Well that's where, it is a little bit of a problem for me. It's like I'm not gonna spread your business and you know, I usually level and say 'I understand, and I'm not gonna spread your business.' And then maybe I can coax them into a face picture.

This negotiation of asking for a picture to be sent, given the discreet context is coded for sending nude or shirtless photos and it is expected to be reciprocated. However, Ben was trying to humanize the interaction by ignoring the "protruding" photo and asking for a face picture and was still met with resistance. The negotiation between the two parties hinges on whether or not Ben can successfully assure the discreet user that he too is discreet, even with his profile exhibiting discrediting markers. The key phrase from the quote—"Then maybe I can coax them into a face picture."—signals past experiences where even when assurances were made, they were not enough to convince the discreet user of Ben's own ability to be discreet. Interviewees were very open with how frequently they received nude photos from discreet profiles and how they felt it was annoying that discreet profiles are so willing to share images of what they saw as the most intimate part of a person but would not show their face, something everyone can see. Sending nude photos can be understood as a crediting feature of discreet practices because it is a

physical display of manhood, and is the ultimate form of masculine posturing. In other words, when a discreet profile sends unsolicited nude photos to other users they are enacting a type of posturing that plays into masculine trope of a casual attitude towards sex, while still ensuring enough safety that would be at risk if they sent a face picture to a profile perceived as not discreet.

The time it takes to negotiate getting a face picture from a discreet profile can be, according to some interviewees, very telling about why that user is discreet. In an exchange I had with George, a 21 year-old white gay man, he elaborated on his experience with trying to solicit face pictures from discreet users:

George: You really don't get the face photo until you've interacted with [discreet profiles] for a while.

IW: Yeah, so that whole process...so what has been your experience with trying to get a face pic from a discreet profile?

George: I mean sometimes it's really easy. Personally, I just ask for a face picture and sometimes they'll be like sure, because they don't know me. But sometimes people are really hesitant to give me it, for a variety of reasons really...I think that—being in a current relationship—is what really makes you really hesitant to send out a face photo—'cause you're like 'what if this person randomly sees me in public with my girlfriend and then calls me out or something.' I think that kind of fear is what makes them so hesitant to give you a face photo. I mean, with

some other discreet people you can tell if they aren't really in a relationship most

of the time because they'll just give it to you, like right away

In George's view, discreet profiles are fearful of those to whom they reveal themselves. Not only are they fearful of exposure, they are also fearful having their heterosexuality contested in public. So by not sending a face picture to someone who they do not fully trust, discreet profiles are actively protecting their own power and status as a passing heterosexual. George's comments about the likelihood of a discreet person being in a relationship, especially a heterosexual one, is a moment where we can see how discreet is imagined as concealing some part of the self that would prove socially harmful if revealed publically.

Discussion

Learning how to adapt a profile to meet these geographically confined needs is accomplished through feedback, both negative and positive, from other profiles that police an individual's online presentation of self into a binary of discreet and not discreet. Through the experience of being overlooked, mocked, and blocked, users learn how to construct performances that meet the demands of discreet in Discreetville. An outcome of out, gay and bisexual men deploying discreet practices on Grindr is that they have to renegotiate the closet. Whereas they are open about their sexuality within their own personal networks, on Grindr they have to strategically go back into the closet in order to meet the demands of discreet. So while some may argue that we have entered into a "post-closeted" society (Seidman 2002; Dead 2014), the closet still remains a constantly negotiated part of interviewee's lives.

