

Digitalised and Internalised Homophobia: The Case of Grindr





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Summary

This case study discusses how a gay dating application is filled by anti-gay traits or well known as internalized homophobia that harms users to feel less wanted in the community. The desire of having masculine-gay partner becomes embodied in users to portray and be the image of this masculine-gay man. Users have to fill up their bio with preferences and setting up ideal images to be under the spotlight and receive uncountable messages. Finally, this case study aims to presents how the internalised homophobia in Grindr occur.

Introduction

Researches on Grindr are mostly about how gay men engage 'risky' sexual behaviours, HIV, or the production of the poor mental health of the gay men itself not about how are they thriving to be accepted in the community.¹ Based on these frequent researches on the online gay community, stereotyping gay men as those who are emotionally deprived, sexually active, and having STDs. The images, language, and proximity in Grindr helped the transformation of gay social media as a panoptic platform. It somehow creates particular terms and conditions on how to be gay, while punishing those who are not into the trend. Unrealistic body norms and expectation that is in the gay community, such as, having defined pecs and flaunting abs on their Grindr profile has created a portrayal of gay men in the contemporary gay lifestyle. Since that Grindr user creates their stereotypes based on how each user's surrounding have their standards of masculinity by the pictures, and how seductive other users are, those who cannot cope with the stereotypes will occur this internalised homophobia within the gay community.

Gay men as a part of the society need to be seen more than just a pathologic community since they are having fun in the digital media by showing their body parts.² Enguix and Gómez-Narvaéz also explain that exposing body parts through the digital platform is believed to rely on an asymmetrical process: we can be seen but not see, and that is why selfies have been considered as a narcissistic, exhibitionist, or self-branding practices.³ Therefore, sharing images is an essential part of being a gay man in a digital world since it is a way to validate their self as a worthy person in society.



Grindr uses words for filling bio of the users, name of the users, status, type, and other stuff which will end up using words to chat someone who fits their category that made the words on Grindr as a seductive persuading language for the users. "Forget star signs, the true way to discover what your potential partner is really like is through his Grindr bio" a quote by Stephen Watkins who thinks bio is the most critical part of choosing someone since it differs and could be self-interpreted.⁴ For Grindr users, bio is where the users could see what do other users want and how they self-describe themselves in this 'market' to have higher quality than the others, especially when it came into romantic and intimate words.⁵ Same as bio, giving names on Grindr could explain many things such as how closeted they are, and even they could make up names to disguise themselves in the application with fancy names that could attract more people to chat them without knowing their real names.⁶ Woo explained that some might engage on Grindr by just scrolling, browsing, and chatting, which will end up on organising casual hook-ups by pulling out flirtatious lines that have been Grindr's dominant orientation.⁷

Location, Grindr's unique feature to be aware of who might interact around the users on screen and continues 'in real life'.⁸ Being on Grindr also means that users are ready to have no privacy on users' location since it still shows the proximity of each other even by disabling the feature.⁹ This app has been criticised for its exact proximity of each user, which Grindr itself claimed that they are trying to increase the level of privacy of each user.¹⁰ By the short explanation before, this location-based application has its advantage and disadvantages which then still trigger the users to compete with other users by seeing every detail of the users around or even hook up with someone nearby.

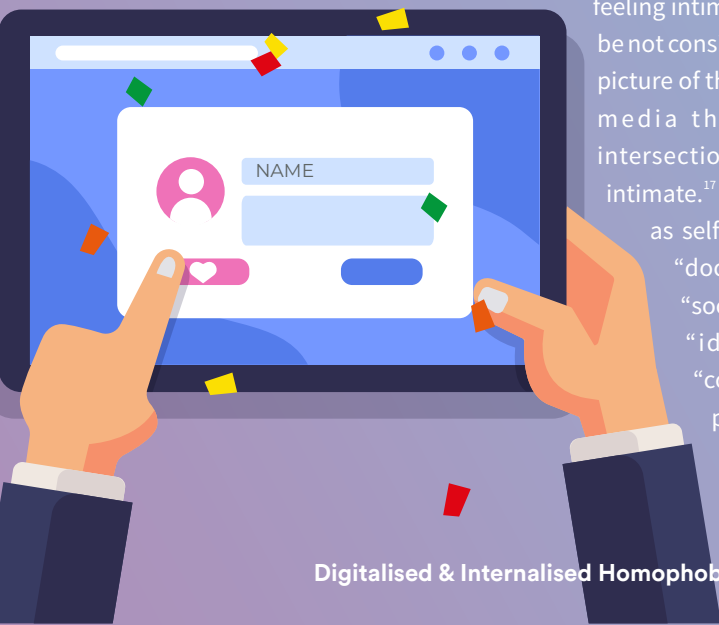
Gay dating app, such as Grindr, provided the profile picture feature to ensure that each user could look as best and perfect as they could to be persuaded since they are following the 'standards' on how to be gay that has been created as a stereotype but themselves. Body image issues, one of the most important concerns within gay men since the findings and surveys show that 84% of respondents said they felt under intense pressure to have a good body and Only 1% considered themselves "very happy" with their appearance.¹¹ Unrealistic body norms and expectation that is in the gay community, such as, having defined pecs and flaunting abs on their Grindr profile has created a

