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(Take Off your Masc: The Hegemonic Gender Performance of Gay Males on Grindr)

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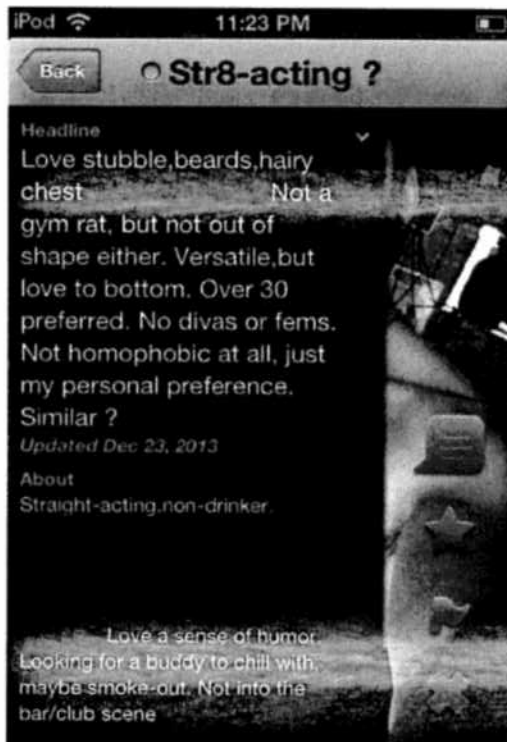
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Take Off your Masc: The Hegemonic Gay Male's Gender Performance on Grindr

Duncan Shuckerow

The hegemonic Grindr clone is a gay male Grindr user who enforces the privileging of traditional masculine gender performance and condemns effeminacy. Through this project's own field work along with the website "douchebagsofgrindr," the hegemonic Grindr clone is here within analyzed. Drawing upon the theory of hegemony articulated by Gramsci, a historical analysis of the 1970s urban gay male clone, and contemporary analysis and research, the project argues the hegemonic Grindr clones, while only a minority group of Grindr users, rules over the cyberspace as sexual gatekeepers. Hegemonic Grindr clones maintain their privileged status on the application through depicting and identifying themselves, along with their desired mates, as traditionally masculine, proudly gay, and passionately femmephobic on their individual profiles. Finally, the project also argues that while hegemonic Grindr clones attempt to enforce hegemonic masculinity and receive substantial consent by other users, there is a subset of radical, counter-hegemonic users who contradict and even openly denounce them.

Grindr, Masculinity, Queer, Gender performance, Hegemony, Gay clone, Femmephobia



“Str8-acting?: Love stubble, beards, hairy chest [...]
Not a gym rat, but not out of shape either. Versatile,
but love to bottom [...]. No divas or fems. Not
homophobic at all, just my personal preference.

Similar?” (*Illustrated left*). This is typical rhetoric
found on the gay male social networking application
‘Grindr,’ espoused by the “hegemonic Grindr clone,”
a term which this project devises. This hegemonic
Grindr clone is a user of the application who displays
and identifies himself (along with his desired mates)
as traditionally masculine, proudly gay, and

passionately femmephobic. Other examples/instances of such rhetoric include phrases such as
“masc4masc,” “muscular no weaklings,” and a long list of racial “preferences” such as “no
Asians or blacks” and “love black cock.” This project analyzes these forms of rhetorical devices
along with visual presentations to depict the ruling class of hegemonic masculine gay men on the
“world’s biggest mobile network of guys” (Grindr.com). It also draws upon the theory of
hegemony articulated by Gramsci, a historical analysis of 1970s urban gay male clone culture,
and contemporary analysis and research to formulate the term hegemonic Grindr clone, a
historic, systemic, fetishized, minority ruling elite.

To thoroughly analyze the hegemonic Grindr clone, this project employs two forms of
data collection. The first is the project’s own data collection, obtained through searching

Grindr's location-based¹ list and 'screenshooting' various user's profiles. Unfortunately, the location-based element of Grindr restricts all users from viewing other users beyond a fifty-mile radius, which has led the project to utilize the international submission-based blog website, "DouchebagsofGrindr.com." This blog, hosted by *Tumblr.com*, receives screenshot submissions from around the world by Grindr users who seek to mock and ridicule users they deem "douchebags." The vast majority of exposed douche-bag users have traits of a hegemonic Grindr clone, and therefore this project has included their profiles in its research. DouchebagsofGrindr allows the project to argue that hegemonic Grindr clones do not only exist in its observable areas but is a U.S.-wide (even international) elite. This argument is further substantiated by U.S. journalists and international bloggers such as Jayson Flores, Michael Bennett, Mathew Rodriguez, and Dale Cooper and YouTube video-makers such as Will Means, Eric Angelo and Kory Desoto and Rice Roll Production who all voice similar analyses of a group of hegemonic Grindr clones.

