

Online Friendship or Sex in Ottawa: A digital Ethnography of Grindr and Scruff

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Abstract

From physical cruising in the 20th century to digital cruising dominating the 21st century, Grindr & Scruff will be situated within a shift of MSM communities primarily soliciting sex online. Beginning gradually with a slew of online forums ranging from the initial chatrooms of AOL and gay.com, to the confidential sections on craigslist, before finally specialized websites emerged. Grindr further commodifies gay male sexuality and the act of cruising, enabling privileged users to continue in their everyday lives and hook-up with new partners whenever it suits. Scruff is further specialized and allows for users to choose their location, enabling potential voyeurism. Commodification occurs somewhat willingly, as users construct their profiles however the discourse exists before this engagement meaning not everyone will have the same Fuckability. User uploaded pictures are the first point of contact, alongside a nickname and age. From this first point of contact onwards, prospective partners will likely choose to: view the rest of your biographic information, block/friend, or send an in-app message. This thesis will draw on existing works that have explored Grindr, hegemonic masculinity, and cultures of cruising within MSM communities. Next, I will turn to my research to understand the experiences of respondents from 16 interviews, including their user profiles, focusing on the Ottawa Valley and themes of masculinity and community. I will argue that hegemonic masculinity and homonormativity, manifest within in-app discourses and the technical considerations of Grindr and Scruff favor certain usages and users. When users are seeking social or romantic relationships or non-normative sexual acts, they are effectively failing the intended purpose of the application and discourse. Further, if you are not considered fuckable within western notions of homonormativity and hegemonic masculinity therein lies greater potential failure. This inquiry will add to existing debates surrounding Grindr which question if the application furthers community, or creates further divisions. My intentions are to explore the potential for resistance within a discourse dominated with homonormative masculinity, using the four themes of the physical body, race, sexual practices, and private & public.

Key words: Assemblage, Digital cruising, Hegemonic Masculinity, Queer Failure, Fuckability

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This thesis is dedicated to Kathleen Breenan 1994-2017, a colleague and friend from my undergraduate studies who passed away in May of this year, after a month in critical condition.

Her zest for life continues to inspire anyone lucky enough to have known her.

Your memory will live on through the friends you have inspired. Good but not forgotten.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of contents	1
Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework.....	6
1.1 Hegemonic Masculinity.....	7
1.2 Assemblage: Homonationalism and a Gay Elite	10
1.3 Queer Failure	12
1.4 Conclusion.....	14
Chapter 2: Situating Grindr and Scruff.....	15
2.1 Digital Cruising	15
2.2 Visual Hegemony Online.....	20
2.3 Conclusion.....	23
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	25
3.1 Overview of Methods	25
3.2 Discourse Analysis.....	27
Chapter 4: Application Typology.....	31
4.1 Technical Considerations	33
4.2 Conclusion.....	37
Chapter 5: Digital Corporeality	38
5.1 Common Practices: Kink	40
5.2 The Desiring Subject: Masculine	43
5.3 The Desiring Subject: Weight.....	46
5.4 The Desiring Subject: Race.....	48
5.5 Conclusion.....	51
Chapter 6: Conclusion	53
Appendices.....	56
References.....	63

Introduction

My own experiences prompted me to start this project and to focus on masculinity online because I was and continue to be, baffled by the paradoxes of gender presentation online. These constructions, in the form of user-profiles, work to craft an image with no signifiers towards femininity. For many of these profiles, they are striving towards hegemonic masculinity, because it exists as an abstract, culturally variant, ideal form of masculinity. This coincides with notions in research detailing an emerging homonormative masculinity and the subsequent potential for resistance that must exist, have guided this inquiry. At the start of this project, I became nervous amidst a sea of published journal articles and thesis submissions that indicated there was a profound interest amongst researching Grindr specifically. Broadening my scope to include other applications was prompted in my interview stage, when it became obvious that users favour applications designed towards their interests or subjectivity. Of surprise to this researcher, perhaps due to internal bias, was the importance of race amongst users who were objectified and immediately placed into scripts of hyper-masculinity or femininity via racial stereotypes.

Grindr and Scruff are the two applications that were most commonly used by respondents throughout my research, thus becoming the focus of this study. When technological innovations harness existing gay subcultures/histories which have valued promiscuous sex, cruising has moved beyond bathhouses and public parks onto online spaces, in so doing creating a new setting for men seeking men (MSM) to solicit sex. Grindr was the first location-based mobile application with over 10 million downloads in 192 countries and has enjoyed widespread success since its initial United States launch in March 2009¹. From humble origins, Grindr has expanded

¹ Haggas. Stuarth 2016 "Grindr & Scruff & Hornet... Oh My! Using Gay Social Networking Apps When Traveling." Passport Magazine - Gay Travel, Culture, Style, Adventure,

based on its popularity amongst its users and free initial membership has enticed many users/advertisers towards this enterprise. Akin to other social media services that may claim to be free, the most valuable commodity these applications can harness is a large audience base. Turning to official communication, the apple store identifies Grindr as the worlds first free mobile social networking application for gay and bisexual men to connect ². Grindr on their website self identifies as “Now more than just a means to chat and meet, Grindr is providing a welcoming window into a passionate and progressive lifestyle,”³. A progressive lifestyle as defined by whom with what potential for community are constant questions I have been asking throughout my research and writing process.

There is competition in this market, with Scruff taking second place with about 5 million users worldwide by offering a more specialized alternate to Grindr by attracting “generally older, larger-bodied, more hirsute, or more masculine,”⁴ inadvertently tapping into bear subculture. Scruff works to sway potential users with this convincing description “Meeting guys online should be fun, friendly, and sexy. Tired of conversations that start and end with “Sup?” Tired of apps that crash and lose your messages? You’ve tried the rest, now try the best!”⁵. Marginalisation occurs on both applications guiding this inquiry towards a queer potential that defies the technical and discursive limitations of these applications to foster a sense of community, which may be positive or negative. These considerations spurred me to conduct research in Ottawa, Canada, because of my familiarity and a lack of published work detailing the Canadian Grindr experience.

² <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/grindr-gay-and-same-sex-guys-chat-meet-and-date/id319881193?mt=8>

³ <https://www.grindr.com/about/>

⁴ Yoel Roth, 2014: Locating the “Scruff Guy”: Theorizing Body and Space in Gay Geosocial Media, 2124

⁵ <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/scruff-gay-chat-dating-and-social-networking/id380015247?mt=8>

Hegemonic masculinity is still an abstract ideal towards which many users online lust and aspire towards. This theory will be used throughout this research to situate the ideal form of masculinity on Grindr and Scruff, which users access by placing themselves within binary discourses. Community will be understood as an imagined community, which in the age of homonationalism and discrete men (those who reject the political label of gay) may form various subcultures, and media representations. Ultimately, user generated profiles on applications will be understood as media products which can lead towards textual interactions. Masculinity dominates discourse online as a constant in virtual spaces, including Grindr and Scurf, through a constant set of negotiations involving user profiles. Different applications will be examined to tease out similarities exist between applications, to situate homosexual masculinity within cultural, historic, technological, and social context. Chris Ashford situates older websites, such as Gaydar and Manhunt, as virtual sex environments for MSM communities. These factors manifest online, particularly virtual sex environments which are defined through the usage and technical structures which facilitate the mediation of desire and sexuality⁶.

This thesis will build on existing academic inquiries involving Grindr & Scruff and utilize the concept of hegemonic masculinity to deconstruct how masculinity positions social actors within discursive regimes. Understanding Grindr and Scruff as involving discourse and technological structures allows this analyze to critically deconstruct user profiles in adjunction with case studies from interviews using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. I will start Chapter 1 outlining my theoretical approach, grounded both in hegemonic masculinity and a potential within experiences of marginalization for queer failure and resistance. Next, chapter 2 will function as a literature review for Grindr and Scruff relating to the themes of user

⁶ Chris Ashford 2009, *Queer theory, Cyber-Ethnographies and Researching Online Sex Environments*, 300

motivations, community, hegemonic masculinity, and a queer potential. My hope is to fill a gap in literature that points towards a need for further inquiry into experiences of failure which have a subversive potential alongside a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In Chapter 3, I will outline my methodological approach, dually grounded in discourse analysis and using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis for my 16 interviews. The profiles of users I interviewed will be analyzed in relation to existing data and research, which substantiates the existing of homonormative masculinities. Chapter 4 will outline my approach of discourse analysis towards the data I have collected and how discourse is shaped by the technical aspect of the applications. Chapter 5 will feature the results of my data collection phase, in relation to the four themes of: the physical body, race, sexual practices, and masculinity. A queer potential will be explored through the experiences of respondents which propelled them towards subversive acts or sustained friendships and are of key interest to this project. Wrapping up in Chapter 6, I hope to recap my initial argument and identify the success and limitations of my initial hypothesis. Overall, this project hopes to lend space towards the experiences of users who are marginalized within these online spaces and dominant discourses and their queer potential.

Adding to existing scholarship, this project aims to test a queer potential through the experiences of marginalized users on Grindr and Scruff, applications that are discursively/technologically structured to favor masculinity. With the majority of users on Grindr and Scruff engaging in the pursuit of sex in the private sphere, I am interested in a potential for failure or marginalization outside of the dominant usage of the applications. What are the experiences for users understood as unfuckable and how do they deviate from those in a position of dominant masculinity.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Users in the dominant or subordinate position of masculinity in any realm, contingent upon other social factors (relating to race, ability, and physicality) can access social privilege associated with manhood. In the context of MSM applications and this study, social privilege is operationalized as desirability. In the city of Ottawa, Canada, specifically, there has been a decline in recent years in the number of queer bars—with three still in operation. A great deal of interactions among MSM—especially those outside of established Queer social circles and physical spaces—are now being mediated in the virtual realm.

Homophobic, misogynistic, and racist ideologies that abound in both Canada and the United States are becoming increasingly apparent within gay male communities⁷. In this study, the concept of hegemonic masculinity⁸ will be used to map a geography of masculinities online which result in a hierarchy of desire wherein race, operates as an important sexual signifier. Hegemonic masculinity is understood as an idea form of masculinity which is achieved through a series of practices. Further, Puar's *Queer Terrorist* (2007) will be examined in relation to the concept of assemblage, as it contributes towards the value of signifiers such as gender and race, and which fluctuate according to ideologies and circumstances. Assemblage refers to a combination of social factors, like intersectionality, but further referenced the impact discourses anchored in context (time and space) have on signifiers of difference⁹. Finally, I will explore Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, to establish a productive potential within experiences of failure and marginalization. Queer failure will be adopted as a theoretical lens,

⁷ Dowsett et al, 2008, *Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity and Barebacking Online.*, 121-141

⁸ Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. 2005. *Hegemonic Masculinity*. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829-859

⁹ Puar, Jasbir K. 2006 "Mapping US Homonormativities." *Gender, Place & Culture* 13.1: 67-88

drawing attention towards a new social world, not primarily focused on the binaries of success and failure, mastery and subordination¹⁰. Success on MSM applications translates into plenty of social contact, according to literature, but little attention is paid towards failure. Success in finding sex on virtual platforms has been examined by Van De Wiele & Tong¹¹ but I hope to demonstrate how the nature of failure online may lead users towards new social bonds—with both negative and positive consequences. Desiring masculinity is not new within gay male communities, as many gay men have historically emphasized masculinity as part of their cultural style¹² although such desire was generally accompanied by widespread stigma. The notion that homosexuality compromised an individual's journey towards hegemonic masculinity was widespread, culturally, but a social shift effected by LGBTQ activism in recent decades has resulted in some men successfully reconciling masculinity and homosexuality¹³.

1.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity was first conceptualized by Connell in the 1980s, as a configuration of gender practices intending to and resulting in legitimizing existing patriarchal hierarchies of female subordination. Cultural and individual acts which ensure the dominant position of men and masculinity serve to align all other members of society, ideologically and socially, with this power structure. These practices signify glimpses of a contextually variant ideal of masculinity requiring all men, at some point, to position themselves in relation to this unachievable standard.

¹⁰ Jack Halberstam, 2011, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press. Durham and London. 1-27

¹¹ Van De Wiele, C. & Tong, S. T. 2014. Breaking boundaries: The uses and gratifications of Grindr. 619-630

¹² See Humphries 1985, Levine 1990, Shuckrow 2014

¹³ Chancellor, Michael W. Jr. 2015, "The Masculine Mystique" Master's Theses. 1-84

The notion of hegemony refers to the cultural component of masculinity as it pertains to the indoctrination of men and women while stabilizing the existing social structure¹⁴.