V. CONCLUSION

This study revealed the complexities of how men define and "do discreet" on Grindr, in Discreetville, Mississippi. Chapter four "What is Discreet?" established how discreet practices are accomplished through specific visual and linguistic patterns. Mississippi's hostile attitude towards men's queer and feminine expression is reinforced through social interaction and political policy. These factors make it necessary for many men who have same-sex desires to explore these desires in secret. Discreet practices encompass this desire to maintain a distinctly hetero-masculine self, while still exploring and engaging their same-sex desires. Visually, these practices follow three distinct profile patterns—blank, shirtless, and clothed headless torso—to buttress a sense of secrecy and personal security. In addition to these visual markers of discreet profiles employ specific language coded as masculine, such as "laid-back country guy" and "looking for a drinking buddy," as a way to validate a digitally disembodied masculine self. This language exaggerates and emphasizes masculinity while also repudiating femininity. Interviewees overwhelmingly identified their perception of discreet users as belonging to fraternities, being confused about their sexuality and/or closeted younger and aged men who participate in heterosexual institutions. Interviewees also noted how fear plays into how they

perceive the pervasive nature of discreet practices on Grindr, citing Discreetville's location in a conservative state that is openly hostile toward LGBT folk as a major contributing factor.

Understanding how out gay and bisexual men navigate discreet practices on Grindr is important because it demonstrates how the closet functions as a regulatory force that constrains gender performances to reflect and reproduce heteronormative ideals (Warner 1999; Rosenfeld 2009). While some scholars have pointed to the waning significance of the closet in the lives of queer persons (Seidman 2002; Dean 2014; Guittar 2014), this study falls in line with literature that examines how the closet is reporduced in different contexts, but still relegates queer expressions to an undesirable status (Giuffre et al. 2008; Orzechowicz 2010). Geographic location matters because Grindr is a geo-based app. That means the pool of users one has access to is constrained by their location in Discreetville. Within this context the pool is further limited because discreet practices dominate all interactions on Grindr, forcing out gay men to adopt discreet practices and reproduce the closet. In figure four I provide a visual illustration of discreet practices and how they reproduce the closet. This is why many interviewees learn to exploit discreet practices to their own benefit. Learning the visual and linguistic components of discreet practices is a complex process that involves positive and negative feedback through interactions with discreet Grindr users. Interviewees admitted to deploying discreet practices, in both profile construction and through interaction with discreet Grindr users.

These findings point to how discreet practices valorize and eroticize hegemonic masculinity and repudiate femininity and any non-normative gender expression on Grindr, a space created and marketed toward gay and bisexual men. When Grindr users "do discreet" they are participating in practices that stabilize hetero-masculine performances in a queer space. These practices also reify stereotypical masculine tropes that perpetuate gender and sexual

oppression by discursively defining the parameters of acceptable gender expression. The closet remains an important defining feature of sexual oppression in Mississippi. Discreet practices reinforce the closet through the emphasis they place on hetero-masculine visual and linguistic presentations of self. While interviewees may not "do discreet" in the same ways as a blank profile would, they engage in practices that reproduce the closet and, in effect, a hierarchy of masculinity. This hierarchy places queer masculinities in a subordinate position (Connell 1995).

Figure 4: Discreet Practices and Reproducing the Closet
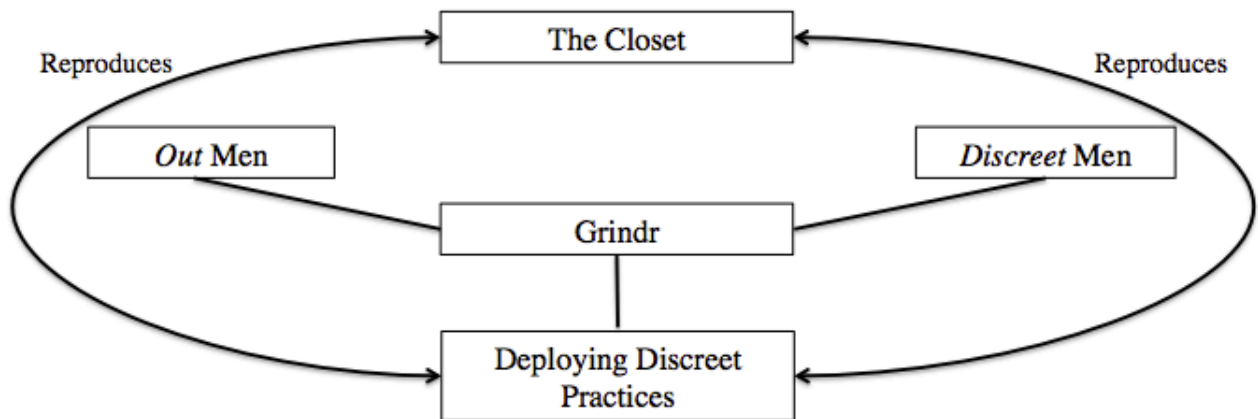
This study is also contributing to literature that explores how gay and bisexual men use online dating apps as it explores how they navigate and interpret discreet practices. While the current literature has largely looked at what gendered and racialized tropes dating profiles