These sources (though not explicitly articulated as such), along with this project, identify three leading tactics the hegemonic Grindr clone deployed to retain power as "sexual gate keepers:" traditional masculinity, racism and femmephobia. Regrettably, this project is unable to treat the complexity of all of these issues and consequently only an analysis of masculinity and femmephobia will be dealt here within. Racism is an enormous issue within the gay male community and deserves a full and thorough analysis, due diligence which is outside the scope of this project. It is our hope that this project begins the intellectual discussion of the Grindr cyberspace and further analyses will be written to extend the work (Cohen; Stockton; Muñoz). That being said, while racism may not be directly discussed here, it would be impossible to

¹ Project location sites include: North and West Chicago, Illinois; North Phoenix, Arizona; Midtown New York City, New York; and North Miami.

ignore the intrinsic racism and classism within the gay community and consequently the Grindr cyberspace which this project acknowledges and by which it is informed.

The United States' gay male community is an incredibly diverse and complicated one, having at once separate and intimate relations with sex and gender non-conformists. While by definition all self-identifying gay men desire same-sex romantic and/or physical intimacies, the sexual and what Judith Butler would refer to as gender performances are extremely multifaceted. Butler argues we must consider gender as “a *corporeal style*, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ itself carries the double-meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential,’” it is “a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (“Performative Acts” 522). Sexually, gay men engage in countless forms and positions having sex with anywhere from one to bath house-full’s of men in positions from traditional missionary to double-penetration on a sex swing. Some gay men only have sex with other men with penses while others have sex with trans*² people whose sex and gender expression are varying and unassociated. Gender expression is just as varied, from wearing traditional male-identified clothing and using terms such as ‘dude’ and ‘bro’ to wearing dresses and high-heels and only answering to female pronouns. People who identify as gay men are exceptionally versatile, especially in their sexual and gender performances.

Of course, these performances do not exist within a vacuum; they are dictated by a variety of circumstances such as their personal, social, economic and/or spatial preferences and realities. Within urban environments, the gay male community seems to be particularly diverse, having both a more accepting environment and number of diversifying neighbors. Because of

² Asterisk connoting an inclusiveness of all transgender, transsexual, gender variant, gender non-conforming, gender-fluid, gender fucked people.

these privileges, modern day urban gay men appear to blend sex and gender expressions, sporting full beards, skinny jeans, flannel button-downs and purses and desiring sex with fellow gender-blending men. There is a minority group, however, which either religiously maintains traditional masculine gender performance or separates their fluid gender performance from their sexual performance; the hegemonic Grindr clone.

In U.S. urban centers, many gay men present themselves in a variety of gendered ways from the traditional to the effeminate, however when regarding sex, a significant number perform an extreme form of traditional masculinity. At the gym, bar, club, and on social networking applications like Grindr, these gay men collapse their multidimensional identities and dedicate themselves to traditional masculinity. This performance of traditional masculinity perpetuate a discourse that an attraction to men is an attraction to masculinity. Even for men who may perform in non-traditional gendered ways offline, they are expected to perform, and be attracted to, traditional masculine ways online in the sexual realm. Of course, it could be argued traditional heterosexual masculinity would not include being penetrated during sexual intercourse, however in the gay male community, even penetration has been masculinized. This is a hegemonic Grindr clone performance, beards, bulging muscles and crotches, crass and arrogant vernacular and all.

Now, what exactly is Grindr? As the application's CEO and founder Joel Simkhai states in a YouTube video presented at an entrepreneur conference, Grindr is "the largest network of gay men, exclusively gay men, in the world," averaging over 5 million users worldwide. The app is for all Smart-phones and is GPS enabled, allowing users to view other user's profiles within a 50 mile radius to "find a new date, buddy, or friend" (Grindr.com/learn-more). Users are "encouraged" to have a user-name, profile picture, general stats (age, height, body build,

ethnicity, “tribe”), headline and an “about me” section so as to effectively “match someone else’s search” (grindr.com/blog). Users then scroll down their Smart-phone screens (*Illustrated Right*), viewing other user’s profile pictures until one catches their eye. They then tap on the desired user’s picture which transitions to a view of that user’s profile. The user then has the options



to ‘chat,’ ‘star,’ ‘flag’³ or ‘block’ that user. The blocking option is for undesirable users, which blocks both users from accessing one another’s profiles.

Because of Grindr’s location-based system, users who might otherwise never interact with one another are placed within the same cyberspace. Grindr literally breaks down the walls around us, as Dale Cooper explains, putting everyone within a 50 mile radius within the same place. Even passers-by will pop-up in user’s search lists, which ushers in all walks of life. Cooper argues this is the reason for the outspokenness seen on Grindr, with users candidly espousing their racist, classist, muscle obsessed, and femmephobic discourses. Before Grindr, gay men had segregated spaces chosen by racial, sexual, economic and even gender performance categories. As he states, “[on Grindr] bodies of all types congregate without the usual geographic and social barriers” (Cooper). For example, men who did not “prefer” black men would go to bars and clubs which had predominantly white patrons, and therefore never had to espouse “no

³ Starring retains that user in the subject’s “favorite” list so no matter where they are located, they have the ability to view and talk to them while the flag option notifies Grindr that that user may be either under-aged or inappropriate.

blacks.” Without these barriers, Grindr users erect linguistic fortifications to fend off undesirables. In this way, Grindr is an incredibly contentious and heated space in which the ruling hegemonic clone must enforce strict regulations.