Originally, hegemonic masculinity was conceived of as being applicable only to the heteronormative social field because homosexual men were assumed to be in a largely subordinate social location. However, the concept was later reworked by Connell and Messerschmidt in 2005, to add further depth by clarifying that “hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force” and needs to be considered relationally within a geography of masculinity. Particularly relevant for my research, this notion serves to delve further into the experiences of subordinated masculinities by bringing the relational aspect into focus. For someone to be understood as having successfully achieved ideal masculinity, clear examples must exist toward the opposite end of the socially constructed spectrum. However, a subordinate position is not necessarily static because social struggles sometimes create space for those in a subordinate position to influence or draw upon dominant forms of masculinity thus achieving benefits, even if only temporarily¹⁵.

Although considered a bleak formulation by some critics, Connell and Messerschmidt also envisioned that this hierarchy could eventually be destabilized thus leading towards “a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man [that] might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies.”¹⁶ Heterosexual male masculinity has traditionally been *de facto* hegemonic in relation to other masculinities but, now, gay masculinities are moving closer to this ideal. Connell (1992) concluded a subsequent reflection

¹⁴ Connell, R. W. 1987. Reprinted 1992. Gender and power

¹⁵ Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", 847

¹⁶ Ibid., 833

on gay masculinity with the hope that a minority of homosexual men had the potential to radically alter social relations of gender, both individually and politically—because gay men are influenced by hegemonic masculinity and may be best situated within a geography of masculinities, to reject these ideals.¹⁷ What is masculine varies based upon context with hegemonic masculinity prevailing within cultural discourses that linguistically signify desired masculinity through established scripts¹⁸. In the virtual realm, masculinity is mediated through both cultural and technological signifiers of masculinity.

Tankut Atuk explored the relationship between community and immunity among users of applications like Grindr and Hornet, the Turkish equivalent of Grindr. He concluded there is less of a radical potential than he and other users had initially and eagerly anticipated. Immunity was a dominant theme throughout his research, indicating further stratification instead of users sharing a sense of community. However, the relationship between community and cruising continues and, in different circumstances, the emergence of a virtual community is either challenged or strengthened.¹⁹ This relationship is further threatened by the existence of homonormative masculinities as mediated by user profiles and interactions.²⁰ Users who aggressively enforce hierarchies of masculinity increase a sense of widespread alienation through interacting or filtering-out all other users based upon their perceived potential as sexual partners. Studies of masculinity as constructed online have yielded a growing consensus that a form of homonormative masculinity manifest through MSM applications²¹.

¹⁷ Connell, R. W. 1992. *A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and Dynamics of Gender*. 340

¹⁸ Kiesling, 2007, *Masculinities and Language*. *Language and Linguistic Compass*: 660.

¹⁹ Atuk, Tankut. *Cruising in-between immunity and community: an in-app ethnography of virtual cruising in Istanbul*, 15

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68

²¹ See Shuckerow 2014; Miller 2015; Miller, B. & Behm-Morawitz, E. 2016, Atuk 2016. Referenced in Chapter 2

1.2 Assemblage: Homonationalism and a Gay Elite

Puar's (2007) notion of assemblage will guide my investigation of discourses that impact conceptions of "fuckability" across online platforms in relation to body size, masculinity, and race. Puar introduced this concept in *Terrorist Assemblage*'s, relating the impact of the War on Terror and national discourses to the Other with regard to gender and sexuality. These discourses combined to create the figure of terrorist bodies who resist "queerness as a sexual identity" despite being labelled as queer in popular discourse²². An example of this includes Islamophobia and racism expressed by gay communities in the United States, and Canada, who have permitted collusions between homosexuality and nationalism.

Although not intended to be applied to the digital realm, the concept of assemblage will be used to draw attention to the impact of technology and homonationalism on MSM applications. Through the lens of homonationalism, "normative bodies" are Grindr users who are aspiring to hegemonic masculinity at the cost of further marginalizing feminine bodies and other users who stray from the hegemonic norm²³. Heteronormative ideals are reproduced by privileged homosexuals who find themselves more aligned with the state than with radical politics, including in the Canadian context as the emergence of the neoliberal queer is a product of a corporatized and liberal movements, with roots in decades of activism opposing state-sponsored homophobia²⁴.

²² Jasbir Puar, 2007, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 205-230

²³ Ibid., 218

²⁴ Patrizia Gentile and Gary Kinsman, 2015, "National Security, Homonationalism, and the Making of the Neo-Liberal Queer, in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging*. 133-150

The notion of the Canadian neo-liberal, or the homonormative queer, is being elaborated within queer theory explorations by Gentile and Kinsman 2015 who identified settler colonialism mixed with Orientalism of empire as key ingredients of Canadian homonationalism.²⁵ Since same-sex marriage was legalized in 2005 in Canada, there have been other legal victories that, taken together, have paved the way for a new type of homosexual elite to emerge. Mostly white and male,²⁶ these individuals enjoy class privilege removed from fears of systemic discrimination. Long-time activist Tim McCaskell has also chronicled this shift through his memoirs of queer activism in Toronto, detailing a community becoming increasingly offended by radical acts, such as the participation Queers Against Israeli Apartheid 2011 and more recently the 2016 Black Lives Matter sit-in protest at Toronto Pride²⁷.

In Canada, there are still strong currents of racism and systemic inequality issues to address and this reality often manifests itself through race acting as an important signifier of masculinity or femininity. These community divisions are becoming increasingly visible, thus challenging notions of Canadian exceptionalism and positioning the fight for LGBTQ liberation, especially within LGBTQ communities, as ongoing. Although the situation in Canada has improved and more legal equality exists than our neighbor's in the United States, internal community issues continue to reflect larger systems of oppression—especially ongoing legacies of colonialism which have yet to be addressed in a similar systematic fashion²⁸.

²⁵ Ibid., 140

²⁶ With the notable exception of Ontario's Lesbian Premier: Kathleen Wynne, the first LGBT Provincial leader. She was also the first lesbian politician in Canada, alongside Svend Robinson who came out in the Spring of 1988.

²⁷ McCaskell, Tim. *Queer progress: from homophobia to homonationalism*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016.

²⁸ Patrizia Gentile and Gary Kinsman, 2015, "National Security, Homonationalism, and the Making of the Neo-Liberal Queer, in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging*. 133-150

1.3 Queer Failure

For the purposes of this study, success on Grindr is operationalized as achieving multiple, one-off sexual encounters—as will be substantiated by the literature review in Chapter 2. I will delve into the experiences of users who fail to meet the dominant standards, often as a consequence of their marginalized masculinity positioning. Such positioning includes users who embrace femininity, or who are transgender, or who are deemed unattractive due to their physique, or who are written-off because of their ability or race. Drawing from Jack Halberstam's concept of queer failure, I will begin by outlining low theory as it pertains towards uncovering potential outside of binary formulations. Failure is "Low theory," a concept informed by the work of Stuart Hall and Gramsci, in opposition to high theory²⁹. Low theory is goal orientated, inching towards social change and is informed by counter knowledge, counter-cultures and can produce counter hegemony. Counter knowledge within failure involves turning one's attention towards the productive potential in failure and allow individuals to focus on their experiences instead of expectations³⁰. Further from this, failure as an example of low theory points towards a greater diversity in the human experience and viable alternatives for challenging the status quo, outside the goal of mastery or success. Halberstam turns to portrayals within popular culture to illustrate the potential of failure for it "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development"³¹ in the hopes that more radical interactions may be fostered. Failure is a sense of being, but it can also become unbecoming leading towards revealing one's relationship with various subjugated forms of knowledge.

²⁹ Jack Halberstam, 2011, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press. Durham and London. 1-27

³⁰ Ibid., 16

³¹ Ibid., 20-23

In MSM applications, failure will be understood as experiences of harassment, involving being intensely ignored or objectified based on signifiers. Failure fits within queer theory as destabilizing existing binaries of the human experience within capitalist society, which posit success as the only productive reality. Queer failure in my research will also represent users who attempt to enact sexual desires and fantasies online that are considered non-normative or deviant. Sex will be considered the dominant orientation of MSM applications and will be explored On Grindr and Scruff, homosexual sex of a socially accepted nature involving a clear distinction between the roles of top and bottom. Although I cannot speak to the specifics of what common sexual encounters from MSM applications entail, I assume they are marginally influenced by BDSM. Kink is the most common phrase used throughout my interview process and references a specific act within the umbrella of BDSM practices that users engage with. Grindr & Scruff are not spaces explicitly geared towards BDSM practices, which often may not involve penetrative sex, therefore seeking these activities can be conceptualized as failure in relation to dominant usages.

Seeking-out or ending-up with a sustained social encounter, of either a social or sexual nature, is reminiscent of Foucault's notions of homosexual friendship, wherein he argues for social relationships outside monogamous heterosexuality. In this framework, "homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable," and this friendship is often structured around desire, pleasure, and age. Contrasted traditional heterosexual fraternity, which has policed the potential of male friendships away from homosexuality, meaning both sexually and platonically. Friendship as a way of life suggests the potential within relationships amongst men to have an intensity, separate from institutionalization, which also runs separate from the ideologies for sexual politics in the 1960s. Foucault argued to be a homosexual can involve friendships with

other homosexuals, while many activists understood sexual liberation as eliminating constraints between homosexuals and heterosexuals³². These relationships are between men and constitute a form of sustained fraternity, which may involve sex, within relationships of male homosexuality. I will argue this type of friendship, if it can be facilitated through MSM applications masquerades as a discursive failure within popular conceptions of virtual sex on Grindr.

1.4 Conclusion

Hegemonic masculinity was the most obvious choice for this inquiry, as it contributes to the mediation of desire on Grindr and Scruff. Masculinity will be examined as abstract and relational. Adding to this inquiry, assemblage will be used to conceptualize the homonationalism, racism, and other relevant motivations, as they are anchored in time and space, manifest on MSM applications. Finally, Queer Failure has brought my attention towards defining success and failure on Grindr and Scruff. Failure is not necessarily opposite of success, through my theoretical configuration. To this end, homosexual friendship may be a result of failed attempts on MSM applications. Collectively, this framework will aid in my exploration of the meaning associated with failure, masculinity, and success relating to MSM applications. Ultimately, this is queer potential will be tested in chapter 4-5. In the next chapter, I will begin an overview of digital cruising before diving straight into a literature review surrounding Grindr and Scruff. Through this, some of the established usages will be made plain, indicating experiences which are deserving of further study.

³² Friendship as a way of life: R. de Ceccaty, J. Danet, and J. Le Bitoux conducted this interview with Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April 1981 and is available online.

Chapter 2: Situating Grindr and Scruff

While initially thought by some researchers to have productive potential for community through a return to a pre-stonewall era of sexuality³³ newer research questions how often a radical queer potential is realized³⁴. One author noted that both community and immunity, further narrowing group membership, are the reality of MSM applications³⁵. An impressive amount of academic work ranging from journal articles to theses from almost every discipline have turned their gaze on Grindr, perhaps stirred in part by personal interest. A majority of research used Grindr to understand human behavior and typically falls within the fields of health, relationships, and general use, with current publications shifting towards centralizing Grindr as the object of study as opposed to a sampling tool. I will begin by introducing digital cruising, before delving into the literature on MSM applications from three points of view, namely psychology, communication studies, and gay nostalgia.

1.1 Digital Cruising

Digital cruising was first coined by Mowlabocus (2010) to describe the recent phenomena of mobile phone-based technologies which tapped into existing gay subcultures and histories of cruising. This has resulted in the blurring of the division between the digital and the physical as these applications are more mobile than gay networking websites. Users can be in public or gay spaces when they are on the application and can undergo both cruising and congregation based on proximity. Mowlabocus, based on their own work on Grindr, argued that the application is

³³ See Aunspach 2015, Crooks 2013

³⁴ See Ahlm 2017, Orne 2016

³⁵ Atuk, Tankut. 2016, Cruising in-between immunity and community: an in-app ethnography of virtual cruising in Istanbul

dominated by a strong visual culture which users embrace despite the dominance of written texts. Similar to earlier cruising platforms, the focus is on connection which has not resulted in the formation of one cohesive group identity³⁶. Digital cruising has often emphasized hegemonic masculinity through discursive productions on earlier websites, constructing the ideal gay embodiment of masculinity and therefore physique³⁷. I will now turn to existing research which indicates that most usage of Grindr and Scruff fall within a shift favoring digital cruising.

Turning towards the usages and motivations of users, anchored in psychology, Van De Wiele and Tong in their intricate and impressive 2014 quantitative study, concluded sex was the strongest motivating factor identified but does exist amongst other motivations. This was from a total of six uses and gratifications including: social inclusion, sex, friendship, entertainment, romantic relationships, and location-based searches³⁸. Primarily, users who resided in urban areas reported seeking sex as their main reason for using Grindr. For users in rural or smaller urban areas, they placed a higher value upon seeking friendship or social networking³⁹. Urban and rural issues come into play, limiting the potential for users in rural areas to develop a sense of community or personal identity through using the application. Even when these interactions do occur, they are mediated by the omnipresent relationship between rural users in relation to the often unattainable ideals of the urban gay identity⁴⁰. Hardy and Lindtner in a 2017 article delving into the Grindr milieu, identify a desiring user, describing the subjectivity produced when desires and sexuality are mediated by technical devices. This user is in relation to the

³⁶ Mowlabocus, Sharif. 2010. *Gaydar culture: gay men, technology and embodiment in the digital age*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate.