follow, this study explores the complexities with deploying these tropes. Discreet is a word whose meaning is determined by its contextual use. This study has explored only a few of the ways discreet is deployed and interpreted on Grindr. All types of Grindr users deploy discreet, including those who are openly gay and bisexual. This shows how the practices associated with discreet are versatile and adaptable to the specific social context in which they are ascribed meaning. In Discreetville, discreet practices are what set the parameters for acceptable masculine performance and while many may not describe themselves as discreet, they still have to subscribe to these practices to be successful on Grindr.

Limitations and Future Studies

One limitation to this study is that it was difficult to recruit interviewees who were out, gay and bisexual men in Discreetville, Mississippi. Moreover, most of my interviewees were white. This limited my understanding of how people of color navigate discreet practices on Grindr. Race clearly plays a role in the construction and deployment of discreet practices, however future research should examine this aspect from the perspectives of both white and African American Grindr users. This study began to unpack and define discreet practices on Grindr through the analysis of Grindr profiles and interviews with out gay and bisexual men. However, future studies should seek out discreet users to gain their perspectives on how and why they deploy discreet practices on Grindr. The data revealed patterns of discreet practices that relied on classed presentations of self on Grindr profiles, like the "country-boy" and "preppy-frat guy" look and language. Future studies should examine how social class plays a role in the construction and deployment of discreet practices.

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Religion is an undeniable social force in Mississippi and directly affects the quality of life for queer individuals (Johnson 2008; Barton 2012). Understanding the role of religion in queer life is essential to better address political challenges that deny basic rights to LGBTQ people. While I did ask questions regarding religion during the interview, I was not able to draw any significant conclusions, other than religion does play a role in how some interviewees constructed their masculine-selves in virtual space. Future studies should further examine the complex dynamic of queer religious life in other states in the Deep South, with respect to how queer folk are able to navigate a religious identity in spaces that are oppressive.

Grindr is a dynamic and fast changing app that frequently adds new features to make it more competitive on the dating app market. Since the data collection ceased, in the spring of 2017, Grindr has added two new profile-filtering options and a unique in-app emoji feature. The two filters allow users to disclose their preferred sexual position (i.e. top, bottom or versatile) and their HIV status. Future analysis on Grindr should examine how often discreet and out users disclose their preferred sexual position and HIV status. Analyzing how Grindr users disclose their HIV status might uncover how discreet practices intersect with HIV infection and transmission rates in a region with the highest rates in the nation (CDC 2016b). The new emoji feature presents a new visual language, largely informed by queer vernacular that requires knowledge of queer culture to be able to interpret the emojis correctly (i.e. Top bunk emoji communicates one's desire to be on "top" during penetrative sex). Future studies could examine how Grindr users learn and use emojis in their profile and messages.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: REVISED QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMER 2016

Semi-Structured Interview Template: Grindr and the Construction of Virtual Masculinities

Warm up:

How did you learn about Grindr?

What sparked your interest in Grindr?

Profiles:

After downloading Grindr, how did you go about creating your profile?

We're you at all influenced by other profiles when you first created your profile?

Did you ever change your profile? How?

Which of your profiles was most successful? Why?