This combative element of Grindr has led many critics to scorn the app as Michelangelo Signorile from The Huffington Post does when he asks Simkhai “[Grindr has received] so many different criticisms, people who say it reduces gay men to, you know, very superficially, meeting through photographs. It forces people to conform to an aesthetic, what do you have to say about that?” Simkhai responds:

yeah, yes! Absolutely, good! Absolutely... I am very proud if Grindr has forced us to up our game: brush our teeth, comb our hair, go to the gym, eat right, be a healthy person [...] Listen, look, we're men. We, we, we visualize... we see before we hear, before we think, before we do everything else. And it's that visual that is so important to us. That's who we are! I haven't changed that, that's what our evolution has taught us to do, and I think that's fantastic”

This proves that not only is Grindr's elitism present, it is institutionalized, supported by Grindr's leading clone, its founder and CEO. In this theory, men are by nature visually motivated, responding to “healthy” bodies, those that follow the codes of body maintenance and masculinity. This is the tyranny of the visual, expecting men to prescribe to, and desire, muscular body standards (Stephens). It follows that while muscles require working out, the desire for muscles is inborn, natural. This discourse is perpetuated alongside the gay rights' mantra that homosexuality is natural, attempting to rationalize and normalize themselves and outcast descanters.

This naturalization is also a form of enforcement of traditional U.S. gender/sex discourses, lead by what Mathew Rodriguez terms Grindr's one-percent stating:

What does someone in the 1 percent of Grindr's sexual economy look like? He has white skin, he has a weight that begins with '1,' he is cisgender, in his 20s, completely able-bodied, has a full head of hair, has either slightly defined or very defined abs, has a dusting of body hair, is masculine and is HIV-negative. These men are what you might call "sexual gatekeepers." Just as the 1 percent of America's economy... Grindr's 1 percent has the privilege of determining who has access to them and when and where they will get serviced (Rodriguez)



This identification of a Grindr "sexual gate keeper" appears to be a more specified version of Simkhai's visually stimulated man. Unfortunately for Simkhai, Rodriguez believes this group to be a very small number of users, akin to the Wall Street one-percent, who rule over Grindr cyberspace. Another applicable analogy is to the Gramscian theory of hegemony, as Grindr's elite rule through a relationship of force and consent. Of course, Grindr users are a far cry from the Italian fascists under whose regime Antonio Gramsci was writing; nevertheless, the theory of power relations is relatable. As he states in his Prison Notebooks, "the 'normal' exercise of hegemony [...] is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally [...] the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion" (75). While

Grindr is not a police state enforced by violence, Grindr's one-percent works within these same frameworks, maintaining power gaining consent through force.

Gramsci's theory has already been modernized by James Messerschmidt and his theory on the formation of misogyny, "hegemonic masculinity." In a more recent essay written with R.W. Connell, the phrase is defined as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (832). Much like Gramsci's hegemony, hegemonic masculinity is enforced by a "ruling class" of men, a one-percent minority, which is supported by the consenting majority, both men and women alike. Men who "perform" hegemonic masculinity not only privilege masculine gender performances, they disdain and condescend femininity, which Messerschmidt argues is the enactment of misogyny. Other men, and women, who do not openly denounce this operate as the consenting majority, allowing for the continuation of the structure. Messerschmidt then argues that gay men have a version of this hegemonic masculinity, but fails to theorize any further than that. This project advances this argument, asserting that not only do heterosexual and homosexual men perform and enforce misogyny, they also perform and enforce femmephobia, the fear of effeminacy regardless of a person's sex. Furthermore, while heterosexual hegemonic masculinity is extremely toxic, gay hegemonic masculinity is in fact lethal, as it appears to come from within.

In regards to misogyny, gay men's relationship to femininity gives the illusion that they are somehow a part of the women's community. As previously stated, there is a group of gay men who perform in gender fluid ways, many times including a feminine performance such as effeminate posture, responding to female pronouns, and even wearing female-identified clothing. As Thomas Linneman explains in his essay, this group has historically been the most commonly portrayed gay men in the media, creating a discourse that all gay men are feminine. Gay men

deal with this stereotype in many different ways, the two most radical being hyper-masculization and hyper-feminization. This project argues that both of these performance enforce misogyny, however, the performance of femininity is achieved much more poisonously. An example of this enforcement is given by Yolo Akili as she recounts, “I was at a gay club in Atlanta with a good friend of mine who is a heterosexual black women. While dancing in the club, a white gay male reached out and grabbed both her breasts aggressively” (everydayfeminism.com). Experiences like this are commonly discussed in feminist circles and are blamed on cultural patriarchal misogyny. This project argues instead that it is because of a gay male acceptance of stereotyped discourse of gay male femininity that they feel an intrinsic sisterly relationship to women. This is, nevertheless, an assumption of ownership of the female body, a painfully misogynistic belief. No matter how feminine a gay man is, they are still men and therefore the touching of a female body without consent is an enforcement of hegemonic misogyny.