³⁷ Dowsett et al, 2008, *Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity and Barebacking Online.*, 121-141

³⁸ Van de Wiele, C. & Tong, S. T. (2014). *Breaking boundaries: The uses and gratifications of Grindr*. 1-10

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4

⁴⁰ Schwartz, R. (2011). *Out of the Grind? Grindr and Teen Queer Identity Work in Rural US*

applications they are using and is reinforced by the make-up of applications which Hardy and Lindtner argue take a simplistic approach that is geared towards cosmopolitan individuals and best support an urban gay subjectivity⁴¹. Digital cruising may occur through Grindr or Scruff, with these applications largely designing their interface towards an urban subject. This is particularly relevant in the Canadian context, although Ottawa exists as a metropolis that attracts many from smaller communities. The notion of the desiring user is useful for this inquiry because it describes the subjectivity created through applications.

Obstacles stand in the way of any goal which is enacted within a visually competitive environment. Turning towards a communications studies approach, Miller and Morawitz explored femmephobia through a qualitative study with users of Grindr, concluding those at the receiving end of femmephobic language were less likely to forge platonic or romantic relationships with these users but remained amicable towards considering them as sexual partners. This points towards an emerging theme of complacency, which users to some degree uphold when they interact in digital spaces which praise masculinity⁴². Brubaker et al in 2017 explored the experiences of users leaving Grindr and noted that leaving these applications is a process and must be understood in relation to a user's experiences, options, and motivations⁴³. Ultimately, few users can stay away from MSM networking applications, simply because they are the most convenient way to meet strangers, particularly for those with less access to physical Queer spaces⁴⁴. Roth (2014) chose to focus his writings on Scruff by locating potential for the

⁴¹Hardy and Lindtner 2017 Constructing a Desiring User: Discourse, Rurality, and Design in Location-Based Social

⁴² Miller and Morawitz, 2016 "Masculine Guys Only": The effects of femmephobic mobile dating application profiles on partner selection for men who have sex with men. In *Journal of Computer Studies*.

⁴³ Brubaker, J., Ananny, M. & K. Crawford. (In press). Departing glances: A sociotechnical account of leaving Grindr. *New Media & Society*. 15

⁴⁴ Ibid 25

application to act in conjunction with gay bars, to enable the formation of embodied, localized communities. Scruff achieves success by expanding the notion of who can be attractive online to Bears and older and larger men, typically excluded from mainstream culture and even Grindr. Grindr is more commonly understood in literature as favoring younger users with a preference for whiteness and abs resembling a six-pack⁴⁵. For the act of digital cruising to be successful, users must maximize their potential to find a suitable mate and now have an increasing number of specialized applications for fractured gay male experiences.

Licoppe et al in a 2016 article examined the ideology linguistically present within interactions between users of Grindr who undertake this interactional activity for potential relational development. They found that when they join the application, users are often made aware of their role in the hierarchy of the app that favors certain conversations and social practices. Users access a number of strategies from a checklist orientation and other matching sequences that aid in the interactional affordance of anonymous sex occurring in private⁴⁶. Interestingly, Licoppe concludes by linking the relational content of Grindr messages to existing cultures of sex between strangers in public in gay culture. Although noting that Grindr, as part of digital messaging, was inherently a technology orientated towards friendly text-based interactions, user culture quickly took over and redefined dominant interactions⁴⁷. Users may leave Grindr for a number of complicated reasons ranging from negative experiences to health concerns but the majority of users continue to explore other applications.

⁴⁵ Yoel Roth. 2014 Locating the "Scruff Guy": Theorizing Body and Space in Gay Geosocial Media Scruff p2126

⁴⁶ Licoppe, C., Riviere, C. A., & Morel, J. (2015). Grindr casual hook-ups as interactional achievements. 2555

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2500

A growing number of researchers maintain that the primary use of Grindr among interviewees is seeking sex which is situated in this project through a focus on digital cruising. When creating a desiring subject within discourse of masculinity, it makes perfect sense that femmephobia becomes a common online experience. This furthers questions surrounding which populations benefit from these online communities. The potential of Grindr is hotly disputed with researchers like Crooks arguing that Grindr enables a return to a pre-Stonewall mode of cruising and socialization, a form of gay nostalgia. In this view, Grindr is understood as working equally for all potential users and enables interactions grounded in anonymity and a shared system of signs or symbols, instead of co-presence and identity politics⁴⁸.

Current research has established that users of MSM geo-spatial applications are primarily seeking sex, while fewer have looked into the implications for sex from digital cruising to occur in the home. However, Grindr and Scruff help to break down the public and private divide through an online space and Aunspach argued in conjunction with Crooks 2013 essay, that there is a potential for queer men to break the homonormative confinements of the application and return to a pre-Stonewall sensibility through promiscuity⁴⁹. Ahlm problematized this notion put forth by Aunspach and Crooks through advancing respectable promiscuity to explore the negotiations present when engaging dually in modern homonormative respectability and promiscuity. Ahlm notes that a type of queer potential exists for applications like Grindr when communication leads to sustained interactions which occur in hybrid between digital and physical spheres, which is a rare reality⁵⁰. This is in conjunction with an argument made by Orne (2016) when looking at the appropriation of Queer spaces in Boystown, Chicago, that

⁴⁸ Crooks R., 2013, *The Rainbow Flag and The Green Carnation: Grindr in the Gay Village*

⁴⁹ Aunspach, C. 2015, *From the Gay Bar to the Search Bar: Promiscuity, Identity, and Queer Mobility on Grindr*

⁵⁰ Ahlm J. *Respectable promiscuity: Digital cruising in an era of queer liberalism*, *Sexualities* 2017 v 20 (3)

Grindr usage can subvert this act when the application is connected to physical spaces and used in tandem⁵¹.

1.2 Visual Hegemony Online

A framework of hegemonic masculinity followed by a critical analysis has been largely neglected in past articles which have attempted to situate masculinity as an object of study through dominant visual cultures. Sharif Mowlambocus identified that Grindr and similar applications function through a reliance upon both textual and visual media combined with assumed authenticity. This combination favours the visual above all else as the first point of contact and digital cruising becomes increasingly based on finding a specific match than a blatant interest in anonymous sex. Often representations are mildly pornographic and fit within existing notions of sexualization within gay subcultures. Users with sexualized profiles that have a focus on genitals are also more likely to reflect dominant beauty norms than users in a subordinate position, with pictures instead focussing on faces⁵². An emphasis on the visual is common enough, however user profiles and intimate exchanges of photos are ultimately nothing more than a media product assumed to be accurate, until these notions are verified in the physical world.

One inquiry into the notion of the hegemonic Grindr clone through user profiles, paid only lip service to hegemonic masculinity by suggesting that gay masculinities can now be dominant⁵³. Using earlier theories of hegemony, David Shuckrow uses Martins Levine's (1990) earlier notion of the Gay Macho to term users as clones, when they constitute a minority ruling elite by embodying masculine archetypes. Miller & Morawitz have argued this hierarchy is

⁵¹ Orne J. 2016, Boystown. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

⁵² Christian P. 2015 Self-Pornographic Representations with Grindr, *Journal of Visual and Media Anthropology*, 73

⁵³ Shuckrow, D., 2014 "Take Off Your Masc: The Hegemonic Gay Male's Gender Performance on Grindr"

maintained by femmephobia and turns to examples of user profiles which reinforce a form of misogyny or internalized homophobia. Denigrating the feminine and rejecting feminine users are two strategies commonly deployed within user profiles on Grindr. Sadly, the only alternative presented is in the hope of user profiles who act as radical queers by opposing the hegemonic ideal, although Shuckerow understands these groups to have an equal amount of privilege when crafting their user profiles.⁵⁴ While I agree that resistance has always existed in user profiles, Shuckerow does not consider what subjectivities anchor counter-discourses.

This is a notion that has previously been challenged in inquiries delving into the construction of masculinity in online sites, in this case for bareback sex, with race being key towards constructing the homosexual online. Race and ethnicity are important sexual markers, situating the vital importance of race among strangers constructing hypothetical sexual encounters and notions of dominance or passivity⁵⁵. Past academic inquiries have also focused on the popular site *douchebagsofgrindr.com* (Shuckerow), and Chancellor in 2015 completed the most comprehensive analysis consisting of over 349 profiles posted on the site. Chancellor, through his MA in communication studies, situated Grindr through the lens of net cartography and substances users understood as feminine are effectively failing dominant scripts of hegemonic masculinity. He furthers this point by noting that the construction of digital spaces allows for users to streamline potential contact and foster a notion of community that is held together infinitely thinner than in the physical realm⁵⁶. Hegemony is positioned as a dominant theme within Grindr, as the application and user cultures have created culturally variant notions of the ideal user, primarily through visual means.

⁵⁴ Shuckerow, D. 2014 "Take Off Your Masc: The Hegemonic Gay Male's Gender Performance on Grindr" 25

⁵⁵ Dowsett, G. W., Williams, H., Ventuneac, A., & Carballo-Diequez, A. (2008). "Taking it like a man": Masculinity and barebacking online. 122

⁵⁶ Chancellor, Michael W. Jr., "The Masculine Mystique" (2015). Master's Theses. 75

Currently, both Grindr and Scruff have community standards governing acceptable images which further situates the importance of these media products. Visual intimacy comes within the form of private messages with users often involved in some type of gift economy where they trade pornographic selfies⁵⁷. Embodied masculinities rely on traditional signifiers such as muscle and hair which are used to relationally position users as solely masculine⁵⁸. An attention towards the category of race was largely neglected in many works, although Dowsett through his 2008 work on virtual sex websites, noted the prevalence of racial stereotyping occurring among users who engaging in bareback-sex online⁵⁹. Ahlm (2016) notes the paradox of blatant online racism within popular media headlines proclaiming a “post racial-America.” Connell and Messerschmidt noted that men who have mobility through their relation to masculinity but fall prey to white supremacy, will most often experience marginalized masculinity⁶⁰. Racialized non-heterosexual identified men are contending with a culture of white supremacy and homophobia, which can position them in situations rife with notions of toxic masculinity as heterosexual resistance.

Race functions similarly online, with many users attributing harmful stereotypes bound up within notions of masculinity. Dowsett observed similar scripts emerging on websites for anonymous bare-back sex, where users interested in a racialized partner would always prefer a relationship of domination or positivity depending on race. Users, particularly in the United States, are increasingly overt with their racist preferences which can lead to social relations being dominated by race. Additionally, search optimization present within Grindr enables users to filter out unwanted matches unlike the reality of attending physical spaces ranging from bars to

⁵⁷ Christian P, 2015, Self-Pornographic Representations with Grindr, *Journal of Visual Anthropology*, 3

⁵⁸ See (Enguix et al 2017; Enguix 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014).

⁵⁹ Dowsett et al, 2008, *Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity and Barebacking Online.*, 135

⁶⁰ Connell, 1992, *A very Gay masculinity*, 10

marches. The technology present in networking applications enables statements expressing white supremacy to be made with less risk of negative social repercussions.

