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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE MASCULINE MYSTIQUE:

A RHETORICAL CRITICISM

by

Michael W. Chancellor Jr.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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This textual analysis explores the rhetoric of exclusion among homosexual men by analyzing DouchebagsofGrindr.com. The rhetoric of exclusion is used by some homosexual men in order to achieve hegemonic masculinity based on performance of gender, age, race, and physical characteristics to conquer stereotypes of femininity. The gay community utilizes civil rights rhetoric in order to create a dialogue about equality; unfortunately a disturbing number of gay community members frequently discount homosexual male minorities, perpetuating the notion that homosexual minorities are unattractive because they violate heteronormative gender performances. Analyzing the artifact DouchebagsofGrindr.com allows for a glimpse into the self-deprecating online behavior employed by some members of the gay community to obtain hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic ideology is shown to influence communication processes, which indicates that culture and society affect how male gender roles should be performed. Heterosexuality is associated with perceptions of masculinity, and discourse becomes disputed when men do not adequately perform their gender as dictated by society. By utilizing masculinity and the public sphere as a theoretical lens, this study highlights the burden on the gay community to appear masculine and physically attractive in order to feel accepted. This research found through the reframing of 349 profiles posted on

DouchebagsofGrindr.com that profile photos, profile text, and identifying information of Grindr users are factors that members on DouchebagsofGrindr.com use to determine if a profile should be posted on the website. Finally, findings suggest that the gay community perceives effeminate acting gay men as having failed to adequately conceptualize hegemonic masculinity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks go to my committee chair, Dr. Maugh Funderburk, for allowing me to assist in her courses, providing me with her knowledge of gender and communication studies, and overcoming the challenges of directing a thesis from another campus. I would also like to thank Dr. Venette for being critical in the development of my prospectus, and the final product of my thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Erickson and Dr. Atkins-Sayre for allowing me to use their personal libraries as if they were my own. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Mack for providing me with numerous sources of research to strengthen my thesis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Seven years ago, a Mississippi native had just arrived in Florida's Eastern Suburbs. Lonely after spending only hours in a new city, he lies on his bed and selects the application Grindr on his Samsung Galaxy. He logs on, creates a profile, and begins to scroll through myriad of faces and endless shirtless torsos – dozens of guys within his vicinity. He clicks on one of the first profiles: “Justin, 19, looking for friends and fun.” Justin is only forty-three feet away. He quickly logs off, disconcerted by the immediacy of his location. He deletes Grindr after just five minutes. I was barely eighteen years old, and just had my first encounter with the mobile application Grindr.

Location-based hookup applications may cause anxiety by identifying prospective interactions too close for comfort. Since Edward Snowden released government documents about domestic surveillance initiatives, the public at large is more concerned than ever about privacy, even more so in the world of homosexual culture. The online hook-up phenomenon started with gay men using applications such as Grindr to find “friends and fun;” now, everyone is doing it and sharing photos of others doing it. A popular offshoot of the mobile application Grindr, Douchebags of Grindr (DOG) has become an internet phenomenon among the homosexual community with an Alexa Website Ranking of 1,682,449 and a ranking of 32 out of 100 in domain authority, which predicts how well the website will rank on search engines (CuteStat.com, 2015). Upon visiting DOG, patrons of the website are met with a picture similar to the one below, depicting a twenty-nine year old Caucasian male on Grindr, whose photo was screen captured by a fellow Grindr user and uploaded onto DOG under the headline “BE

BUTCH LIKE HER.” This profile, including a prominently displayed headshot, shows a muscular male posed with his chest out, biceps flexed, and shirt lifted to display his abdominal muscles. His profile reads, “Not sure what I want, but I don’t want head games or drama! And no glitter or purses falling outta your mouth!” Underneath the profile is the following DOG user submitted created tagline, “She think she all that and a bag of chips.” This blog, hosted by Tumblr.com, receives screenshot submissions from around the world by Grindr users whom deem other Grindr users “douchebags.” DOG curates user-submitted screenshots from the notorious hook-up application and reframes the profile with taglines such as "arrogant", using votes, comments, and a five-star system to rank how severe of a douchebag the community deems the profile to be. Therefore, utilizing this website demonstrates that users who perform traditional masculinity do not only exist in the application’s local observable area, but around the world.

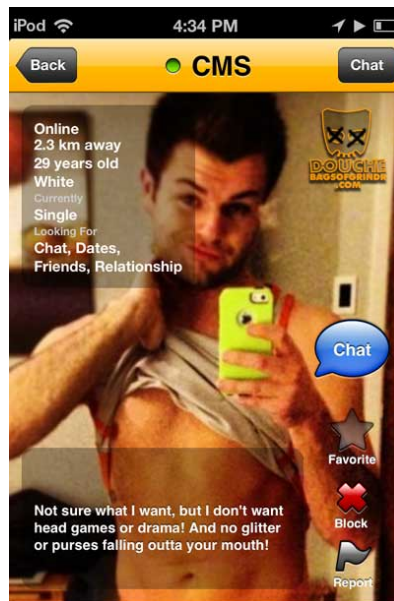


Figure 1. CMS

The aforementioned profile is ranked 3.33 out of 5 stars, making the user a “SUPERMEGADOUCHE.” CMS’s profile is the archetypal profile found on DOG. Unfortunately, CMS’s profile text also presents the typical rhetoric found on the social networking application Grindr (Shuckerow, 2014). This sardonic rhetoric flies in the face of a 2012 study conducted at Duke University that found that homosexual students showed a greater desire for monogamy than indiscriminate fornication (Schaack, 2015).

Schaack’s research is significant because a staggering number of Grindr users and potential douchebags are college-aged, and this application is popular on college campuses. In addition, Grindr has evolved into a phenomenon among gay men, becoming a refuge for the gay community, a complicated forum that can provide both release and subjugation (Senthorun, 2013). Instead of using one of the many antiquated methods to indicate homosexuality, such as keeping a pink scarf in one’s back pocket (Walter, 2011), Grindr is a more direct method allowing homosexuals to instantly identify one another. While many users frequent the application under the guise of seeking friendship, Grindr has a well-deserved reputation as a tool to facilitate hook-ups, or sexual encounters (Shuckerow, 2014). For someone who newly identifies as homosexual or someone who is simply questioning his sexuality, Grindr can expedite conversations with nearby men suffering from similar issues (Ritter, 2012). Due in part to the advent and proliferation of social media, Grindr users tend to think about their public personas much more than previous generations of homosexual males (Shuckerow, 2014). The members of this virtual community construct their public personas meticulously in order to circumvent effeminate qualities regularly associated with homosexuals, project their identities as athletic or masculine as possible, and distance themselves as far as

achievable from other homosexual stereotypes, which often lands these Grindr users on DOG.

This research will apply the qualitative method of ideological rhetorical criticism to examine the popular parody website DOG. Those who create a profile on Grindr do so to attract the attention of others; in order to accomplish this feat, users develop a particular persona that they believe will attract the kind of attention they seek, whether it be finding a new friend nearby or just a promiscuous encounter for one night only. The impression that these original profile creators have established—at the point wherein the profile image and text have circulated through the smartphone application Grindr, been read, received, and have been scrutinized by other users of the application on DOG—has rendered them candidates for “douchebag” status (Schaack, 2015). In particular, this research will examine submitted profiles and their respective comments from February to August 2014. Additionally, my thesis will be advanced by the theories of Gramsci and Habermas. Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony, which describes the gaining and control of power and the creation and devastation of social groups in that process. By the agency of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, an allowance is made for thematic analysis to demonstrate the minority governing aristocracy on Grindr, and subsequent reframing of their profiles on DOG. Understanding the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination is important in order to provide insight as to how masculinities are formulated and used in discourse. In conjunction with Gramsci’s model of hegemony; Habermas’s conceptualization of the public sphere will be used to understand how particular Grindr users emerge on DOG. Habermas refers to the public sphere as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed,”

(Habermas, 1964, p. 49) and all civilians have secure access. This project analyzes hegemonic forms of rhetorical devices along with visual presentations to depict the ruling class of hegemonic masculine gay men on the “world’s biggest mobile network of guys” (Grindr, LLC., 2015).

My analysis also examines the rhetorical devices used by DOG administrators and consumers and includes safe for work visual depictions to show the masculine rhetoric used by Grindr users on their profiles, and rhetoric of exclusion used on the taglines and comment sections of DOG. My analysis attempts to better understand how the classifying information users share on Grindr assists users in developing and performing their masculinities and constructing their identities online, as well as how profile information disclosed is reframed on the counter public DOG, and the implications of profile relabeling on DOG. My goal is to extend the understanding about homosexual identity construction, particularly in a computer-mediated space where homosexual males theoretically have the freedom to become vulnerable by performing and expressing their gender identity among individuals who share their sexual orientation. Initial contact between users on Grindr is through profiles; consequently, profiles affect perceived goals of users, attractiveness, and impression formation (Fitzpatrick, Birnholtz, & Brubaker, 2015). I argue that a significant number of Grindr consumers use gay hegemony and masculinity to attempt to maintain their privileged status on the application by depicting and identifying themselves as masculine and having a goal of finding a potential mate with masculine characteristics. The muscular or athletic physique is not correlated with attractiveness by all members of the gay community; however, understanding why this body type is most desired in the gay community may aid in the development of literature

on gay hegemony and masculinity. Awareness of how homosexual men perform gay hegemony and masculinity may advance understanding of how the gay community challenges the dominant view of hegemonic masculinity.

DOG is a counter public that both displays and attempts to resist the prevalent performance of gay hegemony and masculinity on Grindr. The profiles of the alleged douchebags reflect gay hegemony and masculinity through their profile photographs, identifying information such as age and race, profile text, and the reframing of the profile and subsequent discourse. Conversely, DOG attempts to resist gay hegemony, through the placement and reframing of profiles and user comments on DOG. Prior to examining how gay profile masculinities and impression management function on DOG, my analysis will introduce the blog site DOG, theories of identity construction, masculinity, and the public and private sphere. Borrowing Grindr's own terminology, two "tribes" are created in this online environment. A trifling subsection of Grindr users fall into the masculine schema and fulfill the principles of gay hegemony and masculinity, however, there are many more Grindr users that do not fit into the gay hegemonic puzzle, and are therefore marginalized.

Douchebags of Grindr

DOG is a blog site where any user can submit a screen capture from Grindr to be scrutinized by the community. The profile screenshots usually consist of users with homophobic, racist, or hypocritical propaganda on their profiles. DOG is a counter public that serves a dual purpose as a public safety announcement and a popular satirical website by exposing some of the more radical profiles, often times considered sidesplitting, until people realize that these profiles are real. In July 2011, DOG was launched; allowing

users of the mobile application Grindr to post profiles of other users with aggressive taglines and giving DOG users agency to post and comment on each of the profiles. Common text of profiles posted on DOG include: men who are too short or tall, Asians, fat people, feminine men or “broken wrists,” black, white, not as hot as the profile owner, Latino, ugly, hairy, younger than 21, older than 30, closeted, un-closeted, bisexual, not a college jock, a ginger, Catholic, not into “the scene,” or Republicans (Douchebags of Grindr, 2014). Previous literature reinforces that many of the attitudes expressed in Grindr user’s profile information are counterproductive to the goals of the modern LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning) movement (Eguchi, 2009). Even more alarming is the notion that male homosexual minorities disturbingly prefer white men as romantic partners, and are more likely to exclude members of their own race as potential romantic partners (Han, 2007). Negative racial attitudes are common place in the gay community (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015), and gay male minorities have had the challenge of trying to find their place in the homosexual community. While some Grindr users feel they are simply stating their sexual preference on their profiles, in reality they are alienating members of the gay community. Prevailing hierarchies of gay hegemony are being reinforced by Grindr user’s textual profile information, and in turn gay hegemony is becoming rather problematic for the entire gay community.

DOG is designed to display the most homophobic, arrogant, and racist examples of profiles on Grindr. In Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore’s anthology, *Why Are Faggots So Afraid of Faggots?*, she argues “No femmes or fatties’ is a common buzzword of gay [hook-up] culture online” (Sycamore, 2012). This obscene hierarchical regimentation has become so normalized that the gay community does not even realize the harm it is

inflicting on itself. Since Grindr made its Apple store debut in 2009, a troubling new trend of hyper-masculine, aggressive, and offensive behavior has emerged within the gay community.

Attempted contact filtering by mentioning sexual preferences in identifying information or attempted contact by undesired inhabitants can be considered violating. One phrase commonly seen on Grindr is “not into,” which means not attracted to sexually. Many profiles get posted on DOG because they show radical ethnic labels – which are somehow allowable in online hook-up culture, and part of the language of attraction on Grindr.

The terms “no fats” “no fems” and “no one over 30” have become common taglines to identify profiles on DOG due in part to the “Adonis Factor”, otherwise known as physical male perfection, a prevalent ideology within the gay community (Shuckerow, 2014). Grindr has become an interactive space in which one can find myriad users with different views, including such problematic values as misogyny, racism, body-shaming and other vicious practices. Examples of this can most clearly be seen on the counter public DOG. What is most shocking is that these behaviors are coming from active members of the gay community, those who identify as part of a group demanding marriage equality and equal rights. The language exemplified shows that Grindr users are willing to use uncivil and even confrontational language to exercise their hegemonic masculinity over other users. Internalized homophobia and gay-on-gay prejudice is rampant, even deliberately in gay communities like Grindr. Finally, consumers of DOG use the same rhetoric as the worst Grindr users in the taglines and comment sections of the blog, reframing the gay hegemonic profile as insensitive or effeminate.