How important do you think anonymity is on Grindr? Why?

What are some common, or stereotypical profiles you have seen?

What are common words/expressions you have seen used on Grindr Profiles?

Do you feel one type of guy (masculinity) or tribe is favored over another type?

Do you think there are opposing views about what is considered *manly* on Grindr?

Is there a particular conversation or observation that led you to think so?

I've noticed several profiles that read "discreet" or looking discreet dude."

> Have you ever used "discreet in your profile before? Why or Why not?

> Do you think it is more appealing/ popular to describe yourself as being "discreet"?

> What do you think "being a discreet" looks like?

> What do you think not being "discreet" looks like?

Religion

What role does religion play in your life?

Would you describe yourself as a religious person?

The US South is often coined the "Bible Belt."

Has living in the "Bible Belt" shaped how you date men? How?

Has religion shaped the way you go about talking to other men online?

Going Through the Grindr Document for Definitions

Preferences

What personality types or qualities do you look for in a potential partner online?

What kinds of profiles do you find most appealing?

What kinds of profiles do you find least appealing?

Do you have any questions for me?

Is there something I should have asked but didn't?

*The interviewer reserves the right to ask additional questions that may organically arise during the interview. These questions and responses will be specifically noted in the final transcript of the interview.

APPENDIX B: 2015 INDEPENDENT STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Questions: Exploring the Performance of Masculinity in Virtual Spaces

1. What is your religious affiliation/background?

2. How often do attend a religious service?

3. What does it mean to be a *man* (Masculinity)?

4. What does it mean to be a *woman* (Femininity)?

5. Do you feel one type of masculinity is favored over another type?

6. What other online dating applications have you used?

7. Within the context of using Grindr, have you had hostile encounters over opposing views

   of what is considered *manly* (masculine)?

8. When you've met up with someone did they live up to their profile?

   a. How did they live up to or let you down?

9. What do you feel is the purpose of Grindr?

10. What are some common, or stereotypical profiles you have seen?

11. What about those profiles do you find appealing or less appealing? Why?

12. How would you define *Preference* and *Tribe?*

    a. Do you use those features on Grindr to narrow your personal selection?

13. How important do you think anonymity is on Grindr? Why?

14. Do you think there is a hierarchy of dating apps?

    a. Does this affect how people view relationships/friendships that come from

       interactions on these apps?

*The interviewer reserves the right to ask additional question that may organically arise during the interview. These questions and response will be specially noted in the final transcript of the interview.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to Participate in a Research Project
Title: Grindr and the Construction of Virtual Masculinities

Primary Investigator:
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Description
The purpose of this interview is to investigate how men present themselves in their personal biographies, and profile/default picture on their Grindr, a smartphone dating application. The researcher will specifically look at the ways individuals navigate Grindr and how their experience on Grindr has shaped or informed expectations of the queer community in the South.

Audiotaping
You will be audio recorded during the interview so that that the researcher is able to better quote your answers and take notes more accurately. Recordings of the interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office.

Confidentiality
The interviewer, Ian M. Whalen, will protect your confidentiality by physically separating information that connects you to your response. The recording and any notes taken during your interview will be encrypted and only accessible by Ian M. Whalen, the principal investigator. The only information that will appear in the research reports is basic demographic information (e.g. age, gender, race/ethnicity). To better ensure the confidentiality of your responses, all participants will be assigned pseudonyms.

If you have any questions or concerns about the risks of this project, please do not hesitate to contact Ian M. Whalen at imwhalen@go.olemiss.edu.

Risks and Benefits
There are no foreseeable risks involved with participating in this interview. It is hoped that disclosing the confidentiality of the interview beforehand will encourage you to speak openly and honestly. Sometimes, individuals feel the chance to talk about their experiences outside of the public glare is refreshing and valuable.

The total time requested of you for an interview is estimated to be no more than ninety minutes. In some instances, a request for a second interview may be made, but you are not obligated to grant this request.