1.3 Conclusion

There is inherent potential for users who are understood as “unfuckable” through the visual dynamics of Grindr and Scruff, whether arising from their identities as femme, transgender, disabled, and/or fat. Like the rest of the world, it should come as no large surprise that physical beauty is privileged over notions of personal depth. When returning to older notions of cruising, there was an inherent potential in these interactions through their situation as transgressive and linking together gay men to foster community, as identified by older debates surrounding cruising and community ⁶¹. Unlike physical locations where convenience or a sense of urgency might have dominated interactions, it seems more like Grindr and Scruff are enabling sex based on existing social divisions. Consulting with relevant literature has established that the majority of men who use these applications are in the pursuit of sex, often with a masculine partner (Van de Wille and Tong 2014, Licoppe 2014, Miller & Morawitz 2016). Authors including Aunspach and Crooks have controversially claimed that this sexual promiscuity has the potential to collectively return gay men to a pre-Stonewall era of sexuality. I reject this notion because my training in communication studies has impressed upon me that technology creates different social orderings and structures. It is counterproductive to argue for a return to the past, as the changing social and technological realities have created a fundamentally different context. A sense of community may indeed be fostered online but would have to take place outside the confines of once-off sexual encounters, the current dominant usage. This is also reminiscent of

⁶¹Atuk, Tankut. Cruising in-between immunity and community: an in-app ethnography of virtual cruising in Istanbul, 30

Foucault's notions of homosexual friendship, arguing for social relationships outside monogamous heterosexuality.⁶²

David Shuckerow during his 2014 Bachelors thesis, identified resistance through the profiles of Radical Queers who attacked the hegemonic norms they identified in the application by embracing femininity or mocking masculinity⁶³. Although an act of resistance, I am most intrigued in exploring the queer potential within these applications as identified by Orne and Ahlm, when interactions deviate from the norm of a one-night stand. At this point, it is clear that digital cruising is a focus on these applications and during these interactions, users undergo a process of negotiation when analyzing a potential match. Largely, these negotiations begin at the visual level which privileges users who are able-bodied, discursively positioned as masculine or as White. For users who fit these criteria, they are able to use the application without thinking about social divisions and satisfy their particular desires. This success has created a landscape in which users are beginning to suggest that there is virtually nothing binding users on Grindr together as one monolithic community. Past accounts on Grindr were filled with a form of optimism for the potential for community building, with future works beginning to problematize the moving of cruising into the private sphere. Much of the previous works have also focused on analyzing user-generated profiles, which prompted the usage of interviews for this project. I hope to analyze the perspective of users within some form of marginalized masculinity to interrogate if there is a higher potential for users forming communities based on their queer potential

⁶² Friendship as a way of life: R. de Ceccaty, J. Danet, and J. Le Bitoux conducted this interview with Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April 1981 and is available online

⁶³ Shuckerow, D. 2014 "Take Off Your Masc: The Hegemonic Gay Male's Gender Performance on Grindr

Chapter 3: Methodology

1.1 Overview of Methods

I became interested in this project through my personal experiences with Grindr, but I also have community membership as a queer activist and gay man in Ottawa, Canada. My immersion-as a user of networking applications in the virtual space that I hoped to investigate helped to orientate me towards this field, however my social connections were crucial to finding a diversity of respondents. My fieldwork occurred in the month of April in Ottawa and entailed 16 semi-structured interviews conducted in person, with one exception. Informed-consent was confirmed through both an oral explanation and a physical document outlining how anonymity would be ensured and for how long the data would be retained. Distressing information, as identified by Stern 2003, when understanding virtual communities involves leading towards the obvious identification of users⁶⁴. For this reason, user-profiles that feature interview respondents will be published sparingly and/or with faces blurred. I have employed convenience and snowball sampling with student organizations at both Carleton University and the University of Ottawa as my starting points. This was moderately successful, before turning to an online call for participants, and finally, referrals from respondents. The ontology of queer digital spaces is such that Chris Ashford in a 2009 article, suggests abstracting case studies to form a narrative pointing towards one truth quickly become more damaging to the nature of truth anchored in a digital reality full of multiplicities⁶⁵. Although my interviews occurred in person, the focus was on understanding experiences of respondents without pitting this reality against an objective

⁶⁴ Chris Ashford, 2009. Queer theory, cyber-ethnographies and researching online sex environments. 306

⁶⁵ Ibid p307

perspective. The goal is to identify trends within small case studies as opposed to making general claims.

After conducting a review of existing literature, I have concluded that performing discourse analysis on user profiles within a locale or through an online database has been sufficiently explored⁶⁶, while digital ethnography will involve mixed methods and conducting interviews. These inquiries reveal an emerging consensus that profiles expressing homonormative masculinities are dominating the user profiles and textual interactions on applications like Grindr and Scruff. To explore experiences of success and marginalization in relation to community-building, I hope to analyze both interviews I have conducted and the user profiles of my respondents. Both Grindr and Scruff will be situated as networking applications which effectively function as virtual sex environments, such as Gaydar and older websites, for MSM communities. Turning to Ashford's work on digital ethnography, virtual sex environments mediate sex and sexuality through technology⁶⁷. Grindr and Scruff will be conceptualized in this manner, despite their official stances as networking applications. Operating within these realms as a researcher and community member can be challenging as certain conduct becomes inappropriate for both identities, especially in the realm of sex or disclosing sexual practices⁶⁸. This was not an issue for this researcher, as my fleeting time in Ottawa and interview selection process ensured that my position as an academic researcher overshadowed the potential for me to be decoded as a prospective sexual partner.

⁶⁶See Atuk, 2016; Aunspach 2015; Chancellor, 2015; Shuckerow, 2014

⁶⁷ Ibid p 30

⁶⁸ Ibid b 33

1.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse will be understood in a Foucaudian sense as a regime of knowledge production and reproduction anchored within multiple facets of culture and society. Discourse is shaped by power relations and is a system of representation to discuss “a particular topic at a particular historical moment” representing the episteme, or state of knowledge, of a time⁶⁹. Through my research, discourse encompasses how users portray themselves online, their behaviour online, and also how users come to understand these experiences. According to Fairclough, “texts are seen as part of social events” and that they can be spoken or written and may contain a textual character⁷⁰. Apart from establishing some community standards around language and graphic imagery, Grindr enables users to utilize genre mixing and their own sense of genre within a platform designed for search optimization. Free membership enables the use of one search filter applying to categorical information listed by users, while paid usage of the app provides subscribers with free reign to curate a display of potential matches. Even users who reject the dominant discourses on Grindr through their user profiles are still participating in a discourse.

This analysis will use the Grindr and Scruff profiles of respondent, who through my consent form have approved of publishing this sensitive material. User profiles will be subjected to genre analysis, consisting of conceptualizing genre chains, genre mixtures in text, and individual genre in texts⁷¹. Profiles are like other online dating websites or applications that have merged technology with MSM cruising culture, thus situating Grindr and Scruff within an established genre chain involving relationships between strangers. Genre mixing occurs when an

⁶⁹ Hall, S. 1997, *The Work of Representation in Representation and Cultural Studies*. 72-73

⁷⁰ N. Fairclough 2003 in *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. 17

⁷¹ Ibid p66

application such as Scruff borrows the basic framework from an established competitor, Grindr, while adding some structural differences. The name and clientele may differ slightly, but the same genre conventions apply between users engaged in text-based messaging. Discourses in specific genres signify both the conventions of identification and representational meaning involving users participating in the signification of gender/sexuality⁷². Grindr produces a mediation of gender and sexuality that seemingly attracts somewhat of a diversity of users, while Scruff is more attractive to a harrier and older crowd. User profiles, analysed as texts, are part of the social event of digital cruising and these textual constructions can signify the position of prospective sexual partners either within hegemonic masculinity or resistance to it. The activity in many genres is often fluid and Grindr is no exception, although dominant hook-up culture shapes the discourse for users interested in conversation or sex.

1.3 Interviews: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

When undertaking digital ethnography, many research approaches ranging from discourse analysis to personal ethnography were attractive. Ultimately, I have opted to reflect minimally on my own experiences and focus on my case studies. Although inspired by Atuk, I have chosen a different approach, as he opted against interviews by arguing against using interviews to research Grindr because of concerns with recreating power dynamics⁷³. Working within the dynamics of these applications can be fruitful if the researcher finds a talkative subject but otherwise results in smaller interactions. I have opted for a smaller range of respondents yielding larger data-sets through real-time semi-structured interviews that explore not only respondents' current disposition but also past experiences that have shaped their outlook.

⁷² Ibid p67

⁷³ Atuk 2016, Cruising-In-Between Immunity and Community: An In-App Ethnography of Virtual Cruising in Istanbul

Throughout the planning process for my research I knew that I wanted to use semi-structured interviews as my main method for qualitative study although the final configuration was a mystery. Many of the works reviewed in Chapter 2 that used interviews as a method focused on the gratifications and motivations of participants from a psychological perspective. I was particularly inspired by the approach taken by Rusi Jaspal who used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate identity management that occurred. This was in relation to the sexual efficacy of users, their online and offline identities, combined with their specific motivations⁷⁴. Smith and Osborne, who approached the history of IPA as grounded within psychology and heavily influenced by symbolic interactionism regarding the meaning individuals place on their personal and social worlds⁷⁵. IPA involves allowing plenty of time for responses and using a series of themes to guide the process. Of interest to my research is the emphasis on the meaning-participants place on specific events as potential milestones that contribute to their changing relationship with applications. The psychological aspect comes into play most strongly during data analysis, as the themes are formulated to be linked in a framework of analytic psychology⁷⁶. A focus on mental processes is beyond the scope and goals of this project, as the connections I aim to make are derived from case studies.

The themes raised during my analysis focus on experiences and subsequent interactions with applications; although there is some mention of emotion when appropriate, this is not my primary concern. When constructing my interviews, I began with identifying demographic information and exploring the usage patterns in relation to Grindr and Scruff, especially in relation to respondents' choices of user profiles. I then delve into masculinity through situating

⁷⁴ Jaspal R. 2016. Gay Men's Construction and Management of Identity on Grindr. *Sexuality & Culture*

⁷⁵ Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. 2008. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In J. Smith, *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 56.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 60

the personal orientation of respondents, their interests when online, and their sense of these abstract concepts. Finally, key experiences of success, failure, and community are explored before the respondent is given an opportunity for a final word. I have focussed on statements from respondents' that reflect a relationship between the personal and social world as they are mediated through digital cruising applications. I will begin my analytic section by analyzing the discursive and technical regimes which foster hegemonic masculinity and the enation of sex on Grindr and Scruff. Moving onward, I will outline the results of my interview process and relate the responses towards success and failure on MSM applications.

Chapter 4: Application Typology

“The Medium is the Message,” —Marshall McLuhan 1964

Reflecting on this well-known quotation from a prominent Canadian scholar of mass media, serves to further situate the varied experience of users across platforms by emphasizing the individual character of each medium which will manifest through dominant discourse supported and encouraged by technical configurations. Grindr, Scruff and similar applications are situated as MSM applications, enabled by geographic positioning system (GPS), that offer prospective users an attractive virtual sex environment. These two applications ground this inquiry in part because they both served a purpose as the primary application of choice for those in my research. On these applications, individuals can be as anonymous as they desire through volunteering no information or photos for their user profile, with the opposite featuring descriptive profiles, personal details, and linking social media profiles. Select user-profiles, taken from research participants, will be analyzed in relation to their conformity within genre conventions.

Understanding MSM applications as tools which users can access and customize to augment their potential to complete a specific social task, which is user-dependent, allows this analysis to focus on select case studies. Although an appropriate framework for Ottawa, Canada, I acknowledge the framework of community is more appropriate in cultures of overt homophobia where there is little access or opportunity for socializing in public spaces⁷⁷. Although Grindr and Scruff are advertised as “networking applications,” the dominant use of these applications has been understood through existing literature to centre around casual sex or hook-up culture and

⁷⁷See Atuk 2016, *Cruising-In-Between Immunity and Community: An In-App Ethnography of Virtual Cruising in Istanbul*

this was confirmed through the interview process. Notable exceptions exist, where users based on their personal histories, relationship status, and interests are more interested in casual sex or fostering social connections. This fits within my analysis, as profiles 2 and 4-6 also indicate an interest in seeking sex, although for some users this involves the tagline of kink sex. Otherwise, basic information (including their relationship status) and the type of sex they are looking for are common textual choices. These range from merely suggesting that one is interested in fucking, erotic wrestling, or outlining the character traits which indicate an ideal sexual partner.

Understanding MSM applications as a tool empowers this project to explore the discursive regimes present on user profiles alongside the motivations of users without imposing the notion of a universal reality. To this end I asked all participants in my study about whether these applications are a tool or a virtual community. Two participants responded that they understood their relationship with Grindr and Scruff as pointing towards an imagined community through a theme of surveillance. They both identified the potential in MSM applications, by virtue of constant interaction, to allow them to recognize users in the physical world. Outside of these responses, other respondents situated MSM applications as tools which could be used for a variety of purpose. Some respondents in their 20s also confirmed that years earlier, when they were coming to terms with their sexuality, that they had turned to Grindr for a sense of community and were met with mixed results.