Identity Construction

A widely-held belief from previous literature is that LGBTQ individuals experience mental and spiritual growth in stages, from awareness of one's sexuality to the eventual embrace of one's fully-developed homosexual identity (Brady & Busse, 1994; Kaminski, 2000; Parks, 1999; Rust, 1993). In 1934, social behaviorist, George Herbert Mead, argued identity is created through an interaction between the "I" and the "me." Mead argued that the "I" and "me" are the roles that individuals adopt as they engage in social interaction (Mead, 1934). Mead's work claims the "I" is one's internalized sense of self and the "me" is one's external sense of self; that is, one's image of how one is seen by others. While engaging in a social interaction, both halves of the self can be seen in turn as individuals shift to and from the "I" and the "me" (Mead, 1934). Behavioral psychologist and creator of the "identity crisis," Erik Erikson, adopted the view that identity development emerges as a sense of self, created by the interaction between the individual and social relationships (Erikson, 1968). Erikson also argued that cultural and societal context are involved in identity development, the ways in which individuals think, and the ways in which individuals see themselves (Erikson, 1968). In the 1970s, researchers began to study gay and lesbian issues, which comprised coping with stigma, developing a sexual identity, and adjusting their gender identity in a heterosexual world (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Some scholars even began to develop particular models to describe the process of identity management and development (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Plummer, 1975; Troiden, 1979).

Each researcher created models that range from four to six stages. Each of the four aforementioned models begin with the process called sensitization, also known as

identity confusion; where individuals feel different and are aware of their potential homosexual feelings. After the first stage of initial awareness, homosexuals start the second stage where they begin to contemplate their sexual identity more deeply, have sexual experiences, and attempt to manage a variety of issues including finding potential partners, and management of doubts, anxiety, and guilt. The second stage also involves developing a positive gay or lesbian self-image and identity. The second stage has been termed signification (Plummer, 1975), identity confusion (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1979) and acknowledgement (Coleman, 1982). When homosexuals adjust to the concept of being gay and begin to accept their orientation, this is where the third stage begins. The third stage is known as coming out, an investigation of identity disclosure with like-minded and unlike minded individuals. The four researchers suggest that with greater exploration of and satisfaction within their individual LGBTQ communities, homosexuals enter the identity stabilization phase (Plummer, 1975), they develop sturdy allegiances to being gay or lesbian (Troiden, 1979), experience more meaningful relationships (Coleman, 1982), and develop identity pride (Cass, 1979). Cass (1979) and Coleman (1982) include a final stage where the gay and lesbian identity becomes completely integrated into what Kaufman and Johnson (2004, p. 810) call the “web of multiple identities that make up the self, and individuals become comfortable” with accepting other homosexuals and heterosexuals. Each of these four theorists recognizes the complications that arise from attempts at carving an individual niche, such as: “straight-acting” or pretending to be heterosexual, avoidance behaviors, and restraining social interaction to those individuals who share the same sexual orientation. These coping strategies may make positive attainment of a happy gay or lesbian identity very

problematic. Theorists Cass (1979) and Troiden (1979) claim flexibility of their models, stating that there is no clear linear progression from negative homosexual identity to positive homosexual identity construction. All four theorists acknowledge that homosexuals may not experience every stage or may disregard some stages all together. It should be noted that since the inception of these model, social stigmas and the process of stigma management for homosexuals has changed. These stage models are useful for understanding the thought processes and behaviors of homosexuals during identity development; however, because each person is different, no single model can be attributed to the entire homosexual population.

De Monteflores and Schultz (1978) were the first scholars to suggest that social life is more complex than the models that were available at that time and offered that identity can be conceptualized as a response loop with motives, societal responses, and ego all interacting with each other and interchanging over time. De Monteflores and Schultz's research also suggests that negative feelings towards oneself are the results of incapacity to deal with the difficulties of being a marginalized member of society. Moreover, by the beginning of the 1990s, gay and lesbian scholars began to note the restrictions and disputes with these out-of-date stage models. The stage models also inadequately recognize that coping with stigma and sexual identity admission can take a lifetime (Appleby, 2001). The overarching criticism of the four stage models is that they minimize life experience, including ethnicity, gender, and measureless social characteristics (Eliason, 1996; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001).

Much progress has been made by researchers in the field of identity development, specifically of homosexuals. However, there is still a need to explore how negotiations

with society impact identity development (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Rust, 1993). Researchers of gay and lesbian identity construction have essentially produced a controlled literature that highlights the individuality of the gay and lesbian coming out process but fails to conceptualize the connections to a wider range of theoretical concerns. My study posits that gay hegemony and masculinity, as displayed throughout the profiles on DOG, are used as tools to aid in homosexual identity development. In the gay community, asserting hegemony and masculinity have become commonplace in developing a homosexual identity. Previous literature suggests that gay men are compelled by society to comply with hegemonic masculine behavior (Connell, 1992), which means the dynamic between masculinity and femininity influences the invention of rhetoric. My research examines how homosexual males perform gay hegemony, manage this power structure, and express their masculinity in an attempt to become comfortable with their homosexual identities.

Regardless of the scholar's field of study, academic work on homosexual identity development considers social constructionism, but few works have linked it with symbolic interactionism (Plummer, 1975). Plummer's work is important because it rejects sexuality as an end to research in itself and places it within a set of crucial questions that guide sex research and moreover, sociology. Furthermore, Plummer (1975) defied the social constructionist perspective of scholarly sex research as a theory of communication and sociology that seeks to understand the development of a multitude of constructed understandings of the world. However, social constructionism has had its criticisms. Philosopher, Paul Boghossian, has posited a stance against social constructionism; suggesting that most theorist adopt social constructionism because it has

the potential to be liberating (Boghossian, 2006). Woolgar and Pawluch have further argued against social constructionism as “ontological gerrymandering the social conditions in and out of analysis” (Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985, p. 215). Social constructionism assumes that meaning or understanding is developed in synchronization with other human beings, not solely within the individual. The study of symbolic interactionism can assist in examining many ideas from research into homosexual identity development, and may aid in understanding how identity progresses. In other words, social constructionism scholars claim that gender roles are created by society and imposed on individuals of the appropriate sex gradually through a series of stages. My research challenges the traditional view of social constructionism by arguing that homosexual identity development is much more complicated than the offerings of social constructionism, even though it is plausible that social constructionism does have a partial role in identity development. Moreover, the hierarchy structure of gay hegemony is not liberating as suggested by Plummer’s work on social constructionism.

More recently, psychology scholars, Scott, Havice, Livingston, and Cawthon (2012) have adopted the view that young men, regardless of sexual orientation, struggle with problems related to racial privilege, oppression of others, and the pursuit of success (Scott, Havice, Livingston, & Cawthon, 2012). In the context of general masculine psychology, scholars have argued that these psychological steeplechases can make it difficult for males and male-gendered individuals to develop more appropriate world-views and according to Scott et al., to “understand the importance of accepting and respecting others from diverse backgrounds” (p. 10). These scholars relied on the Key model of white identity development. This Key model is different from the

aforementioned models because it highlights the conjunction of race and gender attitudes that may be faced while white men are exhibiting manhood in their lives (Scott & Robinson, 2011). Scholars explain this model is not linear in design; however, it does introduce the important belief that initial phases of development involve negligible self-interrogation, while the higher levels of development are symbolized by personal crisis and subsequent resolve that leads to greater self-knowledge. The Key model is pertinent to this study because a majority of the profiles posted on DOG belong to Caucasian men. Scott and Robinson (2011) believe there are five different types of attitudes in White male identity formation: Non-contact, Claustrophobic, Conscious Identity, Empirical, and Optimal. The Key model continues the conversation that the maturation of the male identity, especially within hyper-masculine and socially-competitive environments – such as Grindr – is based on having achieved some degree of superiority through, most likely, social means. The socially contrived notions such as appearing menacing or powerful are derived among men in order to perform and compete with their peers, and also fulfill their gender performance as a masculine individual. The five types of attitudes in the Key model of white identity formation include:

1. Noncontact - Status quo; denies racism; seeks power and privilege
2. Claustrophobic - Other races are “closing in” on him; disillusionment with the American dream; feels power and privilege are going to other races
3. Conscious Identity - Dissonance between existing belief system and reality
4. Empirical - Questioning their role in racism and oppression and their struggle for unrealistic power from oppression

5. Optimal - Person understands how his struggle for power and privilege has caused racism and oppression

In fact, supremacy, dominance, and power or lack thereof, are theorized by Scott et al. (2012) to have a direct impact on development of the male gender-role as well as the manner in which males learn to communicate within both professional and personal interactions. The way in which users present themselves on Grindr involves many factors, including how masculine or dominant users perceive themselves, how willing users are to share profile photos or identifying information, and which goals the users are trying to achieve on the application. Understanding why users post specific profile images and the identifying information they provide relates to the development of their identity and feeling comfortable as a homosexual male. Although many of the homosexual identity development models are considered out-of-date by many scholars, these models were critical in advancing the understanding of homosexual identity development, and can still provide insight into the process that gay males go through when experiencing gay hegemony and developing their understanding of masculinity.

Masculinity

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of practices that embody the most desired form of masculinity. The model derives its social power through philosophy, establishments, and persuasion, as it requires all other men to place themselves in relation to it. In this sense, the simulated world of DOG can be read as a counter public, a space of contention where community members are free to express their support or opposition for a particular profile (Bar-Lev & Tillinger, 2010).

At the outset of gender performance research, Gramsci's idea of hegemonic masculinity changed the focus of study from restricted ideologies to mundane common customs that influence everyday communications – and are unquestioned and perceived as normal (Gramsci, 1999). Foucault (1978) argues that sexuality and sexually charged representations are shaped by society in order to suppress individuals from behavior opposite from the heterosexual. Both Gramsci and Foucault agree hegemony is a factor within the broader scope of class struggle and ascendancy (Foucault, 1978; Gramsci, 1999). Additionally, Gramsci's concepts contribute and enlighten discussions of power, such as gender, race, and sexuality. Connell (1992) presents corresponding ideals about hegemonic masculinity; Connell argues external hegemonic masculinity is a device to preserve a misogynist patriarchy in which men dominate over women. Internal hegemonic masculinity, which I have called gay hegemony, is described as the means by which white heterosexual males exercise power over others, including heterosexual and homosexual men. Connell's research supports my claim that gay men are using hegemonic masculinity on Grindr profiles and DOG comments as a tool of power to suppress other gay men. Connell further suggests, "Different masculinities are constituted in relation to other masculinities and to femininities, through the structure of gender relations and through other social structures, notably class, colonialism, and ethnicity. In modern social formations, certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others are subordinated or marginalized" (Connell, 1992, p. 736). Oppression of men by means of hegemonic masculinity is known as subordinated masculinity. Subordinated masculinity is commonly experienced by gay men. Men who may have gender agency,

but lack race are experiencing marginalized masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In Western society, there are still major conflicts between heterosexual and homosexual men. Connell proposes “homosexuality is a negation of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate. Given that assumption, antagonism toward homosexual men may be used to define masculinity [for heterosexual men]” (Connell, 1992, p. 736). Homosexual men may be oppressed in our culture; however, they are not excluded from masculinity. Unfortunately, the gay community still faces stigma about their sexual orientation and must face varying conflicts concerning masculinity. These conflicts include understanding their sexuality, as well as their social presence as men. Connell’s research is significant in part for understanding modern gender dynamics and options for future social advancement and masculinity research.

Demetriou (2001) challenges Connell’s definitions by asserting hegemonic masculinity is not exclusively in the domain of white, heterosexual males. Instead, Demetriou argues dominant masculinity exists in many forms, benefits different segments of male society, and “unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy” (p.337). Demetriou claims that the incorporation of homosexual males in varied cultural practices can be defined as a gay masculinity that forms part of this contemporary “hegemonic masculine bloc” (Demetriou, 2001, p.343). This notion of a hegemonic masculine bloc was developed by Gramsci and adds a layer of multiple hegemonic masculinities. Masculinity scholars have critiqued the trend to speak of just one pattern – “hegemonic masculinity is always used in the singular” (Jefferson, 2002, p. 71). Demetriou (2001) advocates that Connell’s beliefs fail to reach

Gramsci's notions of hegemony. Gramsci believes hegemonic progressions are dialectical and mutually interactive between parties (Gramsci, 1999). Connell, on the other hand, saw these marginalized masculinities as having very little effect on the construction of the hegemonic model (1992). Gramsci's notebooks suggest the dominating class uses pragmatism to create projections of domination, where flexibility is rejected in hopes of balance. Connell notes that the agreement of lesser masculinities can become oriented and suitable for the preservation of hegemonic masculinity, but never subverted by it, eliminating reasonable value. Hegemony is "about the winning and holding of power" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). By reframing profiles from Grindr on the online counter public of DOG, homosexual men are practicing hegemonic masculinity, and using DOG as the tool to achieve their domination over other homosexual minorities. These marginalized masculinities within the structure of hegemonic masculinity propose that these men are mocked by men of privilege, as a means for these men to construct their own masculine identities. More specifically, I argue gay hegemony is the system used by the ruling class of homosexual males to exert control over minority members of their community. This is done through social institutions and by using culture to constructing their domination as normal (Donaldson, 1993). This system maintains its stability by ensuring the support of the dominant group.

Scholarship suggests hegemonic masculinity sets up a system of competition, with men competing among themselves for women, while also eliminating men as prospective partners for women (Martyn, 2013). Women are regarded as prizes to be won, while men must compete amongst one another to prove they are worthy of reward. Men's perceived worth is undoubtedly linked to gender performance, with men

displaying traits that obey closely to the idea of being valued substantially more than those who do not (Martyn, 2013).

I propose not only do heterosexual and homosexual men perform and enforce misogyny; they also enforce the fear of effeminacy, regardless of a person's sex or sexual orientation. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli refer to this aforementioned behavior as compulsory heterosexuality (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 26). Compulsory heterosexuality is a system designed to ensure that males will strictly define themselves through the notions of hegemonic masculinity. Young men are placed under a microscope at a very young age and fortified to be tough and strong while being severely chastised for any deviations from the heterosexual behaviors. Men receive messages such as these through a wide variety of sources, such as their parents, teachers, the media they consume, but of utmost importance, they are constantly scrutinized by their friends. This immense pressure is certain to ensure that boys will behave in such a way that is consistent with the culture's ideas of masculinity, and, in turn, regulate the behaviors of their peers (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Furthermore, because males are considered tough, there are very few safeguards for young men who do not follow the dominant masculinity scripts. Bullying of these men by others is not uncommon; however, bullying at a young age is often squared as "boys just being boys" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 34). The discourse, in terms of user comments on DOG, has created a homophobic atmosphere. Gay men bullying other gay men on DOG has allowed for the creation of a virtual space, powered by hostility and sexual bigotry. Environments such as these foster gay hegemony.