portrayal of gay men in the contemporary gay lifestyle.¹² However, as the standard of the gay community emerged digitally, it affected the beauty industry not merely in what they produce but in their consumers' pool as well. The gay community shapes a rather inclusive environment that normalises the use of 'beauty products' such as makeup and supplements daily. In the last half-decade, we have witnessed how beauty products are not limited to women anymore; men became part of the trend and could equally enjoy the products.¹³ Besides makeup and supplements, Photoshop, another tool to represent beauty by distorting the image so that the image could fit the beauty standards that they accept before uploading it to the internet.¹⁴

Representation of Sexualised Self Images

The phenomenon in digital media refers to a phenomenon which has been conceptualised by Guy Debord as 'The Society of Spectacle.' One of the most important attributes in this 'society of spectacle' is the declining of individual social life from 'being' into 'having,' and from 'having' into merely 'appearing.' In the society of the spectacle, life or personal identity changes into a representation which transforms into reality, or in Debord phrase "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."¹⁵

Grindr as an app that allows users to send and upload pictures has allowed the visual culture as a 'fascination' with display and visual that could please their sense of feeling intimate.¹⁶ In this case, a selfie will be not considered as a mere self-aesthetic picture of themselves, but as a discursive media that put someone on the intersection of public and private or intimate.¹⁷ Selfies have been considered as self-contained media, as a rapid "documenting" of the self, as a "sociocultural revolution" about "identity affirmation", as a "condition" of social media, as a political convergence of the



object and subject of photographic practice, as an act of conspicuous presumption, as spaces for identity manipulation or “selective self-representation”, and as a neoliberal, even narcissistic but increasingly normative mode of “self-branding.”^{18 19 20 21 22 23} They have also been considered as transformative and subversive elements as well as a political weapon.²⁴

Grindr's profile picture as the media of representing their image of a person and body into the digital media could be examined to understand users.^{25 26 27} By the use of profile pictures on Grindr, it is believed that the reproduction of gay community masculinity happened from how Grindr uses grid view, which facilitates users to examine every single user.²⁸ On Carl Bonner-Thompson's research, it shows that the most masculinity that is represented by the users are the hyper-sexualised and lifestyle masculinities.²⁹ Hyper-sexualised masculinity is produced from those who are exposing too much flesh, and those images generate skin on their profile pictures, and lifestyle masculinity could create contexts of being socially active such as taking pictures in the bar, beach, or touristic spots. Being fascinated by someone's profile picture would end up on trying to replicate their image since they are imprisoned by the media's regulation to be accepted in the desired list.

By those reproduced profile picture in the list of users, hegemonic masculinities are changing through a process of increasing objectification of men's bodies connected with a masculine desire to be desired.³⁰ Michel Foucault first brought the idea of imprisoned regulation in his book *Discipline and Punish* where the birth of imprisoned society emerge which cause order for those who obey the regulations and punishment for those who disobey the regulations and the embodied structured system that is made by other prisoners.³¹ Visual images on the platform are then becoming potent mediators of the lived experience of the body, our own, and others, giving us ways of conceptualizing and describing the bodily context of every individual.³² In pictorial images that are exposed in public and 'privately,' each might recognise likeness or difference; they identify themselves or find a different 'other,' an 'other' which, equally powerfully, serves to reinforce the image of our bodily existence.³³ By Callen's and Foucault explanation could be seen that if it is applied to the new media, especially Grindr as a gay social media, has made users of Grindr entered the world of the digital prison where the users itself create regulations and the creators of the application itself, embodied the users themselves create stereotypes of themselves, and for those who don't follow the regulations and following the embodied stereotypes of the gay community will be punished and in this case, alienated.