In regards to the enforcement of femmephobia by gay men, masculine performing gay men enforce it upon feminine performing gay men. The enforcement is the most apparent, as Dale Cooper argues, on social networking applications like Grindr. In the same way Grindr leads to unfiltered racism, it also leads to vicious femmephobia. Headline and about me sections commonly espouse statements such as “if you talk and confetti/feathers/a purse comes out... WAY TOO GAY FOR ME!,” “no fems,” and

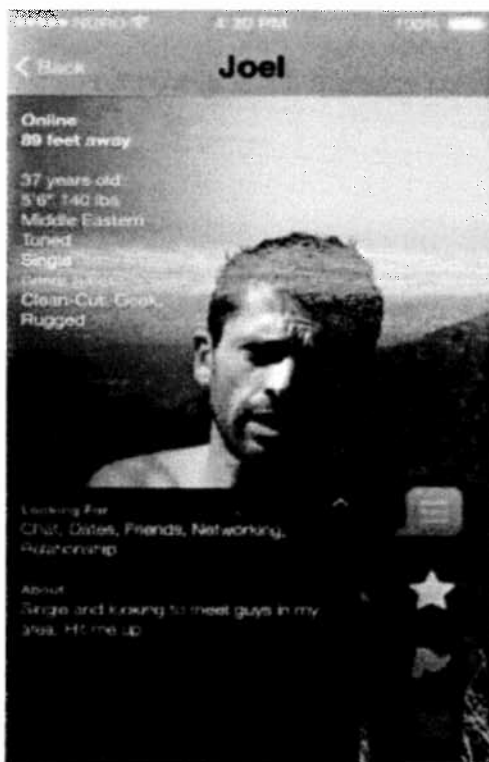


“Masc[uline] musc[ular] only.” Many times, in accordance with Joel Simkhai’s naturalization of masculinity in men, users make statements such as “I am NOT into men that sound, look, or act like females. I am a man, you should be too” (picture above from douchebagsofgrindr.com) and “If I wanted to date someone feminine I would be straight and with a girl.” Another enforcement technique is the “block” option in which users are able to bar access to their profile from undesirable users. While no notification is sent to the blocked user informing them they have been blocked, any messages sent between them are deleted and the user suddenly disappears from the user’s list of men nearby. Blocking undesirable users is not only strictly enforced; it is also threatened by some users such as one who stated “no blacks or fems. Will block.” These are all systematic enforcements of hegemonic femmephobia, aimed at discouraging gay male effeminate gender performance. Veiled under personal preference and naturalized discourses, gay male hegemonic masculinity is incredibly lethal, targeting both female and gay male femininity.

What exactly does it mean to perform traditional masculinity in a cyberspace like Grindr? As Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway term it, cyberspace is “an imaginary space that exists in, on and between ‘computational devices’” (1). This virtual space is explained by Linda Duits: “[bodies] do not exist in cyberspace the way they do in the offline world... the gender one expresses to the world on the other side of the screen can be changed in a few seconds: it can be chosen” (5). This theory depicts a gloriously emancipatory fluid world for queer⁴ subjects in which the restrictions of binary gender and sexualities is broken to allow for fluid expression. While this may be the case for general online portals such as blogs, on a networking application such as Grindr it appears to be fanciful. As previously discussed, Grindr’s cyberspace maintains

⁴ Used here as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual, non–heteronormative individuals.

a system of hegemonic hierarchy in which masculinity is privileged by the consenting majority. One reason for this could be the anxiety of eventually meeting other users in person. Unlike Duits' theory of free, bodiless queer cyberspace, most Grindr users desire other users to find them attractive, or masculine, enough to meet up with. As a result of this, many users perform as masculinely as possible to be desirable to the greatest number of people, increasing the possibility of meeting one. As a result, Grindr's sexual gatekeeper identifies himself as 'masc.'