Under the system of hegemony, men are expected to be strong, independent, and appear attractive to the opposite sex (Katz, 2006). Hegemony privileges sexual and physical prowess. Deviations from these heteronormative values are deemed transgressive, and are often associated with homoeroticism. Certain behaviors have been reconstructed as masculine, when usually these behaviors would be considered transgressive, such as cooking or wearing earrings (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli discussed their subjects as reinventing behaviors consistent with the hegemonic ideal of femininity into paths of resistance, and therefore becoming consistent with their masculinity. Scholars have proposed due to the social nature of gender, certain behaviors can be changed and considered acceptable (Martyn, 2013). There is a group of homosexual men who do perform gender in fluid ways, many times enacting feminine performance, such as effeminate posture. The cultural definition of what it means to be a homosexual man has been commonplace in the media, perpetuating a particular stereotype that all gay men are feminine. Concerning the enforcement of masculine behaviors, masculine performing gay men enforce hegemonic ideals upon feminine performing gay men. The enforcement is most apparent on social networking applications like Grindr, and community based blogs like DOG (Cooper & McGinley, 2012).

Edwards (2005) and Anderson (2009) equally noticed an increasing number of probable masculine identities. Edwards (2005) uncovered this trend through construction of the idea of the “New Man”. “The New Man is based upon men’s lifestyle magazines which saw a peak in the early 1990s that has continued to today – enforcing the ideas of grooming, wearing designer clothing, sporting expensive accessories, and forming a new

idea of modern day chivalry” (Edwards, 2005, p. 33). Edwards noted that male sexual dominance was still present while developing the New Man, there was also a development of masculinity exemplified, which encouraged men to show concern over fashion choices – something which was previously associated with homosexuality. The concept of the New Man was refuted by the “New Lad”, which encouraged men to revel in their “sexuality and manliness” (Edwards, 2005, p. 34). Even though the New Man eventually stood in the shadow of the New Lad, the principles set by the New Man are still acceptable and show the flexibility of the concept of masculinity. Anderson (2002) also noted the development of male gender roles in his analysis of homosexuality and sports. During Anderson’s analysis, he discovered that openly gay athletes had tremendously positive experiences after opening up about their sexuality to their team mates. Gay athlete’s experiences suggest they were included and supported by their colleagues, rather than mistreated, which Anderson suggests was common place during the previous decade. Similar to other scholarship, Anderson’s (2009) work highlights the present changing attitudes towards homosexual men in western society, as an expansion in the definition of masculinity. This is one of the reasons that homosexual men are being accepted within the sporting community. However, their acceptance in sporting events necessitates these men to downplay their identity as a homosexual man and maintain the performance of a straight athlete. By maintaining a straight performance, gay men hide their gender deviant behavior, which makes their identity tolerable to their teammates. “Through such interactions as discussing attractive women, gay men are able to display expected behavior of men on the team” (Anderson, 2009, p. 112). These encroaching

attitudes can be seen on the comments by users on DOG, where being perceived as effeminate equates to being weak or undesirable.

The theory of inclusive masculinity proposes that regardless of increased acceptance, it is not constant with hegemonic masculinity; however, inclusive masculinity exists alongside hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2009, p. 96). Anderson further proposes that each version of masculinity is equal, allowing men to endorse whatever version they please. Anderson's work suggests that young men are choosing the beliefs of inclusive masculinity, rather than more conservative hegemonic masculinity (p. 95). Anderson's research may indicate a paradigm shift among heterosexual men becoming more accepting of homosexual men, and realizing that all men have some value of masculinity.

Studies also suggest that there are numerous rewards in conforming to masculine expectations. Men with muscle mass appear athletic, and intimidating, and are in a prime position to reap the social returns. McCreary's (2005) work aligns with the more recent work of Steinfeldt (2011) in which heterosexual college students who strongly conformed to masculine norms had a stronger drive to be muscular. Participants felt that they would be perceived in a more progressive manner if they were more muscular and would be more appealing to the contrasting sex. By following prescribed masculine behavior, participant's effort to be accepted also amplified their drive to build more muscle. The ability to attract the opposite sex affords men more opportunities to fornicate, ensuring they will be able to prove their vitality and masculinity. Users on DOG see non-conformity to these masculine norms as effeminate.

Although masculinity is a culturally defined experience, hegemonic masculinity remains the ideal to which all men aspire (Kimmel & Messner, 2010). By exerting their masculinity, men are perceived as dominant, able to withstand dangerous activities, and charm potential sexual partners. When men do not conform to masculine behaviors, there are social punishments (Eguchi, 2009). In many cases, peers judge and punish non-conformity to masculine behavior, which can create potentially dangerous situations (Clemens, 2013). The behaviors considered masculine in previous literature include: being successful, competitive, and powerful (Eguchi, 2009), never showing emotion or weakness (Pezzote, 2008), being muscular (McCreary, 2005; Steinfeldt, 2011), displaying homophobic attitudes (Trump & Wallace, 2006), having a high libido, and participating in risk-taking behaviors (Kimmel & Messner, 2010; Steinfeldt, 2011). With a firm understanding of the particulars of hegemonic masculinity, it becomes clear how users on Grindr exert masculinity over other users, and moreover, how moderators and consumers of DOG select profiles to display on the website. Effeminate stereotypes have defined homosexual men in society, which is why many gay men try to prove their masculinity by exerting dominance over other homosexuals. Kimmel and Messner put it best when stating that homophobia is fundamental in our culture's definition of what it means to be a man (2010). Eguchi argues that the performance of traditional masculinity perpetuates a discourse more than an attraction to men but an attraction to masculinity (Eguchi, 2009).

Masculinity is both positive and negative. Masculinity is positive in that it aids in the identity development process for men, negative in the aspect that those who are not considered masculine are associated with being negative and feminine. Many gay men

whose Grindr profile's end up on DOG are confronted by typical masculinity, and in turn experience a particularly harsh homophobia, external to the user himself, but internal to the gay community.

Public and Private Sphere

Habermas' notion of the public sphere and its criticisms have also provided an additional theoretical lens for this research. The public sphere is conceptualized by Manganga in (2012) as "a political and legal sphere and a site for negotiation, conflict, domination, oppression, resistance, and compromise" (p. 244). Habermas originally proposed the public sphere includes access by all citizens and have the freedom to publish and express their feelings on general matters of interest (Habermas, 1964). Mangu proposed the idea of a critical citizenry (Mangu, 2009). The critical citizenry means citizens can freely interact and diagnose social issues which influence political action. This interaction is critical in formation of public opinion (Fraser, 1990). Habermas' idea of the public sphere introduced "a way of circumventing some confusion that has plagued progressive social movements and the political theories associated with them" (Fraser, 1990, p. 58). Hauser (1998) proposed the public sphere as a "discursive space, in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and where possible to reach common judgment" (p. 86). However, Hauser's notion of the public sphere is problematic because one single unified public sphere does not exist. Civil citizenry's or groups of people are not similar, considering different communities have varied and disagreeing interest. Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere was elite and reserved for educated male citizens (Hauser, 1998). By rejecting particular masculinities, DOG users create a counter public by reaching common judgment by

rallying around degrading a particular profile. Additionally, DOG users do not diagnose social issues, but create social issues through their use of exclusion rhetoric.

In contrast to Habermas' original conception, there have always been opposing publics from the start, not just during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Fraser, 1990). Moreover, not only were there always numerous competing publics, but the relationships between the bourgeois publics and counter-publics were always conflicted. Subsequently, the public sphere has been the subject of criticism due in part to its hegemonic supremacy and segregation of other social groups. Furthermore, no public can symbolically address the grievances of all of society's groups. Individuals and groups have varying means of access to the mainstream media and must express their fears through counter-publics, which implicitly and paradoxically exclude others. Manganga (2012) argues "The contemporary public sphere is based on radio, television, newspapers, books, magazines, the Internet and other informal media" (p. 244). Technological innovations such as blogs, peer-to-peer networks, and social networking applications have increased the reach of the public sphere (Mangu, 2008). Thus, contemporary scholarship submits that the bourgeois definition of the public sphere as conceptualized by Habermas is not suitable for critiquing the limits of an existing democracy in more contemporary entrepreneurial societies. Modern scholarship that offers a public unimpeded by social inequality would provide a more adequate definition of the public sphere. Finally, a theory of the public sphere should show the ways in which social inequality stalls negotiation within publics in late capitalist societies; emerging technologies that have improved mediated-communication should also be included (Hauser, 1998). Blog websites such as DOG have certainly increased the reach of the

public sphere, and under a more modern conceptualization of the public sphere, DOG would be considered a competing counter public to Grindr.

Method

Grounded through the theoretical contexts of identity, hegemonic masculinity, and the public sphere, this study utilizes the qualitative method of ideological rhetorical criticism to examine the website DOG. My scholarship seeks to understand if ideologies present “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspects of the world” (Foss, 2009, p. 209) is engrained in the DOG community. From February to August 2014, 349 profiles were uploaded to DOG and were selected for thematic analysis, also providing hundreds of user-submitted comments on those profiles. Finally, this research examines the principles and conventions that are common place on DOG, and how they develop gay hegemony in this interactive space. The following two research questions guide my analysis:

1. In what ways does hegemonic masculinity shape the ways users are presented on the counter-public, DOG?
2. What strategies are adopted by homosexual males in negotiating their masculinity?

During the process of thematic analysis, I will first identify the symbols that are used to enforce hegemonic masculinity and create a rhetorical space. By answering these questions, the dominate ideology exhibited on DOG will emerge. Thus, in the following chapters, I will describe the visual elements that make up the common profiles posted on DOG by using profile examples, provide an analysis of the profile text, and provide conclusions to discuss the rhetorical strategies of gay men negotiating their gender

identity, sexuality, and body in a public space online. Chapter II will explore how homosexual men display their masculinities on their profiles, through their profile images, profile text, and several identifying characteristics that assist in creating a masculine persona. Chapter III presents the notion of DOG as a gay online counter public and offers a glimpse inside how users of the website operate. Finally, Chapter IV will examine three profiles as case studies and their comments sections, which provide a window into debates about masculine embodiment within the gay community.

CHAPTER II

GAY PROFILE MASCULINITIES

Sociologist, Erving Goffman, in his now-classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, laid out what is now called the dramaturgical model of social interaction (Goffman, 1959). Taking its name from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*—"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts..." (Shakespeare, 1601)—the dramaturgical model of the self and social interaction sees life as a series of performances. For Goffman, central to these performances is what he called impression management (Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959). All social situations are constituted by the attempt of those engaged in social interaction to persuade each other of their particular definitions of the situations in which they find themselves. Central to these interactions for Goffman is impression management, in which social actors make impressions through sign vehicles, which for his purposes included verbal and body language (Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959). Goffman made an important distinction between *the impressions we give* and *the impressions we give off*. The impressions we give are found in the things we say, the purposeful poses, specific facial expressions, and other body language we control from a lesser to greater extent to emit impressions we would like to make (Goffman, 1959). The impressions we give off, however, are the aspects of our expressiveness over which we have much less control inasmuch as they escape our intentions and arise out of the incompatibility or inconsistency between, for example, what we say and what we do, which creates the

impression we are aiming for, and what it is that somehow *gives us away*, taking us further from the impressions we are attempting to give.

This distinction is useful in approaching the profiles curated by the website DOG. At some level, the creators of the original profiles have attempted to *give* a particular impression. But the impression that the original creators have *given off*—at that point when the profile image and text circulate through the smartphone application Grindr, as they are read, received, and scrutinized by other users of the app—have rendered them candidates for douchebag status. Something went awry. While Goffman was studying social interaction in its minute-to-minute process (Goffman, 1959), this study examines snapshots of a gay man's attempt at impression management. However, these snapshots—the profile photo and the profile text—are opportunities for the user to present a self which he believes is self-defining, opportunities for the user to make his first impression. Unlike ongoing social interaction, in which body language or the flow of conversation and information can catch a person off-guard, take undesired turns, or betray a social actor, the Grindr user has a considerable timetable to consider how to present himself online.

This chapter examines the visual presentation of homosexual male bodies contained in the profiles uploaded to DOG during February to August 2014, that is, those profiles that were selected by other Grindr users for submission to the website and then posted by website administrators. These profiles give particular insight into how hegemony is displayed on the application.

Goffman believed that what motivated our self-presentation was a hope to achieve our personal goals, a wish to conform to some set of social norms, and a desire to present

a positive view of ourselves to the world (Goffman , 1959). This chapter looks solely at the images included in the original users' profiles. Between February 2014 and August 2014, DOG published 349 profiles with images. These images are discussed here primarily in a descriptive manner, since it is the interactional context which is the principal point of study, and examination of how these images are discussed comes in Chapter IV. Grindr provides the opportunity for users to post a profile photo. Unlike other applications, Grindr only allows one profile photo. This photo, then, must be carefully selected.

Demographics

Racially, the Grindr users whose profiles have been showcased on DOG.com are primarily white (255 men, 73%), but 31 self-identified Latinos (9%), 25 self-identified mixed-race (7%), ten African American men (3%), seven Asian men (2%), six Middle Eastern men (2%), and one Native American man are also presented on the website. In addition, eight profiles are indeterminate and six users chose "other" for their racial category and were not identifiable phenotypically or had other images, such as trucks or a flexed arm, on their profile. Although several men are in their 40s, the average age listed for the profiles is 26 years old.

Visual Masculinity

This begins the intriguing display of homosexual males' private worlds, made public through social media. Upon opening the application Grindr, the user interfaces with a grid of men online or recently online, organized geographically by distance. Depending on whether one uses a free version of Grindr or a paid version, a user will see 100 or 200 men on his grid, respectively. While scrolling through the profiles, wide

arrays of photos are within view. One of the ways in which masculinity is often constructed is through the cultivation of an athletic or muscular physique. To that end, 147 profiles show the user shirtless. When making the decision about which photograph to present in order to make a first impression, 42% of men displayed an image of themselves with a bare torso. The following three images are examples of what may be called an athletic physique. This body type is characterized by a lean, sturdy or well-proportioned physique; mesomorphic (Kernerman, 2010). The somatotype, Mesomorph, is distinguished by “greater than average muscular development” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014), as classified under the physique-classification system established by American psychologist W.H. Sheldon. The case mesomorph has: “a square, massive head; broad, muscular chest and shoulders; a large heart; heavily muscled arms and minimal body fat” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014).