Right to Withdraw
As a participant you have the right to end the interview at any time and to decline answering any question asked. If you provide consent for this project, but wish to later withdraw, simply notify the primary investigator at their email address listed above. The primary investigator may terminate your participation in this project without regard to your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety and protecting the integrity of the research data.

IRB Approval
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to participate.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. I have been given a copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. Furthermore, I also affirm that the researcher explained the study to me and told me about the study's risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw.

☐ By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Demographic Survey:
Directions: *Please circle or fill in the response you most identify with*.

Q1. How would describe your expressed gender identity (Write below)?

_____

Q2. How would you describe your sexual identity (Write below)?

_____

Q3. Age: What is your age (Write below)?

_____

Q4. Race/Ethnicity (Please circle one):

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other
- I prefer not to say

Q5. What is your religious affiliation?

- Catholic
- Protestant
  (Specify:_____)
- Mormon
- Unitarian Universalist
- Muslim
- Jewish
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Other
  (Specify:_____)
- I prefer not to say

Q6. How religious/spiritual are you?

- Very Religious/Spiritual
- Religious (Neutral)
- Somewhat Religious/Spiritual
- Not at all Religious/Spiritual
- I prefer not to say

Q7. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college (including Associates degree)
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree or Higher
- I do not wish to say

Q8. Marital Status: What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- I do not wish to say

APPENDIX E: GRINDR TEMPLATE

Grindr Profile Breakdown:

1. Username

2. Headline (80 Characters)

3. About Me (255 Characters)

_____

a. Profile Photo

b. Age

c. Height

d. Weight

e. Looking For (Options: Chat, Dates, Friends, Networking, Relationship, Right Now)

f. Ethnicity (Options: Do Not Show, Asian, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern, Mixed, Native American, White, Other, South Asian)

g. Body Type (Options: Do Not Show, Toned, Average, Large, Muscular, Slim, Stocky)

h. My Grindr Tribes (Options: Bear, Clean-Cut, Daddy, Discreet, Geek, Jock, Leather, Otter, Poz, Rugged, Trans, Twink)

i. Relationship Status (Options: Do Not Show, Single, Dating, Exclusive, Committed,

1.

a.   **2.**

b.	f.
c.	g.
d.	h.
e.	i.

3.

Circle All That Apply: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

a. _____

_____

_____

_____

b. _____   f. _____

c. _____   g. _____

d. _____   h. _____

e. _____   i. _____

APPENDIX F: EXCEL CODEBOOK

Table 1.1: Recorded Information from Grindr Profiles[1]

Profile Picture Description	In order to protect identity of individual profiles, especially those using a face picture, a specific code was given.
Display Name (15 Character Limit)	Copied exactly from observed profiles, any identifiers removed.
Headline (80 Characters)	Copied exactly from observed profiles, any identifiers removed.
About Me (250 Character Limit)	Copied exactly from observed profiles, any identifiers removed.
My Grindr Tribes	Selections include: Options: Bear, Clean-Cut, Daddy, Discreet, Geek, Jock, Leather, Otter, Poz, Rugged, Trans, and Twink.
Age	Selection ranges from: 18-99.
Height	Selection ranges from: 4'0" to 7'11".
Weight	Selection ranges from: 90lbs to 600lbs.
Body Type	Selections include: Toned, Average, Large, Muscular, Slim, and Stocky.
Ethnicity	Selections include: Asian, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern, Mixed, Native American, White, Other, and South Asian.
Looking For	Selections include: Chat, Dates, Friends, Networking, Relationship, and Right Now
Relationship Status	Selections include: Single, Dating, Exclusive, Committed, Partnered, Engaged, Married, and Open Relationship.
Social Media Links	Selections include: Twitter, Facebook and/or Instagram.

[1] All sections were recorded as reported by user. Any section left blank was recorded as n/a and regarded as missing.