Respondents and Their App Usage

User	Primary	Secondary	Specialized	Usage
Fae	Grindr	Tinder	Na	Online
Jeffers	Grindr	Scruff	Reacon	Online

Rubberist	Scruff	Growlr	Reacon	Left Grindr
Drew	Grindr	Tinder	Na	Online
Mich	Grindr	Scruff	Na	Online
Fr.	Gindr	Scruff	Reacon	Online
Jordan	Scruff	Growlr	Na	Left Grindr, Online
Seb	Grindr	Scruff	Reacon	Occasionally Online
SDR.	Grindr	Scruff	Reacon	Occasionally Online
Tom	Grindr	Scruff	Na	Online
Anon	Grindr	Tinder	Na	Has since left Grindr
Gis	Grindr	Scruff	Na	Online
Col	Scruff	Grindr	Reacon	Online
J.b	Grindr	Scruff	Na	Online
Mit	Grindr	Scruff	Na	Online
Doggo	Grindr	Scruff	Tinder	Online

1.1 Technical Considerations

I will begin by outlining the differences and technical structure of several applications, each with deliberate choices to become more appealing towards intended audiences. Similar applications to Grindr are gaining in popularity, prompting cross-platform use, by promising increased differentiation based on body type or sexual interest including applications such as Growlr, Hornet, Reacon, Scruff, and Tinder. Some commonalities between applications include a similar user profile, in terms of the usage of pictures, demographic information, user descriptions, and

sexual health status. Only Hornet and Scruff allow users to customize their location and enables the virtual cruising of global cities, while other applications can only be customized through external applications and significantly more effort. In terms of audience, Grindr is the most general of these applications in part because it was the first GPS enabled virtual sex application to emerge. Reacon is a specialty application for MSM who are interested in kink or fetish sex, which added location-based capabilities in the last five years. The application regularly advertises for kink parties happening in the immediate area and according to my interviews, is used by a handful of regular users in Ottawa. Scruff also has an option for users to view nearby parties or events, while Grindr will only advertise parties and events in the form of an advertisement. Indeed, the diversity of applications almost suggests that developers have an acknowledgement of an increased specialization⁷⁸.

According to Fairclough, “texts are seen as part of social events,” continuing to note they can be spoken or written and may contain a textual character⁷⁹. Besides involving some community standards around language and graphic imagery, Grindr enabled users to utilize genre mixing and their own sense of genre within an interface built for search optimization. Profiles are similar to other online-dating websites or applications except they are crucially merged with MSM cruising culture, situating Grindr within an established genre chain involving a relationship between strangers and the application. User profiles as texts are part of the social event of digital cruising and these textual constructions can signify the position of prospective sexual partners within hegemonic masculinity or their resistance.

⁷⁸ Yoel Roth, 2014: Locating the “Scruff Guy”: *Theorizing Body and Space in Gay Geosocial Media*. 2124.

⁷⁹ N. Fairclough 2003: *Analysing Discourse*. Routledge, 65

Scruff and Growlr appear more orientated towards masculine and larger men, based on how they have been marketed, leaning towards bear culture through branding considerations.⁸⁰ Growlr and Scruff are more welcoming to heavier-set men who identify as Bears, through including larger men in their advertisements, featuring the bear flag as the background colors and attracting these users and their admirers. However, the label of Bear also has a connotation surrounding the personal interest and pursuit of masculinity which has been understood by respondents as stigmatizing more feminine users. Although present in Ottawa, Growlr is still breaking into the international market. Finally, although some of my research participants had used Hornet in the past, this usage did not extend to Ottawa. For whatever reason, the application is not very popular in Canada and one faithful user noted that he still uses Hornet when he travels to Europe. When ranking the user experience, most respondents were indifferent; however, Hornet was praised by two as a superior application compared with the rest based upon their experiences with coding/technology. Growlr, Hornet, and Reacon have lower user bases in the Ottawa-Valley than their top competitors, while attracting and targeting slightly different target audiences.

Grindr and Scruff are understood as the most popular applications discussed in this project and both have a standard, free membership which allows users limited access to the application or the process of search optimization. When the paid membership is selected in the case of Grindr and Scruff, users can view an unlimited number of user profiles while also customizing their “search,” to locate specific users. Hornet, Growlr, and Reacon have similar user distinctions/subscriptions, while Tinder is unique because users are not able to view more than one user-profile at any given time. These applications also require the use of a smart phone

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 2130.

or tablet, paired with a consistent connection to the internet which functions to exclude potential users based on associated costs.

The apps diverge in the other options they present to users, including categorizing users within a set list of "tribes" that are intended to correspond with their interests or orientation. Many of these labels plug into scripts of masculinity: jock, leather, daddy, bear, otter, military, and muscular. These tribes feature a very limited number of options connoting femininity, which are limited to: twink, drag, and trans.ⁱ Finally, the remaining labels are more general in their makeup: geek, clean-cut, and boy-next-door. Discreet is the loveable exception, as the usage of the term can reference that someone is not open about their sexual orientation or prefers privacy around their intimate encounters. User descriptions surrounding physical appearance are imbued with assumptions of authenticity which exist through trust users place within each other, the application, and the genre⁸¹. It is through this assumption of authenticity that phrases ranging from "fit to hung," gain power in social interactions as they are interpreted to represent reality. Users who choose these phrases and characteristics for their user profiles are contributing to a hierarchy that can only exist through the constant devaluing of feminine bodies in social events. Meaning surrounding user profiles on Grindr relates to the inclusion and exclusion of certain bodies as they relate to users operating in a discourse of hook-up culture, with sex as the desired interactional achievement.

⁸¹⁸¹ Ibid., 60

1.2 Conclusion

The most obvious difference is the configuration of user profiles, with Scruff allowing for users to publish 3-4 times more descriptive information than on Grindr. While Grindr only offers a headline and brief user description, Scruff allows users to fill out a maximum of two text boxes, relating to what they are looking for, and additional descriptive information. This is in addition to a series of categorical lists, allowing users to select their activities and hobbies, sexual interests, and intended relationship (Friendship-Sex). MSM applications influence each other and create spaces where the general audience is looking for the same type of interaction, be that sex with a bear or sex orientated towards kink. Not everyone takes advantage of these options, however respondents who used Scruff indicated a general consensus towards sharing more information. Profiles 2 and 6 indicate that users shared more information on Scruff than on Grindr, with Mich choosing to use Scruff to elaborate on his initial headline of *NSA Only, If the mood is right*, with a bit of humour and descriptive information. In profile 2 Mansfield elaborates on some of his daily activities, including eating and fucking. Both profiles on Scruff reflect a more relaxed platform, once in which users are able to construct profiles that pay some attention towards their interests. Users who aspire to the norms and ideals of hegemonic masculinity within their daily lives are now able to exert this influence on Grindr through constructing profiles praising masculinity. Dominant usages of Grindr and Scruff still lean towards sexual encounters, and this is sustained by profiles analyzed. Next, I will delve into the main content of my interviews in order to situate case studies relating to kink, and the desiring subject in regards to masculinity, race, and weight.

Chapter 5: Digital Corporeality

Seb: The reason I went back on the dating sites is because a friend pointed out that Ottawa is largely a city of busy people and introverts. And you don't typically meet introverts [at] social events ... but you meet someone, you try to chat them up and they lock down. They don't know how to talk to a stranger. If you are not meeting online, then you are not meeting people—at least in Ottawa.

Doggo: Whenever you come into a new city, it's mango season all over again. You are the fresh fruit. They have all seen each other before. There is a sense of a mysterious stranger.

In this chapter, I will contrast experiences of marginalization and the sustainment of social relationships formed by the mediation of desire on MSM applications. Direct quotations will be presented in the interests of authenticity and for analytic purposes, while more general information will be summarized. A subjective-interpretive approach will be taken in the tradition of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to highlight individuals' perceptions of social practices and multiple social worlds.

The social applications examined are not solely a microcosm of disparities and inequalities among LGBT individuals; they also serve to exacerbate existing beauty norms which privilege white, muscular, able-bodied men—to the detriment of the wider community. Users in more dominant social locations within the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity on Grindr and on Scruff reported a more indifferent attitude towards the discursive regimes. Those in a marginalized position—especially on Grindr—were quick to point out and vocalize their position as the marginalized within the LGBT community. Interestingly, there is consensus among all respondents about the fickle nature of desirability on MSM applications.

Of the 16 interviews completed, 15 respondents identified as cisgender men except for one genderqueer participant, Fae, who was also the most interested in finding other femme-identified users as potential partners—which, as a busy activist and student, was Fae's primary reason for app usage. Fae was the only current student included in my research; all other participants held full-time employment. What I present and examine will be a mostly youthful perspective given that 10 respondents are in their 20s. The median age of the respondents was 28. Four users are between 42 and 48 years of age and two are in their 30s. My sample is also skewed towards whiteness (as a racialized category) with 13 users identifying as Caucasian or White and three users identifying as Black, Latino, and Pilipino. During the interviews, three respondents indicated an active interest in kink sex ranging from erotic-wrestling to puppy play—which was easiest to find on Reacon (a fetish community app) but could occasionally be found on the more commonly used applications (i.e., Grindr and Scruff).

When exploring topics and themes related to masculinity, all respondents indicated they had an interest in finding a masculine partner. However, four users who expressed greater interest in femininity indicated that masculinity was not a deal-breaker. Hegemonic masculinity will therefore be explored as it relates to "fuckability" on MSM applications, and how it therefore serves to privilege certain users. Assemblage—which can work positively or negatively for users depending on their platform of choice—will also be examined: "bears," for example, are broadly considered to be less attractive on Grindr. Many men so categorized have thus migrated elsewhere. However, an abdominal "six-pack" typically entitles a user on any application to fuller realization of their sexual goals by appealing to wider desires and fantasies. It is this discourse that Mich tapped into when he constructed his scruff profile by clearly proclaiming that if users were looking for a six-pack, they would have to search elsewhere. Still

hoping to find new sexual partners Mich has identified himself as active, but is strategic in accurately representing his physique⁸². On the other hand, users who are fat, femme, old, and/or kinky, most often reported experiences of failure—though they also reported the development of new social relationships.

1.1 Common Practices: Kink

Seb: If Grindr is a tool then a tool is still what you use it for ... A lot of people, at least when Grindr started up, thought this was for hook-ups. I find that some of the platforms that came later, people were more open-minded and could be used for other things.

Anon: Grindr is a crossroads: everyone ends up there at some point—even if they have the platform, even if they are just barely there.

Of crucial importance when documenting the motivations of users on Grindr is a basic understanding of their personal biographies and current goals for the application. Some users are in a position where, for a variety of reasons extending from their relationship status or an upcoming move, used Grindr to find casual sex. Two users indicated that the knowledge they would soon be leaving the city of Ottawa deterred them from forming a new romantic relationship—opting instead for a physical connection. This is still grounded in vanilla sex.

In total, three users indicated that they actively used Grindr, Scruff, and Reaconn to seek like-minded kinksters. Two other users noted that they had Reaconn on their phones, but were still exploring their interest in kink-sex and were using the application to aid in such an exploration.

⁸² See Profile 6

Curiously, Frank and the Rubberist indicated they were in open relationships and they enjoyed using Grindr and similar applications to augment their existing sex lives. Frank and Rubberist are both in relationships and engage in kink-sex outside their primary relationships. These users all vocalized the importance of sex in their daily lives and noted their partners, although active, were in general less interested in sex which translated into their absence on MSM applications. Frank and a single anonymous user indicated that masculinity was of key importance when selecting a mate, but conceded that an interest in kink sex overrode this preference for masculinity.

Frank: I would say I definitely prefer masculine partners exclusively for vanilla sex but am willing to interact with a femme if I see we are interested in the same kinks. Then I know we will have fun. If I am not interested in them sexually, and they have an interest in puppy-play, then I will still send them an invite to one of our parties.

This approach was shared by an anonymous respondent who uses Grindr to find more general social encounters and normally turns to Reaon to fulfill an interest in erotic wrestling. For this user, this is an intimate kink in which they prefer to play a masculine role opposite a masculine partner. However, they were more flexible to concede towards flipping this script in the context of erotic wrestling and not in the case of a potential date.

Anon: I prefer a masculine partner for a romantic relationship, but if we have been messaging on Grindr and someone is committed towards the physicality of erotic wrestling, then I am willing to give them a shot. Outside of kink, I really have no genuine interest in being with a femme-partner.

Finding the desired partner for erotic wrestling on Grindr and Scruff provides the benefit of a large net, while Reaon is smaller and specialized. An interest in a masculine partner can be overridden by an interest in kink-sex because although increasing in popularity and visibility, it

is considered outside of a mainstream sexual repertoire. Another anonymous respondent who is married and in an open relationship, indicated that they do not have an interest in a femme partner even for kink-sex. They are, however, willing to respond kindly to an individual in this situation and do not extend the same courtesy to interactions on Grindr. In part, this could be due to the nature of kink-sex which can involve anything from a humiliation to puppy play.

Rubberist: To properly engage in kink play, you need to have a sense of how someone and their body reacts to pain—to craft a scene with clear limitations. That takes time.

Often, there may be a degree of pain or domination involved and the three kinksters interviewed all indicated that for a new kink-partner, they would never proceed before assuming some social relationship with the individual. This was in sharp contrast to a general consensus surrounding vanilla sex, for which all respondents indicated having one-off encounters with complete strangers they met on these mobile applications. Potential exists on general applications and Rubberist established a long-standing kink partner just before he left Grindr.

Cameron: Have you made any lasting relationships?