Figure 2. Don't be shy

Beyond the healthy looking body, there are also muscular men putting themselves on display, as shown in the next two images:



Figure 3. Jean



Figure 4. Gym hot ONLY!

In addition to athletic and muscular bodies, some young gay men who are height and weight proportionate according to the standard Body Mass Index are often called “twinks.” These young men also show their bodies in various states of undress in order to display the fact that they are, at least by the BMI standards, “in shape”.

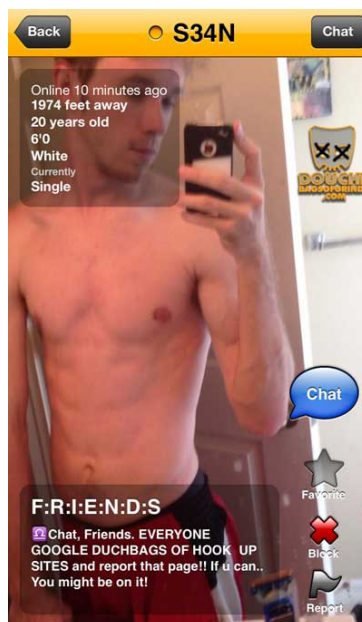


Figure 5. S34N

For an application that has chatting, dating, relationships, and casual encounters as its various purposes, it should be no surprise that the images would tend toward the sexual. Because gay men are the users of this application, this image is an opportunity to display one's spectrum of masculinity. Gay men are stereotypically perceived as feminine, presenting a source of conflict in the communication used by masculine acting gay men (Eguchi, 2009). As the twink "Alex" illustrates, not all men will show their face in their profile images. In fact, in this particular six month sample, 21% of profile users do not show their faces, but choose instead to display their torso, back, or an arm flexed, or showing their face but with dark sunglasses, hoping to rely on these sign vehicles to communicate to the profile viewer something about their attractiveness and masculinity. For example, Untitled 3 recognizes his same-sex sexual preference, however, the social ideals of what it means to be a gay man do not resonate with him while negotiating his identity, because he is "Masc and athletic". Therefore, it can be theorized that negotiating a masculine gay identity is difficult for this individual (Eguchi, 2009).

For various reasons, users will conceal their face in their user profiles. Sunglasses allow a man to present himself as visible, but distant, given the usual emphasis placed on looking people in the eye. Some men will only display sections of their bodies and wait to receive face photos from anyone who decides to contact them. As explained in Chapter I, men come out on their profiles in varying degrees, choosing to limit contact to only those users who are willing to be secure enough to send users such as “Like it on,” a few pictures in order to achieve a “match”. Finally, as show in the last profile above, some men on Grindr are bisexual and/or not out, so therefore unwilling to display their face. In all of these cases above, however, the men are willing to show a significant amount of skin, while hiding their face. Some men simply may not want to be seen in a sexual light, with a divide between users’ public and private faces controlling how much of their real selves they choose to show. While showing one’s face allows for individuality, not showing one’s face relates to users retaining their anonymity. Sometimes men are simply seeking privacy, like the user only willing to show his face to individuals he is interested in meeting. Other reasons for not revealing one’s identity include being in the closet or may denote the individual is cheating or is in an open relationship.

The following sets of images are representative of those which are sexually suggestive, either by pose or by displaying humor in profile text or image. The use of humor represents a number of motivations of use ranging from standing out from the crowd to cues of the users identity not displayed through the profile. However, in the world of Grindr, humor can sometimes be seen as confusing or offensive. Furthermore, there are those men that are relying on a more classic presentation of masculinity, donning a tailored suit or shirt which emphasizes the men’s good physiques as well as possible occupational or class position. It has been said many times that a picture is worth

a thousand words. This may be the reasoning why individuals can only display one photo on their profiles at a time. Research has suggested that individuals can gain a lot from a profile picture. Users can gain accurate information regarding, “obvious traits, such as physical attractiveness but also regarding subtler traits, such as warmth and competence” (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012, p. 29).

Some men display vehicles in their profiles, tapping into the masculine culture of cars or trucks, while also, perhaps unwittingly, communicating something about their class position. These users go for a different kind of anonymity than other users, but it may be for the same reasons. The tactic here, however, is that other users will show interest in a photo of their vehicle may want to arrange a meet up that could not have happened otherwise. Other men show themselves engaged in partying, which gives an air of riskiness and a good time about them.

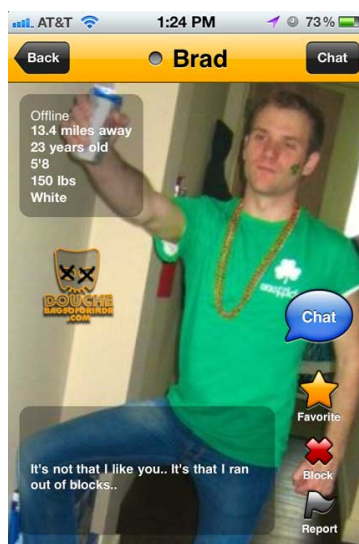


Figure 6. Brad

As shown above, there are numerous ways in which the men on DOG display themselves, coming from both the application Grindr and the influences of hegemonic masculinity. Grindr users represent a wide diversity on their profiles that can categorize

them as part of a particular group. During this part of my research, the group of men who proclaim their masculinity while at the same time denouncing other users (feminine users of the app), showed to be an example of the effects of gay hegemonic masculinity and gay male identity construction. While constructing a virtual identity, Grindr users overwhelmingly wish to present the most ideal versions of themselves. While profile construction allows some Grindr users to display a perfect version of themselves, it also reduces or averts potential romantic partners from gaining an immediate or complete picture. Selecting a prospective profile as a “douchebag” comes down to perception – physical appearances and socioeconomic assumptions. Moreover, Grindr users may even discover that their perceptions of their ideal romantic partner are affiliated with elitist or racist tendencies, perceptions of skin color, and even clothing (or lack thereof) may influence partner selection. Dr. Anne Helen Peterson remarks “... we find someone [attractive] based on unconscious codes of class, race, education level, religion, and corresponding interests embedded within the photo of their profile” (Peterson, 2014). Therefore, Grindr has the ability to produce strength, encourage relationships, or simply provide an online sexual shopping mall for homosexual men. This view displays an interesting separation between an individual’s virtual identity, and an individual’s actual identity. It may seem certain that Grindr is in the business of limiting actual identities, and that virtual identities displayed on Grindr are fictitious. On the other hand, certain communities oppress identities – the virtual world gives users the power to right these wrongs by becoming more opinionated than one’s actual identity.

Profile Texts

In the 1960s, Erving Goffman, in a classic book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, claimed that there was “one complete, unblushing male:” a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective...Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself...as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (1963, p. 128)

Recent work in masculinity studies recognizes this particular male as the man who is enveloped by a hegemonic masculinity; albeit there have been some cracks in this particular paradigm of masculinity. For example, we have now had both Catholic and African-American presidents, hip-hop culture has moved men (and women) of color into the upper echelons of entertainment figures, and a “revenge of the nerds” trend turns the idea of cool on its head with the ascendancy of computer scientists to positions of wealth and prominence beyond those of athletes and entertainers. When we consider the emergence of increasing numbers of out gay men across various social terrains as a result of the homophile, gay power, queer, and now an assimilation-aimed gay rights movement, the hegemony of the heterosexual inflected masculinity is called into question. Even though the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell military policy has been discarded by Congress, even though LGBT people are now protected under federal hate crime statutes, and even though we are in the midst of a cascade of federal court rulings in favor of marriage equality, there remains a stigma attached to homosexuality. The mark of the gay man still sets him apart from the straight camp. Formal legal changes do not necessarily

translate into cultural and social change, as we can see from ongoing racism, both interpersonal and structural, since the Civil Rights Movement. Gay men must still contend with lingering stereotypes and the stigma of being gay.

Another way to think about what is going on in the text of the profiles found on DOG.com comes from an early scholar of gay life who studied men who have sex with men in public places in the late 1960s. In his now infamous book, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, Laud Humphreys draws on psychoanalytic theories of unconscious motivation and reaction formation to account for the men in his study who seemed to be compensating for their 'illicit sex' by assuming a defensive shield of "refulgent respectability" in order to "present themselves as respectable members of society" (Humphreys, 1970, pp. 134-135). After his fieldwork in "tearooms," Humphreys used the license plate numbers of the men who were having sex with men in order to obtain their addresses, which he then placed in a community health study being done by his colleague so that he could gain access to their homes, interview them, and compare their questions about health, social issues, and politics with ostensibly heterosexual men also contained in the latter study's large sample (Humphreys, 1970). Deeply closeted men accomplish this presentation of self by holding much more strongly conservative positions on social and political issues than other men, gay and straight, who share similar demographic characteristics. "Motivated largely by his own awareness of the discreditable nature of his secret behavior," Humphrey's explains, "the covert deviant develops a presentation of self that is respectable to a fault. His whole life style becomes an incarnation of what is proper and orthodox" (p. 135). Four decades later, with many gay men now out of the closet and living their lives and participating in the fashioning of

various gay cultures, we can imagine that many men no longer have to engage in compensatory symbolic actions such as the closeted men Humphrey studied. But the stigma remains, however much weakened, and gay men confront this in various places socially and culturally.

What is evident in some of the profiles collected by DOG is an attraction, a desire for the hegemonic man described by Goffman (Goffman, 1959). The texts of the profiles written by ‘DoucheBags’ are not examples of liberated, equality-minded, conscientious young men building a gay community, but are more like declarations of individual men of their very particular ideas about what is attractive, desirable, and worthy. Often, the profile texts include statements that very few people would actually have the courage to say in social gatherings or in public at all. Tact and consideration are thrown aside, and just as the gay community as a whole is advancing as a group in state and federal law, the cracks and fissures within the gay community are made visible in these profiles. A reading of these profiles has led to the organization of this chapter and the next, both of which look at some dominant themes that emerge around preferences when it comes to age, body type, race and ethnicity, and gender. Finally, some attention to those whom the website community deems “SuperMegaDouches” will be in order—that is, the extremely arrogant. While the next chapter looks at the ways—often contradictory—that other gay men police the boundaries of gay identity and gay community through the heckling and criticism of these profiles when it comes to body types and masculinity, this chapter focuses on two forms of discrimination usually writ large in society making their way into a community confronting stigma: age and race.

Age

A 24 year old looking for chat and friends says, “No one old or fat. New, looking to chat.” “No pic=no reply,” says a 19 year old looking for dates and a relationship. “Dont be old cuz you will be blocked! TY.” While it is completely understandable that a 19 year old might not be interested in older men for dates or a relationship, the 24 year old is only looking, according to his profile, for chat and friends. He does not want to talk with old or fat people. Both of these young men express their preferences starkly. Given the space limitations for scripting a profile, these two users, choose to use those character spaces to warn anyone older or heavier to stay away from them in virtual space. If one is older and should send a message, the consequences are final: they will be blocked.

“Alburyboi Jezzy, a single white guy in his mid-20s, elaborates on this in his profile: “Not here to talk to old ppl. No body over the age of 23 or i will block u. im not here to talk to old ppl u start talking to me i'll just block u.” Literature in the territory of age preference suggests one possible reason for ageism in online dating applications may be life stage association (Kaufman & Phua, 2003). Kaufman and Phua propose that age is used as a prescreening criterion, and more often than not, an indicator of one’s life stage. Life stage research offers several examples, such as young individuals seeking other young individuals due to common interest, and someone who is older with different priorities than younger people may desire a partner that wishes to settle down, or have a family (Kaufman & Phua, 2003).

Since the time of the Ancient Greeks, there has been a cult of youth among men who have sex with men. Luke, a 26 year old single twink looking for chat and friends, says that “there is only 3 thing in life that matter and that is good looks,good looks and

good looks.under 35.” (In order to make his joke, Luke had to skip some necessary spaces and characters in his profile.) So it should come as no surprise when a 42 year old single man looking for friends and displaying a shirtless photo of himself in great physical shape, says: “Think about it...There is a reason I filter out 30+.” Some profiles are very age-specific. For example, “LJ,” a 23 year old white single gay man looking for chat, dates, friends, networking, and a relationship, says: “just be chill dude, interested in talking to 24-26 year old masculine white guys. Don’t fall into that category? Then ask for my rates.” LJ is only networking with older men for a price. One 22 year old says he is “allergic to guys over 26,” communicating a bodily reaction to age, while another lays out a diagram of sorts: “no fatties, over 32, or baldies. No exception. Don’t waste my time.” Seemingly oblivious to the fact that their time as young men will soon come to an end according to their own age parameters, these profiles address older men on the application and reject them outright. Another possibility for this sort of antagonistic rhetoric is that age is seen as an indicator of attractiveness and virility (Kaufman & Phua, 2003). Numerous studies suggest that physical characteristics are top priority in selecting a mate, among *all* men (Kaufman & Phua, 2003; Goode, 1996). Furthermore, in a study of male respondents to personal ads, men are more likely to choose partners based on physical looks than higher socioeconomic status (Goode, 1996).

Queer theorist, Leo Bersani, in his 1996 book *Homos*, examined several iconic figures of homoerotic desire, one of which was “The Gay Daddy.” Some gay men search out older, masculine men, a form of Gay Macho, as elaborated upon by Martin Levine in the 1990s in a book of the same name. DOG users make it very clear that they are not at all interested in crossing generational lines, for chat or for a relationship. Connor, a

19yo, says, “If your old enough to be my dad no thanks...Not into creepy, nasty guys... I have a filter, so should u.” Connor is communicating to viewers of his profile that he has set his filter on his device to see guys around his own age, and that any older viewers of his profile should do the same. Alex, 25 years old, is a single white man looking for dates or friends, but makes it clear that he’s “25 and have a business to run so let’s not mess around, really not here to have my time wasted or to find a new dad.” Migz, a single 20 year old, asks in his profile: “Why do I seem to attract old men!?!? stop it! if ur over 25 why bother. just STOP!” Moreover, in a landmark 1985 study, Sergios and Cody found that the main contributing factor in continuing to date a partner among homosexual males was physical attractiveness. Ethnicity, age, and physical characteristics are considered appearance-related issues (Sergios & Cody, 1985). Even back in 1985, gay culture associated youth with physical characteristics and virility.