The first way in which Grindr users display their masculinity is in the profile settings which offers pre-selected gay male gender and/or sexual categories, or “tribes.” Tribes, as explained by Grindr’s founder and CEO, Joel Simkhai (*Visual below: profile*), “allow you to identify as a member of a community or group that best describes you. So, whether you’re a Bear, Clean-Cut, Daddy, Discreet, Geek, Jock, Leather, Otter, Poz, Rugged, Trans, or Twink, there’s a Tribe for you” (see appendix for full glossary of categories). Most of these terms are well known within the gay male community,

though not typically discussed as legitimate categories. Some of these only have purely personality expression connotations such as “clean-cut” and “geek,” while others have explicitly sexual purposes and are more readily used by gay men, such as “leather” and “poz.” “Tribe” is also only one of a series drop-down categories, the others being age, height, weight, body type, ethnicity, relationship status and what the user is “looking for.” There is also the less restrictive “headline” and “about me” sections in which the user is able to give brief descriptions of

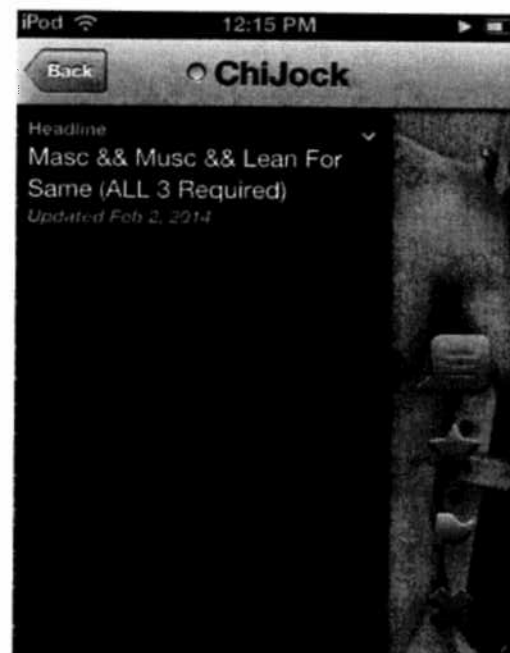
themselves, all of which is overlaid the user's profile picture, which is, although not always, typically the user himself. While Grindr does not require any of this information to be given for a user to search and talk to other users, Simkhai, Grindr's CEO, does recommend, "the more fields you fill out about yourself the more likely you will match someone else's search" (grindr.com/blog). Also, in typical capitalist fashion, users are given the option to, for a *small* fee of \$11.99 per month, identify, and search under, multiple "tribes," along with other "perks" of a "Grindr Xtra" subscription.

Grindr's tribes can be analyzed by returning to Judith Butler and her queer theory analysis of identity and sexuality in her essay, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." As she explains, "[gender] identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (224). While Grindr and its formation of tribes may appear to be community empowerment rallying tools, the fact that they are pre-selected inherently makes them regulatory. By depicting tribes as gay 'communities,' Simkhai constructs them into points of which users can rally. Furthermore, because users are not *forced* to choose a tribe of which to belong, tribes are able to exist unquestioned on Grindr. Users feel a freedom to choose, situating tribes within an uncontested, latent position. Grindr tribes therefore utilize both the discourse of choice and community rallying to *persuade* users to conform within exceptionally confining categories.

In regards to the specifically sexual tribe categories, the question becomes "[can] sexuality even remain sexuality once it submits to a criterion of transparency and disclosure, or does it perhaps cease to be sexuality precisely when the semblance of full explicitness is achieved?" (225). Here, Butler questions the queer obsession with explicit labeling as she argues

that disinfects precisely what should never be sanitized. Sex is, by nature, an ambiguous and dirty activity; however, when one attempts to label and define it, it loses its intrigue. This obsession was institutionalized in the '80s in gay bars across the United States in which codes were enforced for identifying sexual positions. Gay men would fold color-coded bandanas in their back pockets so as to signal to the other bar patrons what they were interested in sexually. For example, a navy blue bandana folded in the right pocket that connoted that man was interested in the insertive role during anal sex (Gay Hanky Codes). In the '90s those signals began to dwindle and a more verbal communication began, such as the verbal titles of “top” connoting an interest in the insertive role in anal sex. There have also been more specific titles such as “leather daddy” which connotes not only the insertive sexual role but also an interest in leather accessories and father-like dominant gender performance. Those self-identifying titles were relatively fluid depending on personal, regional and or economic situation all of which has been consolidated on Grindr. Tribes condense and confine users into pre-selected, generalized categories which completely disinfect sexuality and gender expression.

Gender expression is also articulated in some users' 'headline' and 'about' sections as they attempt to perform their gender identity. As previously stated, Butler argues that gender performance must be constantly “sustained and repeated” (522) for cultural survival with severe consequences in place for anyone who fails. Gender is performed on Grindr in various forms, for the sexual gatekeeper it is articulated through



the usage of traditionally masculine depictions and statements. Some hegemonic Grindr clones perform their masculinity through pictures of their stereotypically masculine body parts such as body hair and flexed muscles. These pictures are meant to intrigue other users to tap on their profile in which many of them list various hegemonic masculine identifications and desires. Headlines will include phrases such as “masc4masc” and “JocksOnly” and about sections such as “laid back, sports, beer, movies. Dude into dude things” and Masc && Musc && Lean For Same (ALL 3 Required)” (*Illustrated above*). Thus, Grindr’s sexual gatekeepers perform their gender performance through masculine body depiction and rhetorical espousal for self, and partner, masculinity.