Rubberist: I met my boy (within a dom & sub relationship) on Grindr. He is much younger and smaller than I am, which is great for throwing him around. He initiated contact because he saw that I was interested in rubber and a variety of kinks. He was a chaser and we have been playing together since 2014.

This relationship is grounded within a sexual sphere but it also extends into other aspects of reality. In part because of a smaller variety of partners, individuals who are interested within BDSM and kinkster communities tend to gravitate towards one another. These relationships can involve practices completely outside of penetrative sex—for example, in the realm of erotic wrestling. Frank and Rubberist indicated the most interest in puppy-play—truly fitting, as Frank

promotes local parties through his online interactions and Rubberist hosts yearly kink workshops on puppy-play, which he advertises online.

1.2 The Desiring Subject: Masculine

Fae was the most overtly feminine on their user profile and they noticed a shift once their Grindr profile reflected notions of gender diversity by identifying as non-binary or genderqueer. Fae was generally more masculine or androgynous in past profile pictures, but this new image blatantly emphasized a self-described femme style with a preference for dark lipstick and corsets⁸³. Fae turns to Grindr as a sex-orientated experience and is more interested in finding a similarly femme partner online. Consequently, Fae experienced a change in the type of attention they received.

Cameron: Have you experienced femme-phobia online?

Fae: Explicitly I can think of a couple where I received very objectifying or degrading comments, but nothing that was a huge red flag. Nothing specific comes to mind. Most of the time it is just a lack of interaction over anything else. When I was not femme-presenting, there tended to be more attention.

Cameron: Are there any tensions (relating to their non-binary identity) using Grindr?

Fae: I think so for a number of reasons. This is an application marketed towards gay men interested in gay men. For my relationship with the app, I am asking should I still be on here or why ... Again, even indicating you are trans in your profile might be good for some folks. I think it allows for you to be easily targeted ... It's a shifted or distorted reflection of queer male communities, or a sub-set of this community as it exists online.

⁸³ See Profile 1 in Appendix

Violence or positive contact are the likely results from increased visibility—although impossible to predict. For Fae, Grindr is a masculine-dominated virtual sex platform presenting structural challenges for femme users hoping to be both respected and sexually pleased. Fae uses the application primarily for sexual encounters which sometimes lead to new social relationships.

Fae: I have a few friends I have met on Grindr, usually relationships that began with sleeping with them, but have continued after the fact. I still have friends who I speak with there ... In a limited way, it is also about keeping in touch with people.

Sustained social relationships are, for many users—including those in my study—not an expected outcome. Doggo is 36 and describes himself as a bear because of his weight and massive beard, presenting as a torso on Grindr with a large and coiffed beard. Throughout the interview, he identifies as a man and an individual who, by virtue of being very feminine, struggled with this identification. Although presenting as traditionally masculine on Grindr, his Scruff profile contains photos from burlesque performances and presented a more feminine and coiffed image⁸⁴. After limited success with the burlesque image on Grindr, Doggo strategically opted for a return to a more masculine image with a beard. The value of a beard should not be underestimated because it can contribute towards the supposed connection between masculinity and body hair. Sadly, this also created situations in which Doggo felt that he needed to hide some aspects of his femininity when meeting men online in order to fulfill the masculine image. At this point, we delved into his choice of selection.

Cameron: Could you talk about your decision around different user-profiles images?

⁸⁴ See Profile 2 in Appendix

Doggo: I am playing into a dynamic as a bigger man, now getting older, with a big beard. I'm not saying I do not want that dynamic but that it stems from my personality of going into this not looking for a specific thing. I want someone interested and multi-faceted. I can get a quick hook-up maybe from this photo ... I'm also wary when the first comment someone makes is about my beard. I can agree it is a great beard and it's an advantage if my goal is just to hook up.

The value of a beard on MSM applications should not be underestimated; it boosts the attractiveness of a user by instantly playing into established associations between hegemonic masculinity and body hair (Enguix et al. 2017). Despite some negative interactions, Doggo makes a point to respond in a sociable fashion—surprisingly, even when he has no sexual interest in a user. During questioning surrounding his positive approach towards online interactions, he observed it was influenced by his sense of marginalization based on weight and a penchant for the feminine.

Cameron: Could you go a bit more into your approach on Grindr?

Doggo: Selfishness on my part. I am very aware that I will come out worse off if I were to go the other route. You can power through and not think about your emotions but it does not mean they do not exist. So, in the interest of my future self, I am trying to avoid mental damage because I feel, in the long run, that will be more expensive.

However, this seemingly simple viewpoint was not shared by the other respondents who used these applications to find quick and masculine-orientated sex. Most respondents indicated an interest in a more masculine partner and many were unyielding in their preference. Frank, who is 27 and partnered, uses these applications as a masculine man interested in sex and kink-sex. Not intending to be rude, Frank does not want to waste anyone's time by entertaining fruitless interactions. Masculinity is of key importance to Frank, however he could also be interested in a more feminine partner.

Frank: I would say I definitely prefer masculine partners, but am willing to interact with a femme if I see we are interested in the same kinks. Then I know we will have fun.

1.3 The Desiring Subject: Weight

Hardy and Litdner (2017) coined the term "desiring user" through their research on Grindr in rural communities. "Desiring user" describes the subjectivity produced when desires and sexuality are mediated by technical devices. For most users, this mediation produces a shared reality and notions of the ideal user⁸⁵. Within Canada, standard Western notions of beauty are emulated and performed and, for men, this has resulted in an increased interest in muscular, chiseled, Greek god body types. Users commonly emphasize that they are "fit" and seeking individuals who meet their hegemonic understanding of fuckability as related to masculinity and muscles. Within my research, the users who most closely represent this phenomenon would be Frank, Gis, and Von because of an interest in masculinity and a muscular physique. Among all participants, there was an acknowledgement that Grindr favors a younger /slimmer user and Scruff is more favorable for those who are older and/or larger.

Users leave Grindr for many complicated reasons ranging from negative experiences to health concerns (Brubaker et al. 2016), but the majority of users continue to explore other applications. Throughout my interviews, objectification regarding physical fitness and weight was rampant and eventually sparked both Jordan and Rubberist to leave Grindr for Scruff and Growlr (another app). Jordan is 27 and weighs just over 300 lbs; Lucas weighs 230 lbs and, at

⁸⁵ Hardy and Lindter 2017 Constructing a Desiring User: Discourse, Rurality, and Design in Location-Based Social

48, is my oldest participant. Both users elaborated upon their reasons for leaving Grindr for greener pastures.

Jordan: It [Grindr] just dried up after a while and I started receiving more hate mail than serious inquiries. I instantly received more compliments on Growlr. It is more welcoming for bears, although masculinity is still emphasized.

Rubberist: As a fat, old, kink SOB, I left Grindr because I was not considered beautiful.

Few users can stay away from MSM networking applications simply because they are the most convenient way to meet strangers. Software engineers have been attentive to this need and have thus taken the Grindr model in more specialized directions. For larger users, such as Doggo, Jordan, and Rubberist, Scruff was a platform where they felt somewhat more accepted and validated as bears. Doggo uses both Grindr and Scruff, remaining unique in his consistent yet varied usage; his Grindr profile signals masculinity and he is also the smallest of the three users. Although users of Growlr are typically more interested in larger body types, they also emphasize an understanding of masculinity that has often left users like Jordan feeling as though they must choose between either being authentic or getting laid. Doggo and Jordan are both interested in finding sexual partners through their use of MSM applications, with Jordan opting to shift up his usage to maximize potential. In a sense, this has actually led to Jordan feeling more disconnected from the gay community through constantly being labelled as unfuckable. Rubberist responded in a similar fashion, although through his pre-existing location on the margins given his interest in kink was less bothered by this reality. Grindr is a space favoring chiseled bodies while Growlr is for bears. While this growing fracturing of digital spaces—resulting from experiences of marginalization—reflects varied reactions towards larger bodies, none have emerged as a consequence of racism.

1.4 The Desiring Subject: Race

Race is presented on Grindr but is generally considered to be more obvious than a definite sense of masculinity or femininity. Doggo identifies as mixed-race—primarily Latino—and is often coded as White on Grindr even when they have stated otherwise. Ultimately, this white-washing results in Doggo being regarded and treated by many users as Caucasian. For Doggo, this is a warped sense of white-passing privilege and may be a key factor in his continued desirability as an older and larger gay man enamoured with kink.

Doggo: I am very open with my race and identify as a mut. I am a bit of everything. People online do not seem to understand that and most of the time assume I am tanned.

Many users are placed within sexualized scripts that identify them as active or passive based on their race. Although fuckability is assembled alongside gender presentation, age, and other factors, race emerged as the most significant sexual signifier for respondents who experienced racism online. Von, who is Pilipino, details how he was commonly accosted on Grindr as a passive Asian, where his peers assumed he was a bottom. When his user profile picture changed and Von sported a beard, the type of attention he received flipped, as he was now being decoded as masculine and therefore a top. Although seemingly preposterous, Doggo also noted that when sporting a beard, he received a different kind of attention. Von was quick to point out the high level of racism he experienced on Grindr and noted that, when travelling to cities like Vancouver with a higher Asian population, he felt more accepted and faced less overt racism.

Von: Honestly, the racism on Grindr is what drives me to regularly leave the application. I received more negative attention or comments while living in Ottawa than when I moved back to Calgary in the last year.

Cameron: Have you noticed a change in overt racism on Grindr?

Von: I think it is less on the surface level now because it is more uncool and a clear dick move to do that. Just because it is not there doesn't mean the preference has gone away. ... In the gay community, a lot of ideals resemble a Caucasian authentic and you may run into the odd person who is not interested in white guys, but they are never aggressive about it and it's just not such an overt thing.

I felt that this was one of the most salient comments because it pointed towards such a clear double-standard. Despite negative experiences using the application, Von was nevertheless quick to point towards new social relationships that formed through the application.

Von: It doesn't foster community itself, but it gives people the opportunity to jumpstart new friendships. All of the gay friends I made when coming out in Calgary were people I met from Grindr, or friends of friends from this. Even in Ottawa, I made new friends through the app.

Adding some closure to this narrative, although Von identified as an occasional user during this process, I have learned that in the weeks following he has once again left Grindr. Although there were some redeeming qualities of the application, such as meeting new gay men, these motivations were no longer sustaining for Von and he turns towards other applications⁸⁶.

Racism on Grindr—particularly anti-Black racism—has been established through several online articles and academic inquiries (Chancellor 2015) that relied upon the online database douchebagsofgrindr.tumblr.com, featuring the most outlandish and offensive comments. Another respondent was Gis who is in his 20s and a Black, first-generation Canadian with roots from the Caribbean. Using Grindr between 2010 and 2011, Gis did not last longer than six months

⁸⁶ Personal Communication, June 1 2017

because of an unending torrent of racist abuse leading him to quit the app for five years afterwards. Many comments were needlessly sexually aggressive and the following describes interactions that occurred during the first online foray.

Gis: The dates I thought were cute—once I messaged them, they often responded "Not into Blacks" or "Sorry, I'm a top" without even asking me what I am ... The rude ones would say things like: "I want you to dominate me"; "I want you to penetrate me"; "Do you have a big cock?"; "I want a Black thug." Once, when I was interested in meeting, this guy sent me the picture of a monkey. I even once had an older man—a white man—approach me with around five thousand dollars to be his sex-slave for the weekend—which was too intense for me.

Once he felt ready to rejoin Grindr, Gis made their user headline "I am not a fetish" and tailored his profile to address the unconscious racism existing on Grindr (Profile 3).

Cameron: Could you explain your choice of user-profile—particularly the headline?

Gis: It was a conscious wall that I erected, to stop someone with hateful intentions before they even began to message me. This change has resulted in slightly less racist messages. I don't want to be approached solely based on my skin color.

Adding to intrigue, Gis is currently employed as an adult film star and this has also impacted his desire to be seen outside of sexualized racist archetypes. Gis still experiences racism through his continued usage of MSM applications; however, his pointed phrasing has aided in diminishing the unwelcome advances. Specifically, because of his work in porn, Gis will turn towards these applications to meet new people. Returning to the theme of community, Gis continues to use Grindr and Scruff to meet new people and is particularly interested in finding other black men for romantic/social encounters. This is not an overarching preference but because he has limited time and access to community spaces, using MSM applications are a

viable option to sate a desire for new social bonds. For users that are easily distinguishable based on their race, common experiences reveal racist and associated sexual stereotypes.

1.5 Conclusion

When asked if applications should play a role in regulating acceptable discourse—primarily in relation to race—participants were divided. Some expressed that such a change could fit within existing community standards available on Grindr, for example, which also encompasses user profile pictures. Other users expressed that using Grindr is a choice and because nobody is forcing one to stay on the application, then one has the agency to leave. Respondents who have experienced racism and femme-phobia online were enthusiastic towards this approach. Users are able to maintain anonymity online with Grindr and Scruff only policing nudity but not hate speech. Similar community standards exist on other similar applications, although they are more specialized than Grindr. This specialization has led to the ability to filter-out racialized categories which was regarded by many respondents as problematic.