What about older men who go to the gym, who stay in shape, who try to play the young part? “Musclepup,” a 26 year old Latino man with a headless profile photo that emphasizes his muscular shoulders, arms, and tattoos in a tank top that fits snugly around his waist, says, “I just love the block button. Major turn off when your 40+ wearing A&F your not a jock but just an old fart...FIT 4 FIT!!!” Another young man, Colossus, a 21 year old mixed-race man looking for chat, dates, friends, networking, and a relationship, says, “No pic, no chat, no old/fat. 11% body fat, gym 3-5 times a week...be in shape, fossils will be blocked.” Old farts and fossils—these are the attributes of older gays, according to the younger set. Gay men obviously prefer young men as partners. Regardless of sexual orientation, males have an overwhelming preference for young partners (Adam, 2000). Of course, this is not true in every case. In fact, men may seek a

more mature partner due to reasons of socioeconomic status or simply experience. Finally, Adam offers a very illuminating comparison, stating that “gay culture is not much different from the enviroing society, in which the ideals of youthfulness and body fascism fall especially heavily on heterosexual women” (Adam, 2000, p. 416). In contrast to gay cultures obsession with youth, gay men do not have to subscribe to the social pressures that heterosexual men feel when selecting a partner. Previous literature has offered that white males use their race as a bargaining chip, as whiteness is seen as a commodity. Gay white men are more likely to prefer younger partners than gay minorities, regardless of age (Kaufman & Phua, 2003). Age should be further explored in studies of partner selection.

Race and Ethnicity

Dillon, a 24 year old white guy, simply says, “Not into Asians.” A 24 year old South Asian announces in his profile that he is “not interested in ghetto black men,” while another white man’s profile is limited to this sentence: “No offense, but blacks please block me!” A 19 year old white man says, “I luv a cute white boy :D No latinos plz sry not attracted to you in the least.” Racial preferences, for the most part, are unlike what we see with age preferences. That is, unlike the general disdain for older men expressed in the textual profiles of Grindr users, racial preferences snag a user the honor of being deemed a ‘douchebag’ for how the preferences are expressed. So far, as we can see, these preferences are usually announced in negative terms. It is the negative way in which racial preferences are expressed more than age preferences that will instantly turn a profile into a “douchebag”. The user wishes to outright exclude categories of people from their searches for dates, relationships, and even friends.

Dillon excludes Asians, the South Asian man qualifies black men by a type in expressing his disinclination to connect, and a white man asks black men to do the work of blocking him instead of simply blocking black men from his own screen. The last example here shows an in-group preference while adamantly sharing that he is not at all attracted to latinos. This user also says “please” and “sorry,” expressions which come up time and time again, and to which we return below for discussion. But not all DOG are engaged in racial discrimination of out-groups.

“Top 4 Blk/Btm,” a 26 year old muscular, shirtless, single white man looking for dates made it to the pages of the DOG.com for saying, “Black guys only!! Not mixed either. My life my choice please respect it!! Under 30 only and have face pic or blocked.” It is important to mention here that it is the explicit mention of race or ethnicity, as well as the manner in which those preferences are expressed, that catapult a profile onto the website pages. So even a white man expressing his preference for black men under 30 years old who take the bottom role sexually will be held up for ridicule due to his exclusion of white, Asian, Latino, and Middle Eastern men. Grindr users, faced with only 120 characters to communicate their desires often use exclusive language to conserve profile characters.

Of course, there are plenty of profiles of white men who write that they are looking solely for other white men. A 22 year old white guy tells his viewers, “I just wanna play doctor. Under 27 only. Not looking for Fat. Old. Or anything but WHITE. But if you’re a cute white boy and a bottom hit me up!” Another 22 year old, who displays the flag of the United Kingdom and Germany in his profile with the use of the emoji keyboard, says he is looking for “Morals & values 18-30 WHITE BOYS ONLY if

not blocked.” Mixing politeness with racial exclusion, “DoingMeDoingYou,” a white 45 year old, asks viewers: “Let’s keep it white or Latin. Thanks.” Perhaps unwittingly expressing himself too well, a 22 year old white man states that he is “only into white guys. So sorry but if you’re anything less then I’m not interested.” “Bi Big Top,” whose profile is lacking much of a description, but notes that he is looking for chat or networking, writes: “Only interested in white. Sorry no offense but it’s my preference. I will not answer to blacks / Asians or Latinos.” This profile text marks the point where the Grindr app users move from negatively stating their racial preferences to expressing their disdain for people in racial categories they find wanting, lacking or, as the 22 year old above says, “anything less.”

In 2009, the dating site OkCupid published a study of response rates and race among same-sex and heterosexual members. Before going any further, it is important to distinguish OkCupid from Grindr. OkCupid allows for uploads of multiple photos, exhaustive space for profiles, and even offers a matching system for its members. Results suggest the phenomenon of racial matching, where men feel most comfortable responding to members of the same race (Rudder, 2009). Moreover, being white did effect the number of messages and responses a user received.

A 19 year old white man says, “WHITES ONLY!! All blacks, keep moving cuz I ain’t interested unless u can prove not all blacks are the exact same mkay?” Sentiments such as these—that all blacks are the exact same—move us away from racial statements to racist sentiments. An 18 year old white guy’s headline reads, “Positively no black people,” and he follows that up with further racial comments: “Does anyone know how to type in plain English? If not, leave me alone. I don’t have time to decipher your

Ebonics.” Another white man, a 23 year old looking for dates or a relationship, says “I don’t speak Ebonics.” These white men are actively engaged in racial discrimination, stereotyping, and insulting black users. Although black Grindr users are a small percentage of those who are showcased on DOG.com, some black men also express their exclusion of white men. A muscular black man displaying only a photo of his naked torso tells his viewers that he is “Lookin for sex. No white guy.”

Some variations in racial preferences appear to cross racial lines, too. A 24 year old Latino, “R” announces that he is “Into white guys!!” and is looking for chat, dates, friends, and networking. Criticizing some of the men in his own racial group, a 22 year old latino says “My Latino men, I love y’all..I do..bat eef yu espeak a lyke edis, I sorri, et well nat ewurk aut.” Some Latinos have a special preference for black men, like a 28 year old single mixed-race man who describes himself in his headline as a “cool laid back Spanish guy” says “NO WHITES OR MEXICANS...i am into black tops ONLY.” Also rejecting men in his own racial group, a 19 year old Asian, partnered to a white Australian boyfriend, states in his profile: “NOT INTEREST INTO ASIAN, ACCEPT WHITE GUY ONLY.” It is not unusual that racism has found its way into this digital world, as so much of the actual space is dominated by racism. Foucault offers an explanation of this through biopolitics. “The set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words...modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species” (Foucault M. , 1978, p. 16). Beyond the ingrained racism, which is similar to what we experience in the real world, technological advances have also linked sexuality and racism. First, Grindr has

made meeting people much easier, but part of the trade-off is that there are so many users in this interactive space, which makes us less committed to each user. While the choice may be difficult, I am not arguing that hundreds of available men is a bad thing, however, those Grindr users who choose other user's profiles to upload to DOG in a discriminative manner is the issue. While the beauty rituals of youthful white males may change, their place at the gay male hierarchy does not seem to be changing anytime soon. Second, this sort of negative language has caused two camps to form in the gay community: one who criticize the language as offensive, and the other whom uphold attraction is a preference. Regardless, what is troublesome with this language is that it dehumanizes others in order to achieve something subjective. While users offer no explanation to how this "preference" developed, it can be argued that through socialization and hegemony Grindr users are exposed to the athletic, white male as the standard to which society should hold themselves.

Asians stand as the most rejected racial group on DOG, with blacks a close second. Food metaphors abound. "One Night Only" tells his viewers that he is "51% Ukranian, 49% Armenian. NSA or SA, both will work. Vanilla and spice, no chocolate and rice." A 23 year old shirtless selfie-taker who covers his face with his camera for his profile image, "dev," also states, in all capital letters, "NO CHOCOLATE/RICE." A 23 year old visiting San Francisco tells lookers that he's "more into vanilla and spice than chocolate and rice; so hit me up if this is you:)" A 21 year old white man states in his headline that he is "not into spice or rice," and follows that with a profile that reads: "Go subscribe to National Geographic, make a list of places you'll never get to visit. Add to that list: me." Framing their desire as a matter of taste, these users reduce the racial and

ethnic dimensions of other gay men to chocolate and rice. Another profile simply states: “no sushi aka no Asian.”

But Asians are also the butt of many jokes as well. Ryno, a 23 white man, announces that he is “not into chop sticks, curry, or walking frames.” Justin Milian, a 25 year old white man, says, “I block more Asian than the Great Wall of China.” A 25 year old whose photo shows him in Sydney, Australia, says, “What’s with Asians wanting to spoon? Don’t they use chopstix? PS: I’m not racist, I own a colour tv.” Another white man claims that he is “thoroughly impressed with China in the Olympics” so that he can make this racial joke: “They are using the same person for every event.” While some men may think racist Asian jokes are somehow funny to some audience, others users are explicitly racist. For example, focusing on phenotypes, a 28 year old white man simply typed the following into his profile: “Squinty eye, no reply.” Focusing on Asian accents when speaking English, a 28 year old, slim, single Latino says, “No Asian. Solly.” And focusing on the presumed effeminacy of Asian men, another profile states the user is “scared about getting old and having to date a young Asian ladyboy.”

“GoVeg.com,” a 27 year old white man with a headless selfie in his profile, but with his shirt up showing one nipple and his navel, uses both his headline and his profile text to reiterate his racial preferences: “no Asians,” followed by “Sorry Asians I don’t find you attractive.” Repeatedly, some form of “No Asians” shows up in profiles of men who categorically reject connecting with Asian men of varying nationalities and ethnicities. Any Asian man is automatically rejected by these discriminatory users. Richard Fung, who has studied images of Asian men in various media, and Asian men in gay porn in particular, discussed at length in his 1991 article, “Looking for My Penis:

The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn” how gay Asian men are rendered feminine in various ways. Often hairless/smooth, with smaller frames, and sometimes smaller penises, gay Asian men show up in gay porn as sexual objects that are gendered feminine. When gay men are speaking in their profiles about Asian men, they are solidifying, to some extent, racial hierarchies that place gay Asian men at the bottom—where porn often places them in sexual acts.

Furthermore, as we see in GoVeg.com’s profile text above, there is the apology: sorry. “View pro 1st” relays this message in his profile: “No disrespect, but please don’t waste your time if you’re unattractive out of shape Asian black fem.” No disrespect, but... There is a more explicit disavowal of racism in some profiles. The following argument is provided by a 29 year old, white, muscular man with a headless profile: “If saying I’m NOT sexually into Asians makes me a racist (you Asians seem to think so) then I guess I’m a racist. I’M NOT INTO ASIANS...Am I clear?” A 25 year old white man’s headline reads “Asians leave me alone” and his profile states: “I love men from different cultures. Just no Asians. I’m not racist.” In both of these cases, the author of the profile wishes to square his categorical rejection of Asian men as objects of sexual desire with his wish to be seen as not racist. Perhaps these men do not hold racist belief systems when it comes to housing, employment, hate crimes, and a host of other more legal and social concerns, but when it comes to the cultural definitions of desirability that circulate through gay culture, exclusion of gay Asian men is a dominant trope in many of these profiles.

The original purpose of Grindr, whether stated elsewhere or not, was to provide a pool of men that was large enough that users can select with whom they connect. And yet

the argument still exist that the language is too harsh. The issue is that Grindr is a quasi-public, which shields application users from taking responsibility for the comments on their profiles. Very few reasonable individuals would walk up to another human being and say some of the comments listed on these “douchebag” profiles. It is difficult to note how prevalent this sort of behavior is on Grindr, as this project attempts to address; however, even when only a small subset of the Grindr population uses these phrases, the negative effect still resonates loudly. The privacy policy of the application states that users could be banned if their profiles “perceived to incite racism, bigotry, hatred or physical harm of any kind” (Grindr, LLC., 2015). However, in the newspaper *Globe and Mail*, a spokesperson for Grindr explained “We also encourage our users to state what they are looking for as opposed to what they are not looking for” (Bielski, 2012). Cultural concepts regarding race will always determine whom we respond to, both as in messages on applications and sexually.

Digital rhetoric scholar, Michael J. Faris, remarks of his own online chat room experiences, “...we all interrogate ourselves and our own desires, until we can get to the point where we fuck based on what we want to do, and not on the type of body we want to do it with. Our society has fucked up our sexual desires so that we’re fixated on other people’s bodies that we forget about what we actually want to do in bed” (Sycamore, 2012, p. 47). What is the appropriate way to express sexual desires online? Faris proposes listing activities, “I like fucking...”, then questions how “can we describe the bodies we want to fuck [online]” (Sycamore, 2012, pp. 48-49). Unfortunately, preferences for certain gender performances and raced bodies exist in cyberspace. The solution may very well possibly be not stating sexual preferences for potential partners. While in the real

world, it makes complete sense to have preferences, such as seeking someone of the same political affiliation. But these are not age, gender, or racial preferences, rather preferences based on philosophy. Faris suggest a “radical interrogation of one’s own desire” (Sycamore, 2012, p. 50). These desires are based on an individual’s life experience, and based on that experience; we construct our desire to fit what is normative and culturally acceptable – white, middle class, toned male. Consumers of Grindr regard race, gender, and even sexual positions in terms of binaries.