Combining these rhetorical devices with Grindr tribes and femmephobia complete the sexual gatekeeper’s enforcement of hegemonic masculinity, however, that does not situate them within historical contexts. Without these contexts it would be easy to discount sexual gatekeepers as simply a twenty-first century phenomenon, an unfortunate simplification of a complex history. Far predating Grindr’s sexual gatekeepers is the infamous 1970s “gay clone,” defined by a self-proclaimed clone himself, Martin Levine, as “not only real men, but real *gay* men” (62). Much like the hegemonic Grindr clone, gay clones sought one form of sex: “Hot sex. Heavy sex. Rough sex. Gay sex. But decidedly masculine sex. The clone ‘took it like a man’ and he also ‘gave’ it like a man” (79). Levine had a very specific theory on the gay clone’s psychology arguing they were “gay men [who] enacted a hypermasculine sexuality as a way to challenge their stigmatization as failed men” (5) and “existing stereotypes about male homosexuality” (4). This departure from the gay stereotype is explained by Levine’s editor Michael Kimmel: “[n]o more were gay men the ‘pitiful effeminates’... the inverts, men trapped in women’s bodies. Gay men were real men, and their sense of themselves as gay was shaped by the same forces by

which they experienced themselves as men: traditional masculinity” (Levine 1). These “pitiful effeminate” were the clone’s predecessors, termed as fairies, queers, and limp-wristed queens in the early twentieth century. George Chauncey’s essay, “Trade, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood” describes this time in gay history which existed primarily in large U.S. cities such as New York City within working-class communities.

During the early twentieth century, the greater society did not use terms such as homosexual or gay but instead used derogatory terms, one of which was fairy. As Chauncey defines it “*fairy* generally [denoted] any flamboyantly effeminate homosexual man (whose self-presentation resembled that of a female prostitute)” (624). While not always the case, many fairies worked in the sex trade alongside female and punk prostitutes, submitting to male customers, trades or wolves alike, most commonly performing oral sex. Trade was the term sex workers used for “[any] man who responded to a gay man’s advances” (626) but was still considered “normal” by society. Wolves were also not considered homosexual, however, as Chauncey describes, they preferred the company of submissive fairies and punks, even occasionally entering into relationships with them. “Punk” was the term referring to a “physically slighter youth who [allowed] himself to be used sexually by an older and more powerful man, the wolf, in exchange for money, protection, or other forms of support” (642).

Both trades and wolfs were part of the working-class communities (predominantly African American and Italian) whose male masculinity was based upon “highly aggressive and quintessentially ‘masculine’” (624) gender performances. These men were young bachelors and were typically employed in male-dominated jobs such as the merchant marine, day laboring, and transient work (622). Following a full workday, trades and wolfs would spend their leisure time in male-dominated bars in which “rough females,” fairies and punks would be found. As

described in a police report recounting an investigation of a sailors bar in Brooklyn, New York, “sailors [left] with some girls, and some men in uniform [left] with the fags” (623). Trades and wolves would take the dominant, insertive role while their partner would assume the submissive, receiving position. Because of these sexual positions, trades and wolves were considered “normal men” by both themselves and society while their partners were condemned as degenerates and inverts.

World War II dramatically shifted the gay culture in the United States with the post-war formation of what Martin Levine terms the urban “gay ghetto” (31). While most soldiers returned home from fighting abroad, newly cognizant homosexuals remained in the port cities of New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Prior to WWII, most gay men and lesbians lived spread out in small towns and cities across the country and were most likely the only non-heterosexual person around. With the draft for the war, thousands of queer people were introduced to one another, creating a communal awakening that they were not alone. Once these men and women returned home, many of them decided to create new lives for themselves in the city. Thus, the gay ghetto was born, identifiable by its predominantly gay residency and gay-owned businesses.

This creation of a gay sub-culture led to a radical shift in the gay sexual landscape within large urban centers which had been situated around a feminine/masculine dichotomy. Previously, trades and wolves were considered “normal,” punks were fallen boys, and fairies were degenerate homosexuals; however, post-WWII gay veterans became the despised group. In response to this status formation, the newly discovered gay veterans created what Martin Levine terms “closet culture” which can be divided between minstrel and passing gender performance (56). Minstrelsy was identified by the dramatically feminine gender performance of “‘camp’

which involved the adoption of feminine dress, speech, and demeanor” performed both on the street and on the stage or drag ball.⁵ Passing involved a set of behaviors “designed to hide a gay identity under a heterosexual façade” (Levine 21) which usually restricted the man to heteronormative attitudes, activities and spaces. Occasionally, however, passing gay men would venture into a known gay bar in which minstrel performers and relocated⁶ punks would congregate, in hopes of finding a sexual encounter. Unfortunately, police officers also frequented the newly established gay bars and would arrest and blacklist the patrons. Commonly arrests would also lead to “mandatory psychotherapy or psychiatric hospitalization” (21), pathologizing same-sex attraction as a mental disorder. The severity which institutions policed homosexuality eventually kick started riots in the summer of 1969 which began what is termed now the United States’ gay rights movement.