Within the context of the responses analyzed, a shift has occurred on Grindr in the last few years which has caused a decrease in overt discrimination. The ideology has not gone away and has perhaps resulted in furthering the hegemony online, forcing some users off the application. Friendships can occur through finding users that have memberships in addition to their queer identity when these communities otherwise have limited physical spaces. Social bonds can also emerge from sexual encounters initiated through Grindr and is a common experience among respondents. This is of particular importance for respondents who, for a variety of circumstances either now or in the past, had few gay male friends and turned to the online world to fill this void. Where they turn online is also of crucial interest, as an assemblage of discourse and technological mediation inclines certain experiences over others. Users typically

have a strong understanding of this, often continuing to use Grindr and Scruff for their broad reach while also using other specialized applications.

Failure is difficult to conceptualize in this case, as it is less cut and dry than winning second place in a sporting competition. Even in this example, the focus could instead be on the journey that had resulted in said competition. Often repeated exposure to failure on Grindr has caused users to leave the platform for Scruff, although they may return. In general, experiences of marginalization relating to femininity, race, and weight, seem to endear my respondents towards sociability, even if sex was their ultimate goal. This perspective acknowledges a larger reality in which friendships as a way of life can be considered fulfilling, compared with an existence of constant sexual interactions. Kink sex also manifested as sexual fantasy which involves a literal sense of community, through attempt to organize on MSM applications. Not surprisingly, these applications can connect dispersed communities and allow them enhanced opportunities to connect with like-minded users. Conceptually speaking, these examples serve to elucidate experiences of failure within applications structured as virtual sex environment, favouring hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Broadly speaking, this thesis has been an exploration of hegemonic masculinity on Grindr and Scruff, relating to experiences of success and failure. To accomplish this, I undertook a literature review which influenced my approach of semi-structured interviews in completing a digital ethnography in Ottawa. My focal points included delving into experiences of marginalization and understanding some of them as queer failure, before relating them back to ongoing debates surrounding community and digital cruising. Grindr does not have an inherent capacity to form community for its users, so I argue it is most accurate to look at experiences shared by users, without claiming they are monolithic. Key findings coalesced around how users experiences virtual sex environments as desirable subjects in relation to their gender presentation, race, and physicality. Failure is a regular experience for users who are deemed unfuckable within discourses of desire, leading some to leave the applications or change their usage.

For users who were interested in kink sex, Grindr and Scruff presented a general virtual sex environment which they have successfully used to find new partners. My findings fit within my literature review, in that users experienced marginalization corresponding to racism and femmephobia. Fatphobia is also a dominant trend on Grindr and largess is conversely considered more attractive on Scruff. A queer potential was found to exist, most strongly among users seeking partners with similar community membership, or friendship from the application. Seeking friendship occurs under specific circumstances, which may involve changing applications from Grindr to Scruff. This is a strategic decision to be deemed more attractive within regimes of casual sex and is more radical when the orientation remained towards friendship.

My results build into existing theory, attending towards a potential in experiences of failure. For some users, this has resulted in a small re-orientation which questioned the nature of engaging with MSM applications. Ultimately, this was not as easy to position throughout my research because experiences of marginalization or isolation had less to do with failure in discourses of masculinity and were more concerned with the pervasive nature of racism. If you are looking for sex, you can surely find it. Friendship was a strong possibility, for users that were actively seeking new gay male friends. Ultimately, my findings build into existing theory through elaborating a link between failure on MSM applications and the discursive or technical considerations at play. Assemblage nicely describes the relationship between emerging homonormative masculinities in Canada and discourses of colonialism, racism, and masculinity coalesce online. This reality made it difficult for larger and feminine bodies to feel fuckable on Grindr, in relation to finding sex. Scruff presented more opportunities for new social interactions, with both applications being used more commonly by users experiencing marginalized masculinity, serving motivations outside of sexual activity.

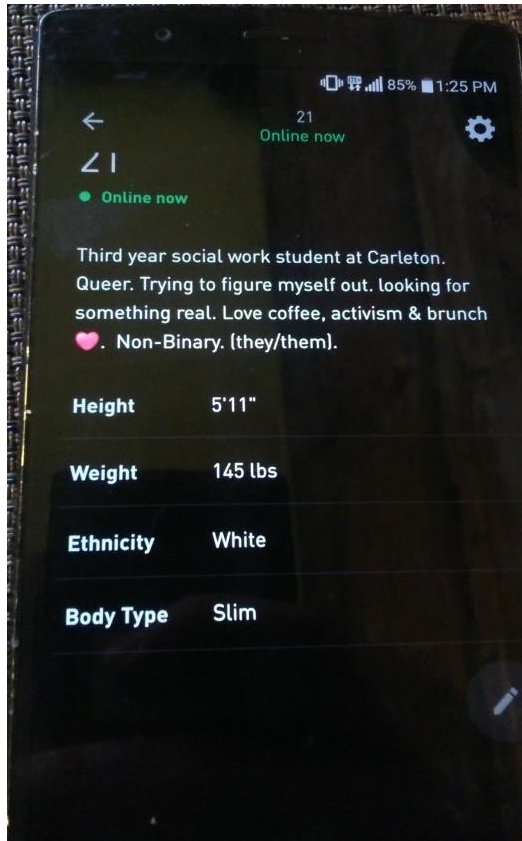
As my study consisted of qualitative methods, the aim has been to showcase specific case studies that have been overlooking in literature dealing with digital cruising on MSM applications. Critically speaking, a weakness of this research was that I was not able to screen research participants based on my assumptions of their experiences based on demographic information. I would have liked to include more participants who identified as Transgender or non-binary, however the limitations of my data collection period prevented this. Additionally, all participants researched are considered physically able-bodies and therefore my analysis was not able to address ableism online. Experiences of marginalization and failure could be re-examined paying attention towards linkage between community membership and experiences of failure.

Future research into Grindr and Scruff, or more general MSM applications, could explore the theme of surveillance which was identified in the interview process. Bigger than an acknowledgement that all users are sharing this space, links in the interview process existed that pointed towards George Cooley's looking glass theory. The notion of constantly being watched and watching others intrigued me, as it seemed similar to a type of institutionalized paranoid which has existed within male dominated institutions, including the army. Particularly if this were to be investigated from a psychoanalytic perspective which would utilize the paranoid position to understand this orientation. Either way, the themes of watching and being watched were present during my interview process and are deserving of more inquiry.

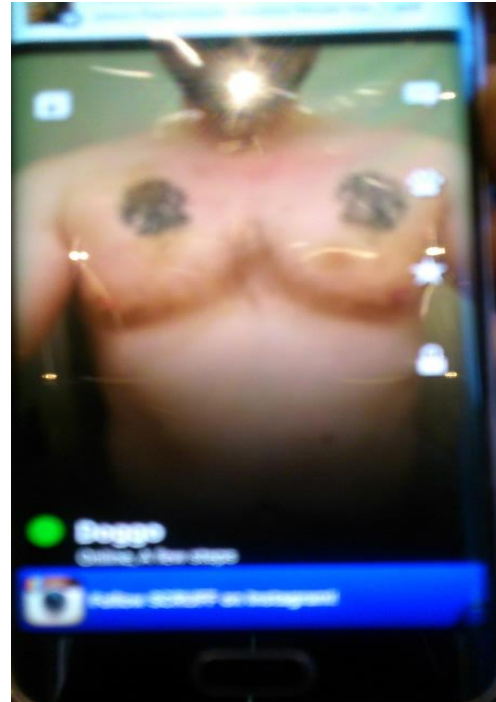
Ultimately, this research has attempted to showcase experiences of failure and marginalization, looking for a productive potential within or outside seeking sex. Although this potential exists on an individual level, in terms of how users changed their orientation based on experiences of discrimination. Failure can be productive on an individual level, but it was still fruitful for this research to inquiry into failure and the impact on desiring success on MSM applications. Hegemonic masculinity allows for men in a dominant or a subordinate position to access social male privilege, but for some users this was never a realistic option. Users in a subordinated position may have to contend with femmephobia, homophobia and racism, in the online and offline worlds. For many users, Grindr and Scruff are virtual sex environments and exist only in this fashion. This inquiry has attempted to outline the potential these applications have for users who, often because of experiences of failure, interact with MSM application as a social networking application.

Appendix: User Profiles

Profile 1: Fae

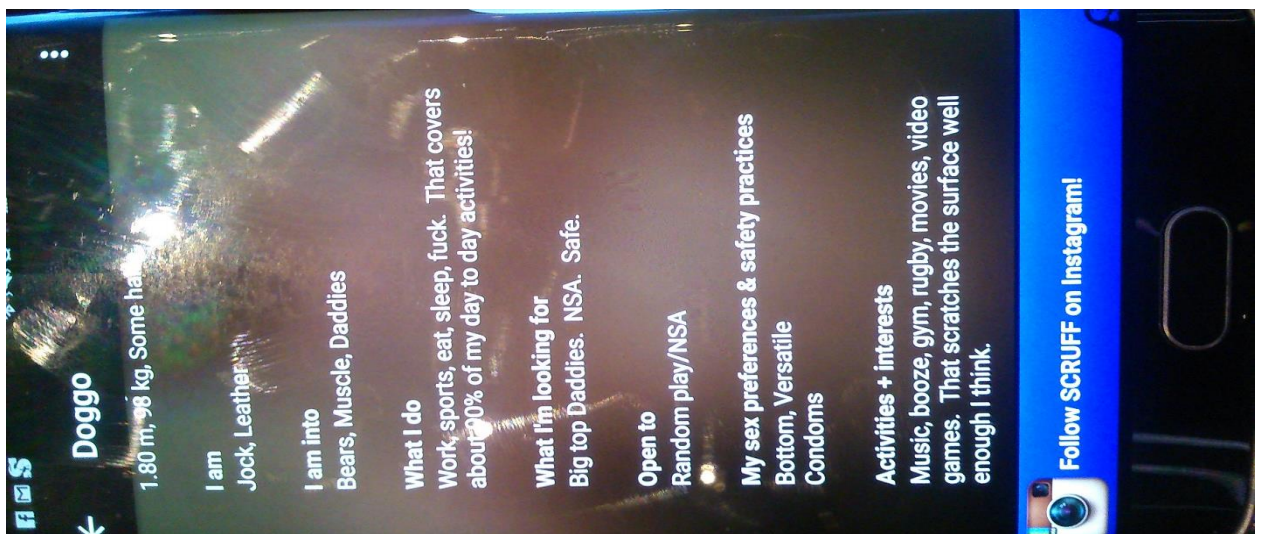


Profile 2: Doggo




P1: On Scruff

P2: On Grindr



P3: On Scruff

Profile 3: Gis




☆ Not a fetish. 26


● Online now


1 mile away

The guy you want is everything I'm not. Please go play your unconscious racism "preference" game with someone else. Don't be a coward and block or ignore people tell them if you are interested or not KARMA treat others the way you want to be treated.