Moreover, it is important to note that 73% of the sample identified as white. Han (2007) argues whiteness is everywhere in the gay community, and that whiteness is powerful because “It blends into the background and then becomes erased from scrutiny” (p.53). Whiteness is maintained by excluding those who are not. While the “douchebags” are eager to disproportionately denounce bodies of color, Asians in particular, research on racism in the gay community describes a different story:

Whereas Asian men become the object of white male fantasy due to their perceived feminine qualities, Black men suffer the opposite stereotype. Rather than subservient geishas who will submissively tend to all of the white male fantasies of domination, black men are the overly sexual predators racially capable of fulfilling white male sexual lust. If Asian men are the vassals for white men’s domination fantasies, black men are the tools required for white male submissive fantasies (Han, 2007, p. 57)

Furthermore, in a society that reinforces their privilege, white men have no reason to hate themselves, however, black men are devalued and must face issues of self-hatred not experienced by white men. In an environment where black men feel ignored as

potential sexual partners by white men, black men compete with each other for a white male partner (Han, 2007). Internalized racism and the desire for white male partnership occurs in not only black men, but seems to be a “pandemic among many gay men of color” (p.60). Gay Asian men justify self-hating behaviors through antiquated stereotypes to justify their internalized racism. Due in part to negative race relations and internalized homophobia, gay men of color must build identities along the lines of both race and sexuality (Han, 2007).

This suggests that homosexual male minorities may experience racism and homophobia differently than white homosexual males. Gay men of color experience things differently, because they are gay and a racial minority. The next chapter will focus on the role of the administrators on DOG, as well as reviewing the comments section, and the mechanics of how DOG functions as a space to facilitate gay hegemony.

CHAPTER III

GAY ONLINE COUNTER PUBLIC

So much of the social science literature related to gay and lesbian life deals with the politics and law of sexuality, the social movement and counter-movement dynamics, public opinion polling and social research into attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women, psychological models of identity formation and mental health in the face of stigma and discrimination, or anthropological and health perspectives on gay and lesbian sex practices and physical health (Appleby, 2001; McCreary, 2005; Sycamore, 2012). Of course, for some years now, the leading questions scholars have tended to pay most attention to have dealt with marriage and child-rearing by lesbian and gay couples, with some of these studies making their way into various federal court decisions paving the way for marriage equality (Campbell & Monson, 2008; Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). In the background of all this, one can find the quiet work of historians excavating the various forms of gay life and communities throughout time past and in various places, but not much attention is paid to the dynamics of gay life and culture (Dowsett, 1993). Too much of the research on gay life positions gays and lesbians against or in comparison to the straight world (Collins, 2005).

Avoiding much of these approaches to gay culture, that is, gay culture compared to straight culture, David Nimmons' (2002) eclectic study of gay men, titled *The Soul Beneath the Skin: The Unseen Hearts and Habits of Gay Men*, took a focus on much of the overlooked and positive aspects of contemporary gay culture. Among various insights into what he considers to be the unseen patterns of gay culture—unseen by straight outsiders as well as many gay men themselves—Nimmons reports, for example, that

when police officers in major cities are asked to rank their preferences for which parades in their cities they would like to work, many of them choose the gay pride parade (Nimmons, 2002). This is because, according to many of the officers, it is a very uneventful parade from a policing perspective. Relatedly, a review of 911 calls from red light districts in major cities indicates that just about all the calls come from straight bars and dance clubs, rather than gay establishments (Walter, 2011). Gay establishments, even for crowds catering toward the young 20s set, serve their drinks in glasses; similarly situated straight bars, on the other hand, opt for plastic cups (Walter, 2011). Nimmons stacks up examples such as these in a chapter called “Our Peaceable Kingdom.” The next chapter, “Communities of Caring,” emphasizes the historically partially accurate, partially mythological story of an army of lesbian caregivers getting many sick gay men through the HIV/AIDS epidemic years, and the ways in which gay men have cared for each other while under political or public health threats (Nimmons, 2002). Instead of conforming to the stereotypes, this research suggest that gay culture consist of highly ethical behaviors regarding health, the individual, and community, while at the same time stating that homosexual relationships and heterosexual relationships are very different.

But there is also a significant romanticization of gay culture in Nimmons’ book, a book intended to counter the negative portrayals of gay men that circulate in American culture (Nimmons, 2002). That romantic view barrels against something many gay men have known and talked about with one another, for decades: gay men can be fiercely ruthless with one another. It is true that you are unlikely to see a brawl rolling out on to the sidewalk in front of gay bar or a gang fight at a gay pride parade, but it is also true that gay men have sharp tongues and engage in conflict in a verbal manner instead of a

physical way. Anyone who has watched a few episodes of *Will & Grace* or *Modern Family* or *RuPaul's Drag Race*—knows that gay men have an aptitude for hurling heavy insults couched in humorous turns of phrase, or can just be outright mean to one another (Nimmons, 2002). The queer historian David Halperin (2012), in *How To Be Gay*, argues that being gay is a unique cultural practice, the formation of which is a result of gay culture's and gay communities' relation to larger mainstream society. Gay cultural practice, according to Halperin, entails aestheticism, snobbery, melodrama, glamour, caricatures of women (best seen in drag), kitsch, camp, and a linguistic dexterity exemplified by gay writers such as Oscar Wilde (Halperin, 2012). Of course, Halperin is discussing elements of gay culture in their more refined manifestations. But we can think about DOG as a cultural artifact that is simultaneously rambunctious and humorous, politically disappointing, and a privileged space to view and review contemporary gay culture online through the initial framing of profiles on Grindr, and reframing on DOG by moderators and the community at large.

In Chapter II, the study identified two themes, age and race preferences in relation to whom Grindr users that are deemed “douchebags” find desirable or not. The evidence indicates that youth and whiteness are often, but not always, what Grindr “douchebags” find desirable. This chapter, studies how a general arrogance and gender come to play in the construction of “douchebags,” a construction which has several pivotal points. First, some particular Grindr users come across a profile they believe qualifies its writer for the moniker “douchebag.” Users submit the profile to the website, DOG. The gatekeepers of the website make an editorial decision whether or not to publish the particular profile on the website, and whether or not to use the user submitted name for the profile. Then the

website itself allows for a comments section for each individual douchebag posting. Without access to the users submitting the profiles to the website—the origin of this process—this chapter focuses on administrators themselves, before turning to the comments sections, where various visitors to the website engage in an online forum which permits them to support or disagree with the administrators’ decisions to post a particular profile and to discuss the various aspects of the profile that qualifies its creator as a douchebag. A close look at the types of discourse used in these comments—comments which may exist in one’s internal conversation while in a gay bar or venue, but made public in this privileged online space—reveals quite a bit about contemporary gay culture’s ambivalent relationship to perceived gender and masculinity, as well as contradictory deployments of insults and such in attempts to knock douchebags off their proverbial high horses. Examining the DOG administrators work is important because the administrators are the people whom decide which profiles make it onto the homepage and which profiles get rejected.

Website Administrators, Profile Interpretations, and Their Tags

When visiting any particular profile on the website, one can see that the profile is tagged in various ways for its offending content. Administrators use the following tags to categorize profiles: ageism, arrogant, asshole, assholes, at least he’s not racist, blockophiles, body nazi, bottom, cocky, crazy, cunts, delusional, DL, douche, douchebag, druggies, dumb, elitist, femmephobia, gross, hair, hypocrites, homophobia, hot mess, hypermaterialism, hypocrites, idiot, lolz masc, megadouche, mess, messy, mezzy, moron, nipples, racism, racist, self-loathing, supermegadouche, ugly, unmedicated, vapid, and weird (Douchebags of Grindr, 2014). These tags call into question douchebags’ comfort

with their own sexuality, their mental health, their physical properties, their psychological disposition, and their arrogance. The administrators present the available tags in somewhat of a world-cloud fashion, with fonts indicating how often tags are used. The tags most used in designating a profile's author as a "douchebag" are: Femmephobia, Racism, Arrogant, Body Nazi, and Ageism. Communication research on annotations online suggest users tag photos for a many reasons, and these "multiple motivations" are the factor in users decisions to tag a photo (Ames & Naaman, 2007). Moreover, it has been found that it is possible to motivate users to tag photos as well. The main reason why users tag was found to be organization in the online world (Ames & Naaman, 2007). The administrators are acting as gatekeepers, allowing only profiles that meet popular taglines to make it onto DOG. Furthermore, administrators are correcting the behaviors of "douchebags" by posting their personal profiles on the website; negating their hegemony and turning them into a minority in the gay community.

Website administrators also engage in two additional ways to make their case that a profile qualifies its author for the douchebag designation. First, they title the blog entry in which the profile appears. For example, when it comes to profiles that are tagged with "femmephobia," which is another way of critiquing the stance a douchebag has on gender, administrators have titled posts in this fashion:

Hand Bag Douche, for a douchebag whose text reads, "I'm out and proud but I'm no queen with hand bags pouring out of my mouth.

Real Butch Douche, for a douchebag whose text reads, "I am NOT into men that sound, look, or act like females. I am a man, you should be too."

“Sister Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “Looking for someone who is not a sister bitch queen. Id say masc but everyone seems to think they’re masc these days. Smh.”

“Not English Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “Queens are for England!”

“Car Bottom Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “Not into the gay scene, masc here. Like sports, camping, I know how to work on a car, not your typical bottom”

“Strictly Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “strictly straight acting”

“Manly Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “Be masculine please! I’m gay don’t want a girl!

“Purse Flying Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “Are there any regular normal guys out left out there? If purses fly out of your mouth when you talk, we won’t get along.”

“Redundant Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “Please please masculine masculine!!!!!!...no act gay”

“The Princess Douche,” for a douchebag whose text reads, “This prince ain’t lookin for a Queen”

Second, administrators will sometimes provide additional commentary along with the presentation of the offending profile. For example, the following profile, titled on the website as “Kool Douche,” is editorialized in this way: “Well now we can all relax now that we finally understand how gay people should act...when they are acting straight on

Grindr.” “KoOL_CaT” is transformed into “Kool Douche,” and his declaration of “str8 acting” is mocked and seen as contradictory inasmuch as the profile creator is claiming to be straight-acting on a gay application.

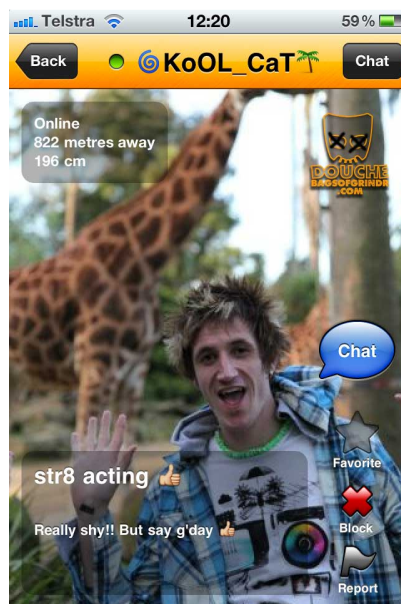


Figure 7. KoOL_CaT

Ripping these profiles from their original and author-intended locations on Grindr app screens of smart phone devices and situating them within critical frames constructed by their new website titles and commentary, the administrators are able to dwell on the presentation of self in these profiles in a way that divorces that presentation from the gay selves that craft them for consumption through the application. The administrators shift the viewers' attention from the impressions that the profile creators wish to give, to those that the administrators believe they are giving off. More specifically, the administrators are able to, in the case of those profiles tagged with “femmephobia,” highlight the performative aspect of gender and identity, even though these performances are mediated. Precisely because they are mediated, they can be easily captured for commentary, ridicule, and editorializing.. Left unspoken, but still sitting like an elephant

in the room, is the appearance and mannerisms caught in the image of the profile creator, which the administrators playfully and subtly force the viewer to consider.

Furthermore, as evidenced in the attached figures, the tension surrounding gay masculinities run throughout many of the profiles. Each of the titles bestowed on the entries acknowledges the fact that the profile creator is attempting to exorcise any signs of femininity from their own or others' gender performances and presentations by framing themselves as masculine through mannerisms, appearance, or profile text. By removing any notions of femininity from their profiles, homosexual males on Grindr attempt to assert their hegemony over other application users. While other marginalized groups in society are often raised by people such as themselves and live among people such as themselves, gay men experience their childhoods in straight families, and the rest of their lives within straight-influenced institutions. Throughout these institutions, ideas about male homosexuality being related to inverted gender identity or self-understanding or even physiology circulate, even if not as explicitly as they have in the past. Therefore, many gay men are often sexually attracted to traditional or hegemonic masculinity in a potential mate or partner—that much is understandable. But the explicit and nasty way in which some gay men demean feminine characteristics, or the full range of gendered potential, is raised by bringing up the ways in which men speak (“purses falling out of the mouth”), the things they are interested in (cars, sports, camping versus fashion, theater, dancing, for example), or their appearances. The administrators are quick to deny the douchebag's attempt to distance himself from the feminine, using various techniques. Poking fun at the user's masculinity (Manly Douche, Redundant Douche), refusing to recognize a reference to queens (Not English Douche, The Princess Douche), invoking a

collective characterization of gay men as feminine (Sister Douche, Car Bottom Douche)—these re-framings of the original profiles simultaneously re-inscribe their authors in the gay community and hold them up for scrutiny by other members of the community, who, as we will see, are happy to engage.

The administrators are also up to something else—they are re-evaluating and re-valuing forms of masculinity. One young 23 year old man states in his profile: “I’m a gay GUY! If I wanted to date someone feminine I would be straight and with a girl. No one can explain themselves in this little space.” The site administrators, rather than accepting the user’s attempt to align himself with a hegemonic masculinity, renders his masculinity suspect by a different standard, titling his entry, “Fragile Masculinity Douche.” A valued masculinity, according to the administrators, is one which does not fear the feminine. And yet when examining commentary, the administrators can also engage in some contradictory messaging. For example, one wonders, why was the car-invoking guy above not simply titled, “Car Douche,” but instead “Car Bottom Douche”? Was the mention of “bottom” a slip into mainstream understandings of gender, where active/passive, top/bottom, subject/object dichotomies of masculine/feminine too often prevail, or was it a humorous attempt to remind the man deemed a douchebag that that mainstream culture he is attempting to placate will never see him as fully masculine precisely because he is a bottom? It is not always entirely clear. In western society, gender roles are more clearly defined for men than they are women, therefore men who violate these norms experience negative attitudes. These negative beliefs about gender roles and the role of women are part of the traditional gender belief system and are associated with negative attitudes towards gay men. Herek (1986) explains, “To be a man

in society is to be homophobic” (p. 563). In 2007, Hall and La France’s study argued that individuals in an environment will conform and approve of communicative behavior. In environments like DOG, the tables are turned on homophobic Grindr users and a negative form of communication about the Grindr user’s profile is approved. Users identifying as part of an online community, such as DOG, members of the community bond over communication norms that seem commonplace and share similar communicative behavior.