The movement was triggered when bars across New York State began resisting police raids by barring the doors, refusing entry and hurling stools and glasses at the officers. The customers who initiated these riots were mostly made up of drag queens and sex workers, fended off the police for hours before ultimately being apprehended and arrested. However, the firestorm had already been set, from coast to coast riots springing up opposing police harassment and criminality. Quickly queer political groups began taking control of riot situations and mobilized groups to protest during the day to increase visibility. These activists had already been involved in the country’s “countercultural, antiwar, [and] civil rights movements” (26) in the decade previous and used those movement’s tactics for the gay rights movement. They focused

⁵ A queer dance/runway competition in which various dramatized gender expressions are presented and judged. For example, gay men would compete on who looked the most feminine.

⁶ Punks, once frequenting working-class bars, relocated to gay bars to capitalize on the highly populated and lucrative population of gay male customers in which they had virtually no competition as neither fairies nor females were desired.

on discrediting and condemning what they saw as society's fear of homosexuality, namely "deviant lifestyles," including gender inversion, drug and alcohol use and promiscuous sex, advocating that "same-sex love was a moral, natural, and healthy form of erotic expression among men who typically conformed to cultural expectations for manly demeanor and appearance" (Levine 26). These activists believed "homosexuality did not necessarily mean immorality, pathology, effeminacy," and gay men began living their lives with these concepts.

As one gay man told Levine in his interview, "we like making love with people of the same sex. We feel good and whole making love. We want to remain homosexual" (27). This exemplified the new gay right's gay male, or as Levine terms him the "postcloset homosexual." While he had a specific mantra, however, he still needed an identity, a lifestyle, a sexuality. Gay men began experimenting with identities, the first came in the form of the gay liberationist, a "politicized hippie" who shunned "traditional manliness, conventional aspirations, and established institutions." He wore gender fuck attire⁷ and proudly strutted down the street holding the hand of his partner who most people might confuse with being his identical twin brother. Most gay men, though, found this gender fucking hippie too radical and opted instead for the more subdued "gay reformist." This gay prototype was the "'butch' rebel who had sex with 'anyone, any way, any time.'" They dressed down in traditional working-class outfits and socialized primarily in "gay bars, bathhouses, and pornographic bookstores" (28), always in search of the next sexual encounter. And so, the "gay clone" was born, a transformation one of Levine's subjects outlined as "now, [gay men have] 'butched up,' giving up limp wrists and mincing gaits for bulging muscles and manly handshakes, giving up fancy clothes and posh pubs for faded jeans and raunchy discos" (55).

⁷ The mix between masculine and feminine such as sporting both facial hair and a dress (28).

David Halperin, another self-described “gay clone,” attempts to rationalize the clone mentality stating:

For me, and for many gay men of my generation, gay culture was simply not a high priority. We certainly weren't much interested in what passed for gay culture at the time. After all, it didn't even focus on gay men like ourselves (who had yet to be visibly represented by the media)... it didn't help us to deal with the challenges we faced, as out, proud, young, masculine, sexually active gay men, trying to find our place in a homophobic society” (40).

Gay “clones” were not interested in creating a new gay culture, they were interested in one thing and one thing only, “getting laid,” which they were experts in. In his book, *The Butch Manual*, Clark Henley states that to “perform butch” a man must have the adequate movements, noises, body, outfit, location and drugs (I). Levine explains that clones used “stereotypically macho sign-vehicles such as musculature, facial hair, short haircuts, rugged, functional clothing” and developed gym bodies which included “tight buttocks, washboard stomachs, and ‘pumped up’ biceps and pectorals” (59). They would also strictly monitor their speech, speaking in “low, deep voices [and] using rough, vulgar language” (67) all of which completed what Halperin listed as the four clone types: “construction worker, college athlete, lumberjack, [or] motorcyclist” (50).