Table 1.2: Profile Picture Code Descriptions

Art (Non-Human)	A profile that used artwork as the default profile picture.
Blank	A profile that opted not to use a profile and displayed default picture of a masculine black and grey silhouette.
Body	A profile that emphasized the body and included an un-obscured face.
Face Pic	A profile that displayed only a face.
Headless Torso 1	A profile that obscured the face and was clothed.
Headless Torso 2	A profile that obscured the face and was shirtless.
Meme	A profile that used a meme as the default profile picture.
Misc.	Miscellaneous picture that did not fit any other category, and never used an un-obscured face picture.
Nature Based Photo (Human)	A profile that was outdoor and included a person, but at a distance, making the face hard to see.
Nature Based Photo (Non-Human)	A profile that was only of nature (i.e. mountains, forest, lakes).

<div align="center">

VITA

</div>

Ian M. Whalen

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EDUCATION
B.A.   History, University of Mississippi, 2015 (minor in Sociology)

CONFERENCE PAPERS
2017   Whalen, Ian M. ""Discrete is so Annoying": Grindr, Discretion and Navigating the
       Closet in a Mississippi College Town" Southern Sociological Society Annual Meeting.
       Greenville, SC.

2017   Whalen, Ian M. "An Ethnographic Case Study of Organizational Culture, Diversity, &
       Inequality in Higher Ed." University of Mississippi OSRP Graduate Student Research
       Presentation. Oxford, MS.

2016   Whalen, Ian M. "Grindr and the Construction of Virtual Masculinities." Alabama-
       Mississippi Sociological Association Annual Meeting. Jackson, MS.

2016   Whalen, Ian M. "Inclusive Masculinity Theory: A Critical Evaluation." Sarah Isom
       Center for Women and Gender Studies Student Conference. Oxford, MS.

RESEARCH EXPEREINCE
2016-2017:   Graduate Research Assistant. Department of Sociology and
                       Anthropology. University of Mississippi. Performed content
                       analysis of primary data for the "Race Diary Project," PIs: Dr.
                       Willa Johnson, Dr. Kirk Johnson, and Dr. James Thomas.

Summer 2016-Spring 2017:   Graduate Research Assistant. Department of Sociology and
                       Anthropology. University of Mississippi. Collected and analyzed
                       primary data for "An Ethnographic Case Study of Organizational
                       Culture, Diversity, & Inequality in Higher Ed.," PI: Dr. James
                       Thomas.

TEACHING ASSISTANT EXPERIENCE

Spring 2017   Intro to Sociology (SOC 101)

Fall 2016   Intro to Sociology (SOC 101)
               Religion, Gender and Sexuality (SOC 425)

Spring 2016   Intro to Sociology (SOC 101)
               Sociology of Pop Culture (SOC 315)
               Guest Lecture. "The Sociology of Religion," Intro to Sociology
               Guest Lecture. "The Role of Socialization in Genocides and Wars," Women and
               Genocide (SOC 399)
               Guest Lecture. "Grindr and the Construction of Virtual Masculinities: A
               Workshop," Sex and Power (SOC 451)

Fall 2015   Sociological Theory (SOC 468)
               Sociology of Identities (SOC 329)
               Guest Lecture. "Transgender 101," Sociology of Identities (SOC 329)
               Guest Lecture. "Goffman and the Virtual Self: Reevaluating Dramaturgy,"
               Sociological Theory (SOC 468)
               Guest Lecture. "Goffman & The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life,"
               Sociological Theory (SOC 468)

AWARDS AND HONORS

2016   Larry W. DeBord Award

SERVICE AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Summer 2016-Spring 2017   Founding Member and Membership and Records Coordinator for
                           OUTGrads

Fall 2015-Spring 2017   Graduate Student Council Senator: Department of Sociology and
                           Anthropology

Fall 2014-Spring 2015   Student Representative on the LGBTQ Affairs Committee to the
                           Chancellor

Fall 2014-Spring 2015   Co-President of UM Pride Network

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Sociological Association
Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association
Southern Sociological Society