CHAPTER VI

COUNTER PUBLIC COMMENTARY

Given the brutal nature of some of the language used in the profiles that make their way on to DOG, it is no wonder that the comments sections for various entries can be lively affairs to say the least. In Althusserian terms, borrowing a term from Marxist philosophy, some Grindr users are likely interpolated by the text of various profiles and are therefore personally invested in taking the “douchebag” down a notch. In other cases, some reasoned commentary about whether the profile qualifies as a “Douchebag” profile shows up as well. Most of the previous literature on blogs focuses on the post, not the comments. However, research has shown that once a user reads the comments, that users understanding of the original post will be changed (Hu, Sun, & Lim, 2007). In this section, we closely examine three profiles and their comments sections, which provides a window into debates about masculine embodiment within the gay community.

Case 1: Mirror-Less Douche

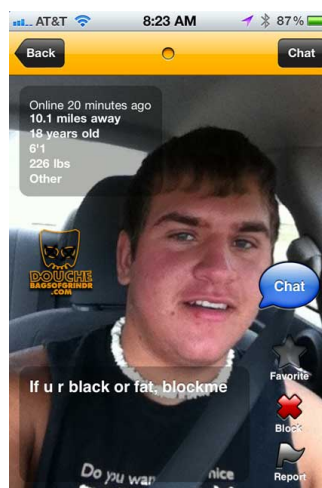


Figure 8. Mirror-Less Douche

Under the title “Mirror-less Douche,” the administrators of the site are attempting to focus on the fact that the profile says, “if u r black or fat, blockme,” while the user himself looks overweight and as one commenter points out, by Body Mass Index standards, is on the border of medically obese. The commentary attached to the profile is best appreciated, especially since this profile ranks as one of the highest-rated “megadouches” on the site, as it unfolds:

B: Looks like he might need to block himself!

Be: WOW!!! This coming from someone fat, ugly, & with zits & a big cold sore on his lip!!! YUCK!!!

Parker: Absolutely revolting, vomit-inducing and blinding. Someone harpoon this whale.

NiceTry: Hon, I’ve got news for you. You might want to sit down.

BJC: Has anyone noticed his fringe? OMG

Antonio: At 6’1 225lbs, he ain’t exactly fit himself. Talk about a douchebag. What’s up with people taking pics of themselves inside their cars? Are they stuck in traffic or something?

martino: Trick, no black men are trying to chat with you! Dream on!

pierre: Apparently guys with Herpes Simplex 1 are fine and dandy, though, from the looks of his lip. Blacks and fat guys, you’ve lucked out!

Miranda Hobbs: This is true to form, because most gay men are DELUSIONAL like this guy.

Parker: Miranda, please wash your cooch. You have that “not so fresh” aroma and it’s stinking up the site. Thanks hon.

Kyle: At 6’1”, he’s technically overweight at 190lbs unless he’s exceptionally muscular. At 226lbs, he’s only a couple of lbs from technically obese.

BJC: Fat racist. That’s all.

Brent: Another self-hating bigger guy. Everyone has preferences or a “type,” just don’t be a dick about it. Oh, and he should really get some Abreva for that massive cold sore.

Timmy: He does look a little chunky so needs to lay off fat comments. Maybe it’s just a bad pic. And for the record a big black chunky guy sounds good to me.

Justin: Pooka shells? Really?

Timmy: What’s a pooka shell?

8oh!8: Timmy, Justin is referring to the shells used to make his necklace. Basically he is the guys necklace is tacky...and I agree!! Yuck!

Timmy: I’ve seen worse. I was an asshole at that age too u suppose. You live n learn!

DrLulzington: I’m neither black nor fat, but I’d still totally block. Nice lip herpes, BTW.

Juda: Lol I’m sure In the hell not tryong to get with this mrs. piggy looking bitch anyways.....

Anthony: what’s with the eyebrows?!

Meow: What if you are black & fat?

Miley: I can’t look at it for more than a few seconds at a time or I start dry reaching...

stephen: oh, an externalizing blockophile! we need a new work where, even the responsibility for the ‘block’ button is put on the target of the racism and homophobia! That’s lazy blockophilia—I know, lazy blockophilia

Bryan: LMFAO..THIS GUY CAN BE SERIOUS!!!..THIS JUST CANT BE LIFE!?!..HAHAHA HES LIKE A PIG CALLING A ROSTER PHAT..WILBUR IS THAT YOU?..LMAO Hes no where near cute and from the size of him, he just screams pencil dick..lol Seone put an apple in his mouth a roast shamoo..lol

John: This douche needs to take a look in the mirror. What an ugly fuck...

Dominique: He’s fking fat himself, fatass!

Matt: You're fat. Find a weight room. And the sore on your bottom lip is scary. Nice necklace...Poookah douche.

davidlime: I wonder if he is blocking himself! LMAO.

CC: He's fat, ugly, he probably stinks, and needs to go back to studying for his biology test...tomorrow's school!

Krusha: As someone black and fat, I can honestly say...EWWWWW!!!!
Ain't nobody checking for this herpes-having inbred Neanderthal, looking like an ugly-ass caveman...

Manc: That must be a dog collar around his neck...he has the manners of a dog...shame on him.

readycarlos: The request by this guy to be blocked is quite revealing. He is asking to be rejected before you even have the chance to reject him. In a sense, beating you to the punchline. It's a very sad insight to someone with very low self-esteem. Anyone viewing his profile would be wise to block him as a relationship with anyone this self-hating would be impossible.

Mac: No need to get on his weight.

BB: Mac, let's be real, chubbies are either adorable or fucking annoying. This one has some acute cuteness deficiency.

GregMartinez: Obviously you don't have a mirror. Otherwise you could see your double chin. Get a grip!!

brian: he looks so greasy...what an abortion, he should be blocked just based on his hair alone. he looks 35 at 18.

This particular profile unanimously draws the ire of the website's commenters. Keeping in mind the profile's text—"If u r black or fat, blockme"—the designated douchebag's appearance and profile information become fodder for criticism. Calling him a "whale," "fat," "delusional," "overweight," "obese," "chunky," "mrs. piggy looking bitch," "pig," "shamoo," and a "fatass" with a "double chin," the commenters repeatedly point out that he himself does not live up to the standards he sets in his own profile text, causing one commenter to state tongue-in-cheek, "looks like he might have

to block himself.” Beyond his weight, his acne and cold sore are mentioned several times as well, tagging him with “Herpes Simplex,” the need for some Abreva, and his “lip herpes.” The pookah necklace serves as way to ridicule him as well, with some calling it a dog-collar and others just labeling it tacky. Throughout the banter of the commentary, the ferocity of judgment can be felt for a young man who dismisses overweight and Black people, and who is overweight himself. The identity between our public and private personas can air pressures and concern. There is no guide to understand what starts the private identity and the end of the public identity while constructing an identity through the internet. The community created in the comments is sort of a public spectacle where users rally around a particular profile, and use a particular rhetoric to accomplish formation of a “douchebag”. In part due to the phenomenon of capture, activities performed by users of Grindr can be documented and published on networks to create public histories of a particular user (Brannan, 2012). Aware of this risk, users who share personal information online must accept the consequences or take action if their profile is compromised and appears on another website. DOG, in particular, allows users of the Grindr community to post profile photos of other users, which are almost always tagged by gatekeepers in a negative light; and furthermore, subjects the posted profiles to public ridicule by the community. This online vernacular on profiles is clearly an issue; however perpetrators of this rhetoric do not understand that this is a major issue for the gay community. Furthermore, the community created by commenters continuing the conversation about said “douchebag”, reaffirms his douchebag status and represents the same tropes that have been prevalent in society for a very long time. Homosexual male desire is much larger than seeking a real life Ken doll physique of reasonable

socioeconomic means. Moreover, previous literature suggests that the Internet allows anonymous users to negotiate other social identities in order to raise self-esteem and feel rewarded by others online (Griffiths, 1997). This is one possible explanation for the aggressive group mentality seen in the blog comments.

Bodies are essential when calculating desire and for gauging masculinity. While this particular “douchebag” may himself be attracted to slim or muscular men, the fact that he himself is overweight allows the website audience to hurl insults, however humorously crafted, at him with impunity. But does not the comments unfurling below his profile on DOG indicate a certain level of “douchiness” on the part of the comment authors as well? While trying to criticize or react to what they perceive to be offenses, the commenters themselves engage in some heavy anti-fat discourse themselves. While several comments deal with the racial exclusion in the profile, a majority of them harp on the mismatch between his weight and his profile text. Finally, some reasonable comments appear as well. Kyle informs the online community of the health science behind his “technical obesity,” while Mac simply states, “No need to get on his weight.” Readycarlos acts as online psychologist, claiming that the request to be blocked is a request to be rejected and a sign of low self-esteem and self-hating. For the most part, however, this particular set of comments is harsh and exclusionary in itself. Rather than pointing out and discussing the racial and physical nature of the profile text, the commenters engage in their own forms of douche-baggery, deployed in a (failed?) attempt to cut the designated “douchebag” down to size. The comments bashing this user are one way that gay men construct their masculine identity. By tearing another user’s

profile down with negative comments, in turn it builds up the individual users masculinity.

Case 2: Cunt-Faced Grindr Douche



Figure 9. Cunt-Faced Grindr Douche

The administrators at DOG have dubbed Jean a “Cunt Faced Grindr Douche.” Obviously in great physical shape, and unlike “Mirror-Less Douche,” Jean is not perceived so much as a hypocrite, but as an arrogant man, likely for his profile text: “If I didn’t answer you the first time, what makes you thinking will the second?” Given Jean’s body composition and musculature, it is likely the case that he receives many messages on Grindr. But instead of simply ignoring messages from men who do not interest him, Jean has decided to make it a point to let his viewers and those who message him know that he ignores messages and then belittles them (perhaps) by asking them a flippant question. Jean wants others to know he is looking for a particular type of user, and that will be signified if he responds to that user. Many commenters on the site are not happy with the “Cunt Faced Douche”:

Yuck: Too many steroids not enough English speaking good classes!!!!

MrHorizontal: Christ, he can't even form a coherent sentence.

Allan: wrong grammar is wrong

Froggle: Actually he's not that douche. Yes, grammar fail, but he's not blatantly arrogant. I've seen many profiles like this.

Dr: If you didn't answer me the first time, most likely you didn't understand what I wrote.

Todd Stevens: Big pecs bub, but if you want to see your future build, look at the ex Governor Ahl-nold. Should just stick with nature.

Martin: well because you look a bit stupid so we thought you didn't get it the first time mate... you get me?

Luddite: Hmmm. This is some type of mysterious Haiku. What do it mean Jean?

jason beck: the funny thing is i bet none of you guys would say it to this guys face. grammer is important though...

Justin Violini: hahah this was my trainer for a while in NYC, he's actually just funny and sarcastic

urbanD: omg hoe many roids does this guy take a day? LOL does he REALLY think he's going to awe everyone with that body? Do you think we're fucking blind buddy? OMG HAHAHAAAAAAAAH Poor guy. He must feel so insecure about his body

marlon: New York City – Financial District Douche!

Meterd: Damn he's hot though.

Matt: Shoulder stretch marks.

JL: or maybe he could just say not interested, thanks—at the very least/not that hard to do

Gidz: I'm guessing he gets thrashed with messages and then thrashed again with instant people. I kind of read these as guys that are frustrated with pushy people.

Gidz: And calling him a cunt face admin is out of balance with what he's actually written.

Timmy: He's very attractive but he does have that bitchy queen look about him...spends a lot of time in bars looking in mirrors type.

There are several striking features to these comments. One, some commenters admit that Jean qualifies as "hot." But even then, assumptions are made about him based on one image when Timmy says he looks like he is a "spends a lot of time in bars looking in mirrors type." Two, immediately some commenters claim he uses steroids to achieve his physical state. UrbanD goes so far as to ask if Jean "REALLY think he's going to awe everyone with that body?" and then makes the further claim that Jean "must feel so insecure about his body." Some humor is injected when one comment warns Jean what will happen to his pectoral muscles when he ages. Three, Jean is attacked for his grammar. Drawing on the stereotype that muscular guys or jock types must be stupid, or maybe an implicit assumption about intelligence and race (we cannot be sure absent interviews with commenters), some comments deride Jean for his lack of proofreading. And, finally, here we have an example of disagreement between commenters, as well as commenters and site administrators. Jason Beck points out that commenters would not have the courage to say any of these things to Jean directly and Gidz explicitly defends his profile text, while disagreeing with the site administrators about his douchebag status and "calling him a cunt face," which he believes to be "out of balance with what he's actually written."

DOG administrators are receptive to criticisms of their douchebag designations and will sometimes remove profiles if their online commenting community disagrees with their decision to place a profile on the site. In this particular case, Jean must have

been lacking in negative responses to his inclusion on the site. Nevertheless, Jason Beck is correct: men with muscular bodies, who enjoy significant sexual and cultural capital in gay circles and enclaves such as New York, would never have to submit to criticism as seen here. DOG provides a space for those who either lack the elements of masculinity that would place them closer to hegemonic masculinity, or those who value other forms of masculinity, to heckle a figure like Jean. Even a set of muscles cannot stop some gay men from labeling another a “bitchy queen.” Even though this user presents himself as the typical masculine man one may find on Grindr, he is still made fun of and his masculinity is refuted.