Bio as Words of Wisdom

Being alienated by the cause of having different images or having no picture at all is only a part of having some problems and issues in Grindr since Grindr itself is a chat-based social media. Given that sex and technology are each linked with discourses of risk, it is predictable that the use of mobile phone apps for sexual hook-ups or dating has received attention from health promotion and reproductive health researchers.³⁴ A public health conflation of HIV risk with digital media risks can overshadow how online and digital media allow same-sex attracted young people to explore and develop their identities through digital media.³⁵ Developing characters through bio and chats are also a way to dive into the risky, unsafe sex by Grindr users since it could be interpreted erotically by 'hyper-sexual' users.³⁶ This risky hook-ups done by Grindr users organised by talking to each other by using seductive texts do it 'right now'.³⁷

Grindr has this feature on setting up profiles which include the tab 'Looking For' and the option 'Right Now' which means looking for a casual hook-up(s). Casual hook-ups on Grindr involve a characteristic 'sexual script,' in which:³⁸

a

the sexual encounter involves unknown strangers, who are attractive in part because they are strangers;



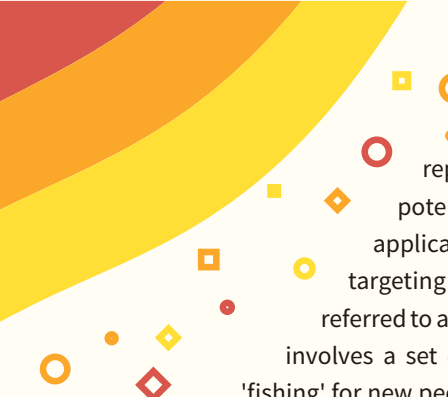
b

these potential partners are apprehended through a set of objectified attributes and characteristics (pictures, profiles, sexual preferences, etc.);

c

the sexual encounter is expected to be short-lived, with no repeat, and thus not develop into a relationship or lead to personal entanglements (of course this may happen, but it is rather rare and unexpected and then the whole thing becomes something else altogether).





As such, social mingling on Grindr appears as a repetition of similar encounters among a wealth of potential new partners made visible through the mobile application. It is often described as a consumption process, targeting others framed as objectified commodities (often referred to as 'meat' or 'fresh meat'). Such a consumption process involves a set of practices metaphorically evoked as 'hunting' or 'fishing' for new people with whom to initiate encounters with similarly oriented gay strangers conceived of as 'preys.'

Grindr had thus reinforced and reshaped the particular 'sexual script' of casual hook-up.³⁹ Grindr has also led to a privatisation of this particular scenario in which potential partners may be gathered or 'fished' in the course of everyday mobilities, and the encounter may subsequently be organised from, and in the home: Instead of securing some 'privacy' in public places for the initiation and management of fleeting sexual encounters, Grindr users introduce some amount of publicity into the home by turning it into a place to meet strangers.^{40 41} Grindr users develop what anthropologists have called a 'linguistic ideology' about ordinary conversation and social networking, a 'linguistic ideology' being a set of 'beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use.'⁴²

Linguistic ideologies index the interests of particular communities and a normative repertoire relevant to the choice of a particular form of language or discourse, or what a proper way to talk might be in a given set of circumstances. This might results on how Grindr users become reflexively and acutely aware of how ordinary conversation in general and in the more specific form of electronic conversations on social networking platforms enables relationships and 'affords' sociality, and how such an orientation is unsuitable for initiating a 'purely' sexual encounter with a stranger, leading them to develop specific patterns of digital interaction.