Height	5'11"
Weight	165 lbs
Ethnicity	Black
Body Type	Muscular
Tribes	Jock

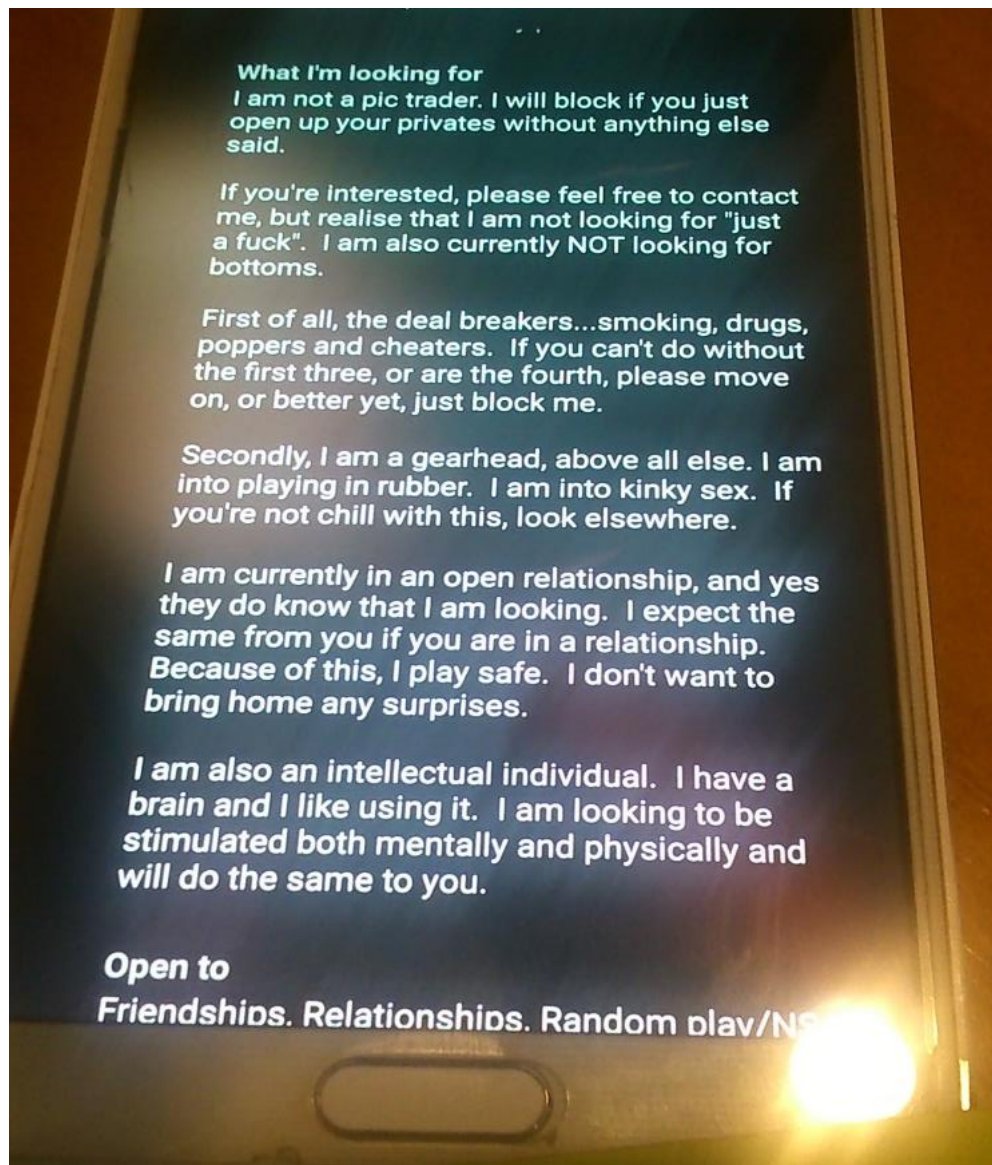






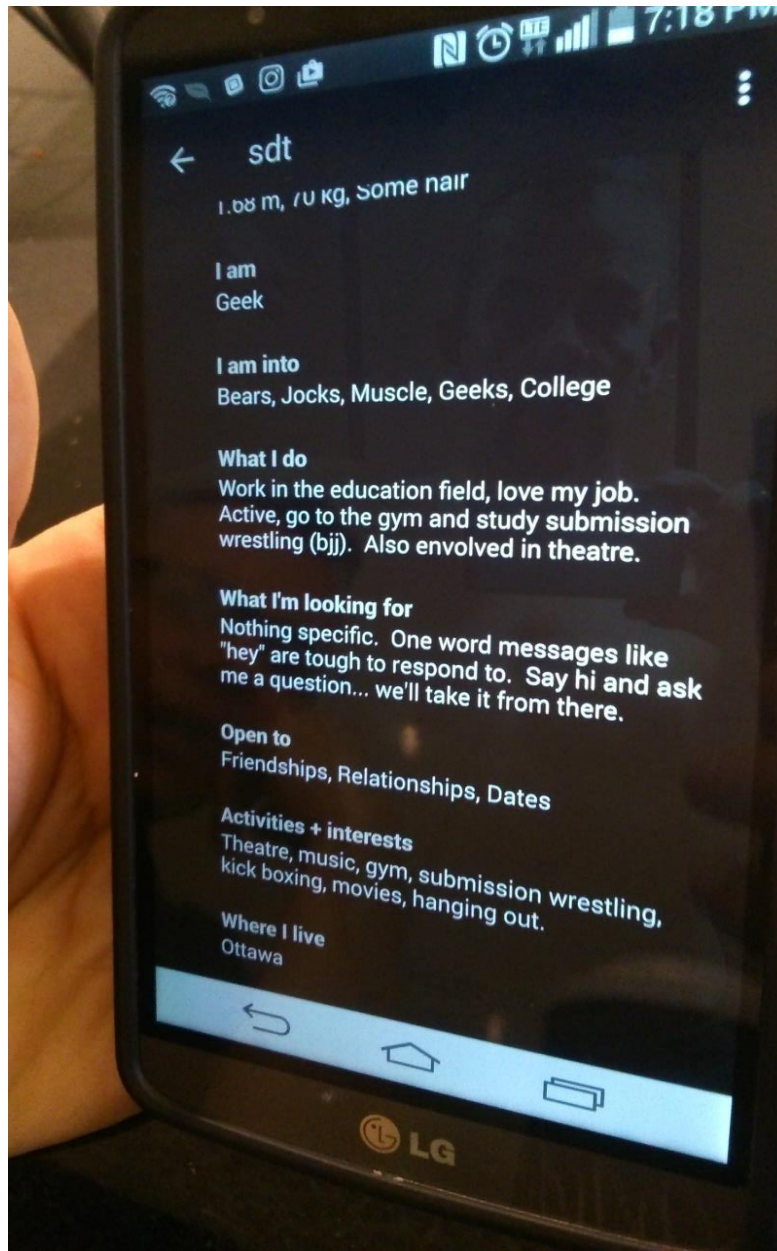
Advertisement

Profile 4: Rubberist

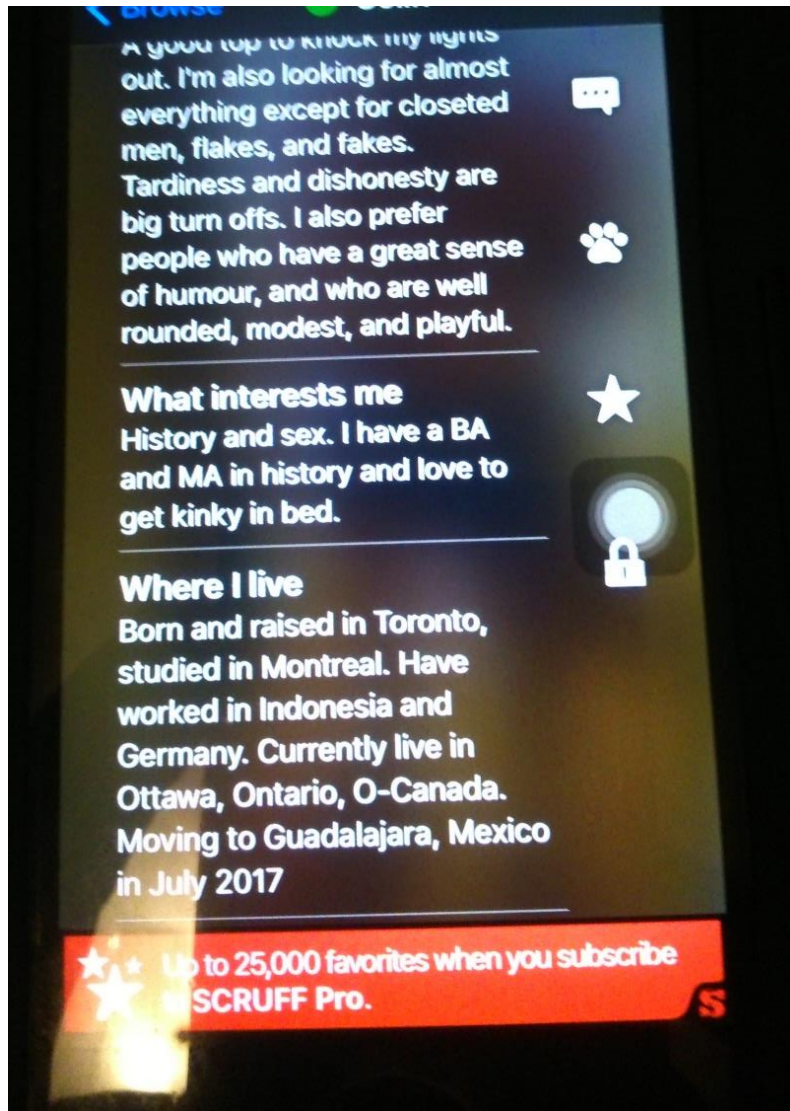


P1: On Scruff

Profile 5-SDT

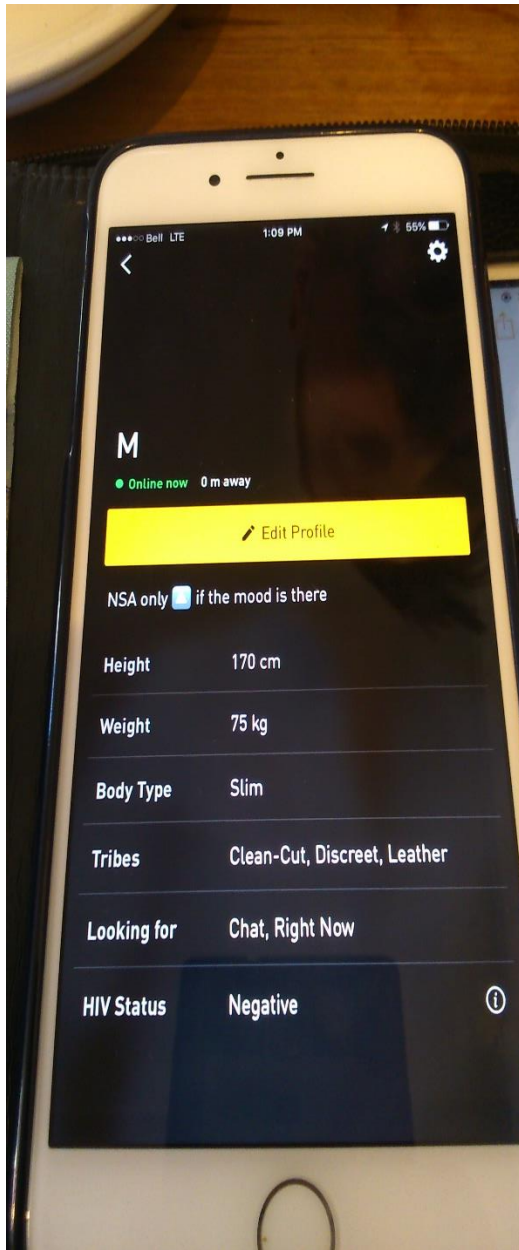


P1: On Scruff

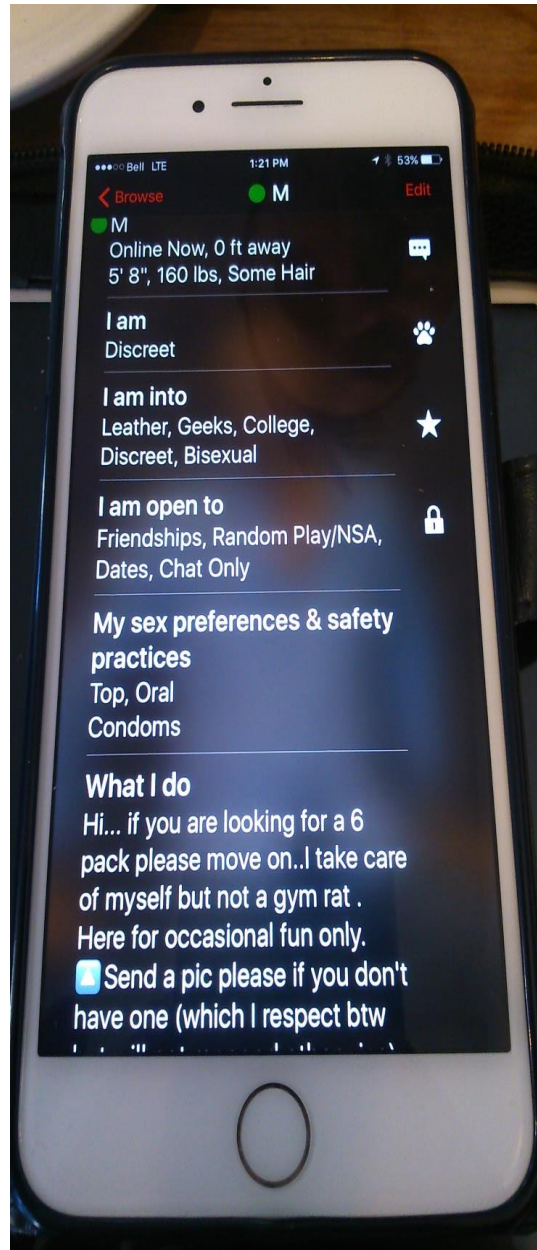


P1: On Scruff

Profile 7- Mich



P1: On Grindr



P2: On Scruff

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