Case 3: Extra Self-Loathing Douche

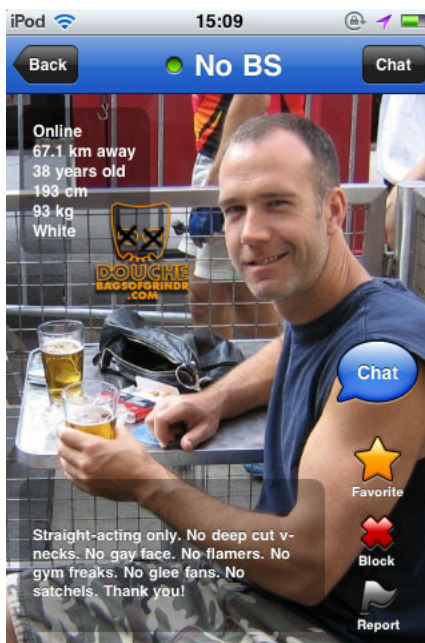


Figure 10. Extra Self-Loathing Douche

This case is exemplary in three respects. One, “No BS” serves as an excellent example of how femmephobia appears in many of the profiles showcased on the website.

Two, the comments section is more representative of the nature of most comments on the site, which is, containing a mix of comments ranging from humorous to serious. Three, the discourse deployed in these comments both disciplines the profile author and trades in some of the very same deplorable heterosexist and sexist notions that support hegemonic masculinity. “No BS,” after warning his viewers that he is looking for “straight-acting only,” which excludes deep cut v-neck t-shirts, gay face, flammers, gym freaks, glee fans, and satchels, is transformed into “Extra Self-Loathing Douche” by the site administrators.

The response to this profile reads:

LittleKiwi: poor guy. Still blaming “flammers” for the fact that his daddy doesn’t want him to be his son. Guys like this are hilarious. Grow some fucking BALLS, stop being an apologist wimp. 38 and still ashamed to be gay? Hang it up, loser. You’ve wasted your life.

Schwarzestiefel: Nice purse.

Ernesto: Don’t mind the purse as much as the cigs...he looks like he smells...bad.

ToddStevens: Cigarettes and beer. And no one who expresses themselves. Yeah. He’s a real winner. Next.

DrLulzington: His profile says 38, but his crow’s feet say 43.

gus: yet he is wearing a very gay “uniform”...camo shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt...

R.: Well, you have to admit that deep v-necks are moronic and are quite possibly a sign of the apocalypse.

jakes: total hate fuck material.

Txchill: Give the guy a break. 1.) there are TWO drinks on the table, so there’s a possibility that he’s with a GIRL. That MIGHT not be his purse. 2.) the smokes are closer to the purse than him. As a smoker, mine are never out of my fingertips. 3.) he just wants to be with a NORMAL GUY. I don’t blame him! 4.) V-necks ARE just girl shorts without room for tits. I think they were shirts for Asian girls and didn’t catch on, so they marketed them to American power bottoms.

DVDV: is that his purse on the table? I noticed he didn't list no purses...so it must be.

Ray: I think it's douche to grindr from an ipod. Sorry if that offends anyone else.

V: looks pretty rough for 38

G.I. Joe: Just plain pathetic. *Puts on his favorite v-neck just in spite*

Hugo6: Lol!! Finally a guy from Toronto! Seeing he's pic here makes me ashamed to have exchanged a few messages with him!

Jim: and no fags in faggy blue tank tops and gay camo cargo shorts. So typical gay, but wants to be straight douche.

jason: SO GLAD to see him here, every time I see his profile I want to nominate him for this site.

Justin: the purse belongs to his girlfriend/wife who won't blow him. He just wants a little DL action with a "bro." Yep, he's a douche.

Timmy: Sleeveless t strictly for under 30 s!

Phraughy: Douche or not I'd have some awesome pig sex with him WOOF!

Jay: Says the queen with the manpurse on the table at Folsom Street Fair. Get Mary!

Wow: F*ck that sh*t! Glee is awesome!

Felix: No satchels, but the purse is ok. I'm gonna drink beer while making a creepy stroke face. lol I am dying of laughter.

Cheerboy69: prob no bass in his voice, he loves glee, has a purse from Coach or Louis Vuitton lol and prob has a pair of Christian Louboutin for the Drag queen bar down the road

Timmy: Hate to admit but I actually agree with his dislikes. Would not be so stupid as to write them down though!

Brian: So masc, nice manbag!

Ernst: You know, I read the guy's comment and think, yeah, douche; then I read the comments here, and I think, yeah, maybe he just came across one vicious queen too many. You people are awful.

Yanni: Wait wtf is gay face haha

Matt: The hunchback look is distressing. Otherwise where do we start? The neck fat rolls? The bad hairline? The need for laser skin resurfacing and botox throughout the face and neck? Or the butt chin with the horizontal butt just above it? Double butt chin douche.

Adam: He's not "ashamed of being gay." He's a masculine man who wants the same. Bitching because he's a GLM who doesn't want you just makes you "guys" look like the kinds of womanly man he wants to avoid. You've proven his points for him.

"No BS" presents a masculine gay self that rejects many of the elements of recent metrosexual gay culture and announces his disaffiliation from the gay community. The site administrators draw him back into the community, but label him "self-loathing." Commenters then proceed to mock his physical appearance in response to his rejection of some stereotypical gay cultural and fashion trends—and, notably, trends that encapsulate men outside of the gay community. Beyond the usual banter about his appearance and the purse, there are some traces of debates about masculinity internal to the gay community. LittleKiwi interjects the psychoanalytical tradition and points out that "No BS" may be trying to please his father by remaining traditionally masculine despite his sexual orientation. TxChill points out that he simply wants to be with a "normal guy." Two comments raise the point that "No BS" himself is donning a stereotypical "uniform" of sleeveless shirt and camo shorts, an ensemble often worn by gay men who are attracted to "normal guys" and wish to be seen as "normal guys" themselves. Cheerboy69 taps into a common experience of gay men with self-regarding "straight-acting" gay men—they themselves often do not measure up to their own standards of what they consider

“straight-acting.” And, finally, Ernst and Adam state a growing frustration on the part of some gay men with the requirement that one should accept wholesale the forms of gay culture that were born of marginalization in decades past.

The notion of “straight-acting” is itself problematic and likely why administrators labeled this particular man “self-loathing.” This type of rhetoric emerges among gay men in order to subvert notions of effeminacy and align with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Eguchi, 2009). The attempt to identify as straight is obviously not a matter of sex, but one of sexuality and gender. Men such as “No BS” are rejecting femininity in any shape or form in which they find it among gay men. But other gay men then ask why one would want to “act” as something they are not. Instead of simply forging new forms of gay identity which incorporate various ways of being men, men such as “No BS” seemingly denigrate other gay men, some of whom may not have it within their power to pass as straight as “No BS” would like to. Moreover, all gay men, regardless of their gender performance, experience ostracism due to the heteronormative gender. In some ways, this is a historical problem. In his speeches, gay activist Harvey Milk famously said, “Come out, come out wherever you are!” Over time, as many men have come out, arguably the first to do so were those who were more stereotypically feminine since they may have been labeled gay before they even knew themselves that they were homosexual. But with critical masses of men now publicly identified as gay, many who present themselves as hegemonically or traditionally masculine must contend with a dominant gay culture that was created before them. The rejection of such a culture, which could be a paradise for other gay men living along a gender continuum, can be taken as an insult. And here we see its effects—gay men chastising men like “No BS” for their

inability to situate themselves within the bounds of the gay community. These case studies showed examples of the type of profiles, and comments displayed on DOG. The profiles presented on DOG represent hegemonic masculinity in many ways. First, after the profile circulates through Grindr and onto the website, the profile is reframed in a space where the negatives are highlighted. Second, the comments posted under each individual profile reflect the gay communities' notion to dismiss those Grindr users that post offensive content or have obscene or humorous photos the community can comment upon.

These profiles on DOG become marginalized masculinities within the structure of hegemonic masculinity and in turn these men are mocked by men of privilege or DOG users, as a means for these men to construct their own masculine identities.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Queer theorist Viviane Namaste's (2000) study of cross-dressers, drag queens, and transsexuals, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, makes a striking argument about what goes on—what *happens* in the construction of gender—during a drag performance. Comparing the relationship between the gay world and the mainstream straight world to that between the drag performer and the gay audience, Namaste shows how the normal-ness or natural-ness of gender is secured performatively and ideologically. While straight people can look to LGBT people as the Other, and therefore both know and regard their own gendered sexuality as normal and natural, the gay audience, too, assembles at the drag show and looks at the transgendered person as the Other, and therefore comes to understand its own gendered sexualities as normal and natural relative to the drag queen or king (Namaste, 2000). Gendered sexuality, then, takes a visible shape, with particular contours, and can be more easily deciphered and known when it is set against something Other.

Many of the profiles uploaded can be seen as making an attempt to set themselves apart from what they find least desirable or compelling about the idea of gay culture or a gay community. The rich diversity of the gay community of the past is thrown aside for a gay individualism that is defined in small profile spaces as a list of negatives. I do not want this, I do not want that. There is a shedding of attachments to other people in the gay community based on gender presentation, age, race, bodily characteristics, and such. Defining one's self not by whom one is or what one wants, but rather by whom one is not or what one does not want, sets the person apart from the community. Increasing

evidence indicates that internet chat rooms shut down many gay bars as local institutions (Sycamore, 2012), which can be understood as an unraveling of the community threads, especially for gay men, whose bars long served as the backbone of a gay infrastructure similar to the way that the Black Church did for African-Americans during decades of oppression. Handheld smartphone devices, coupled with applications for meeting one another, seem to enable homosexual men today to divorce themselves from gay culture and a traditional gay identity. Much of this splitting up has to do with masculinity especially. Gay male stereotypes are associated with customary feminine qualities, such as professions, body types, and roles (Eguchi, 2009). Thus, effeminate gay men are seen as failures of conceptualizing their performance of hegemonic masculinity.

Writing about the ethics of identity, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2010) says,

An American homosexual after Stonewall and gay liberation takes the old script of self-hatred, the script of the closet, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive gay life-scripts. In these life-scripts, being a faggot is recorded as being gay: and this requires, among other things, refusing to stay in the closet. And if one is to be out of the closet in a society that deprives homosexuals of equal dignity and respect, then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, the right to live as an "open homosexual" will not be enough. It will not even be enough to be treated with equal dignity despite being a homosexual: for that would suggest that being homosexual counts to some degree against one's dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected *as a*

homosexual... Demanding respect for people...*as gays* can go along with notably rigid strictures as to how one is to be...a person with same-sex desires. In a particularly fraught and emphatic way, there will be proper modes of being...gay: there will be demands that are made; expectations to be met; battle lines to be drawn. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously may worry whether we have replaced one kind of tyranny with another. (pp. 109-110)

As the history of LGBT people in the United States unfolds, two important points from Appiah stand out. Some men are forgoing the demand to be respected as homosexuals, as gays, and are instead identifying as “straight-acting.” The proper modes of being gay, then, are called into question—and not the proper ways set up by the straight, mainstream society, but the proper ways of being gay as understood by gay men in gay communities. The counter-public represented by the site DOG can be seen as a conservative force inasmuch as it is attempting to maintain a sort of gay ethnicity and culture in the face of growing individuality and disparate forms of sexual and gender identifications. Grindr makes possible the singular gay man who can throw other gay men aside, or under the bus, or into the blocked category. While one might expect members of a community who have experienced oppression in varying degrees to be ennobled by that experience to respect, understand, and take critical account of other groups’ experiences of marginalization or oppression, the reality of thinner bonds holding the gay “community” together in virtual space allows for some men to reject whole swaths of the gay community.

In setting up their profiles on Grindr, users are attempting to present a particular kind of self. As we have seen on DOG, that self is often a young, white, masculine self, contained in a physically fit body, and exhibiting the properties of masculinity most closely approaching hegemonic masculinity. In his seminal article, “Center and Periphery,” sociologist Edward Shils (1961) theorizes that:

Society has a center. There is a central zone in the structure of society... Membership in the society, in more than the ecological sense of being located in a bounded territory and of adapting to an environment affected or made up by other persons located in the same territory, is constituted by relationship to this central zone... The center, or the central zone, is a phenomenon of the realm of values and beliefs. It is the center of the order of symbols, of values and beliefs, which govern the society... The central zone partakes of the nature of the sacred... It is central because of its intimate connection with what the society holds to be sacred... (pp. 93-95)

The “douchebags” of Grindr make attempts to place themselves as close as possible to the center of mainstream society, particularly when it comes to the symbols, values, and beliefs attached to hegemonic masculinity. The counter-public represented by DOG, on the other hand, hold somewhat different symbols, values, and beliefs when it comes to masculinity and other social aspects of being gay. When “douchebags” reject some “sacred” aspects of gay culture, and do so while attempting to situate themselves outside gay culture (but on a gay application), the counter-public launches its critiques and drags that recalcitrant gay man back into the fold discursively. But it often does so in a contradictory manner, relying on the same insulting scripts that commenters pretend to

deplorable, demonstrating how difficult it is to disentangle one's self from the dominant ideologies circulating in mainstream society.

Through a condensed introduction to Douchebags of Grindr and subsequent explication of identity construction, masculinity, and the notion of public and private spheres in the first chapter of this research, hegemonic masculinity manifests as an undeniable and inescapable reality of conditioning with regards to behavioral practices for homosexual men. Using demographics and analysis of profiles extracted from DOG presented in the second chapter and the concept of counter public media presented in the third chapter, this research showcases that among homosexual men, notions of masculinity play a fundamental role in formalizing elements of their lives such as social environments. By analyzing behaviors of users of DOG and case studies presented in the fourth chapter, this study is able to establish some dynamic forces that influence male homosexual attraction schemas regarding preferences for age, race and ethnicity, and physical muscularity. In addition, this study finds that in normative environments of discrimination such as DOG, males are more likely to accept and contribute to discriminatory behaviors as their peers engage in such behaviors. This trend of social influence continues as homosexual men were found as well to have a diminished sense of gratification for their own bodies and sense of attractiveness after being exposed to profiles of ideal masculine bodies. This research will be helpful in understanding homophobic communication within homosexual communities as well as advancing understanding of physical attraction and its relationship to social behavior within the homosexual community. These results reinforce the need to explore ways to reduce the acceptability of discriminatory communication on online environments.

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