You Are Not a Lonely Online Man

The digital interaction brought up by Grindr is based on users proximity so that the user does not feel alone since there are several possible hook-up buddies around the user. Location-based social networking applications offer new ways to see, engage with, and represent those who occupy physical spaces. Early work on mobile ICTs focused on text messaging among teenagers, and with the rise of the geographic positioning system (GPS)-enabled smartphones, human-computer interaction researchers have produced a growing body of research on location-disclosure.^{43 44 45}

Communication geographers conceptualise the relationship between communication and space in a variety of ways. Tuan (1977) distinguishes between 'space' as a container for social action and 'place' as a subjective understanding of that space. Adams and Jansson (2012), likewise, provide a framework for considering when and how communication 'textures' subjective experience of a place as opposed to 'structuring' one's interactions within a space. The distinction between space and place can help differentiate between the technological affordances of Grindr as space and how structural properties of a physical location impact these affordances. Likewise, the place allows us to account for how subjective experiences of Grindr are textured by individuals' interactions and experiences of the space Grindr as an app provides.

Location awareness, moreover, raises new questions about community and boundaries. Sutko and De Souza e Silva present a taxonomy of location-aware systems that distinguish between types of information shared (place names vs. GPS coordinates), whether the information is shared with strangers or known contacts, and the nature of communication.⁴⁶ With Grindr, GPS coordinates are stocked with a server, which keeps the exact location private but uses it to calculate geographic proximity to others. Only this distance is shared with other users. This allows for meeting proximate strangers without having to identify known contacts or socially defined place names.⁴⁷ At the same time, though, this means Grindr co-situates geographically proximate users in a way that transcends and conflates socially defined places and neighbourhoods.



The Making of Internalised Homophobia by the UX

Internalised homophobia merely is when homosexuals are stereotyped negatively and oppressed by the surrounding society, which then results on how the homosexual society also believe de discourse of homophobia.⁴⁸ Since that Grindr user creates their stereotypes based on how each user's surrounding have their standards of masculinity by the pictures, and how seductive other users are, those who cannot cope with the stereotypes will occur this internalised homophobia. An example of internalised homophobia that happened is the discourse of, “No fat, No fem” which is a thing in Grindr, which means not into fat guys, not into feminine guys. This discourse of being exclusive in the gay society projected hate towards homosexuals who do not fulfill what makes the 'market' demands.

Fulfilling the demand, or as Foucault said, being in order, could be a hard thing to do. Fixing body image is one of the most crucial things for gay communities to get accepted into the list of desired men.⁴⁹ According to researchers Olivia Foster-Gimbel and Renee Engeln, one-third of the gay men they surveyed reported experiencing "anti-fat bias" among those who were not classified as overweight by the Body Mass Index.⁵⁰ Unrealistic body standards that are expected in the community, such as having tall body, muscular, big genitals, and other 'manly' features as the epitome of being a modern gay.⁵¹ This explains that by expecting the gay community itself to have a nice male genital organ, or being referred to as 'meat,' is the base discourse of being racist towards the gay community.

Besides race, age is also a concern in the Gay Community. "For me, older gay men came to symbolize the one thing more inspiring than heartbreak: rebirth. These guys had been through the emotional throes of dating, and ultimately, they had been able to fall in love again – even multiple times. I needed to know their secrets."⁵² This statement somehow explains that intergenerational love is a thing in the Gay Community. Combining age and body built, gay terms such as Twink, Hunk, Twunk, Bear, and others exist to be some certain fetish for a gay individual. This fact shows that some race is having a higher hierarchy in the gay community since the gay community itself discriminates races. On the other hand, there are also specifications of men that are preferred in the 'market.'

Gay Asians, as a non-white, non-black, but a part of the people of colour have received homophobic-racism. The line "You have a big genital for an Asian" is a phenomenon in the gay community since the stereotype of Asian genitals have been placed in every mindset.⁵³ Asian has been stereotyped as the submissive race since the stereotypes are saying that they have little bodies, nerds, weak, and other stereotypes that is ever heard in the discourse.

Conclusion

Gays, as a community has turned Grindr, media to connect them with potential lovers and 'Flings' into a pool of homophobic homosexuals. The images, language, and proximity in Grindr helped this gay social media as a panoptic platform. It creates order towards those who are following the terms and condition on how to be gay. At the same time, it punishes some gays who are not into the trend. Images that spread on Grindr has created standardisation on how each user should look so that they could get grabbed in 'market.' For the language, being seductive and looking for instant hook-ups without any romantic notion are the ways to get picked in this game of thirst. However, the most important part of being picked is the users' proximity on how close are they towards those hyper-sexual men.



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