An important line, however, was never crossed by a good gay clone and that was to be actually mistaken for a heterosexual working-class man. While it was an enormous compliment to be told one could “pass” as straight, gay clones always maintained a little hint of gay, such as their facial hair being meticulously trimmed and outfits being perfectly “tailored and matched” (61). Levine described one of his subjects as a “well-groomed lumberjack... His jeans and plaid

Pendelton shirt fit perfectly... No real lumberjack ever looked as well put together, so coordinated,” (61) which led Levine to identify this style as signifying rather than being. Gay clones desired to appear heterosexual in complete virile, hyper-masculine glory but to also have sex with men. This relationship had previously seemed to be a contradiction as same-sex relationships always mirrored heterosexual ones with fixed dominant-male and submissive-female roles. Clones sought to counteract that contradiction through both their performance of traditional masculinity and desiring that in a mate, both loving and fucking masculinity in its rawest sense. Promiscuity was one of the leading forms of display for masculinity, achieved through the cruising of a bar or bathhouse in which they would “stand at a bar, posed with casual indifference, apart from other men, taking up as much space as possible, but with his crotch thrust forward in a way that exaggerated sexual interest” (62). When a clone found another whom he was aroused by, the two would find a place (either a room in the club, bar or bathhouse, outside in a public space, or at home) and would engage in raw, raunchy, hyper-masculine oral and anal sex. This ‘risky’ sexual activity lead clones to be viewed as the cause of the AIDS epidemic as it was believed to be spread through violent, unprotected sexual intercourse.

Gay panic set in along with a communal feeling of guilt, as one of Levine’s subjects stated, “I always knew being gay was wrong... I knew all the drugs and sleeping-around was sinful, and now it just might kill me” (139). Levine describes this feeling in the conclusion of his book as he himself was dying of AIDS-related complications identifying the mid 80s “the end of the gay clone” (164), himself not able to envision a future to the hyper-masculine gay performance. The clone did not die, however, as the discovery of the retroviral “cocktail” literally revived the desire for traditional masculinity. As Perry Halkitis explains, HIV-positive

men, previously clones or not, were being saved from death, but as a result from the drugs suffered from intense “weight loss, muscular wasting and deterioration, [and] decreases in libido” (28). This created obvious stigmatization (Kelly et al.) and emaciated men were assumed to be positive and therefore diseased which led to an obsession with physical muscularity and displays of sexual prowess. Gay men began using “complementary therapy measures such as steroid replacement as well as weight training and nutritional supplements” to appear strong and healthy. They also engaged in anonymous, and many times condomless, sex as “risk-taking [has] been linked to masculine identities” (Halkitis 28).

Today these treatments of HIV, including steroid replacement, weight training, nutrition supplementing and an obsession with sexual prowess, have extended far beyond their original survival purposes. As Michelangelo Signorile explains, treatments have “moved beyond the goals of health and survival and have become associated with a physically based conception of masculinity espoused by many gay men, regardless of HIV serostatus” (Signorile). Also beginning in the mid-1980s was a movement David Halperin pessimistically identified as “the ‘queer’ movement, with its militant vindication of deviant sex and gender styles, its men in dresses and leather and pearls” (53). Queer identifying men have resorted to some of the ideals of the “politicized hippie” such as manipulating society’s gender binaries. However, they also oppose their moralist ideas privileging monogamy by openly engaging in anonymous and drug enhanced sexual experiences.

It is in both groups’ preservation of the gay clone’s sexual promiscuousness that they find commonality, but in all other arenas, the two appear to be polar opposites. Hyper-masculine performing gay men continue to obsess over their bodies enhancing them to appear as muscular as possible along with exercising their sexual prowess while queer performing gay men continue

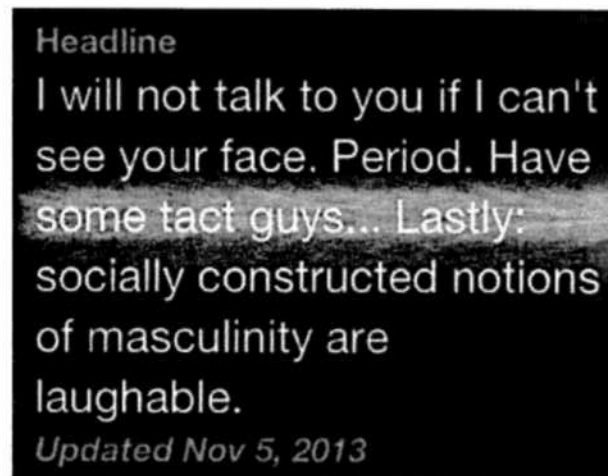
to manipulate gender and also participate in the sexually-liberated marketplace. These gender presentations mark the two gay male extremes, though, like most extremes, they remain the minority within the community. The typical gay male exists somewhere between these two poles, floating fluidly between them depending on the environment and time of day. This is exemplified within urban settings in which gay men commonly transition between the two spheres, one moment referring to himself as “girl” and the next as “sir.”

On Grindr, this fluidity is much less visible, most likely because of the hegemonic structure of the application. Hegemonic Grindr clones enforce strict regulations on gender expression by self-identifying as, and desiring, traditional masculinity. Hegemony on Grindr does not go unquestioned though, a counter-hegemonic resistance does exist. Much like the queers of the 1960s riots and the gender-benders of the 1990s, Grindr too has a radical contingent of counter-hegemonic, queer users. One articulation of this queer counter-hegemonic performance is users whose profile pictures include feminine-identified elements such as noticeable make-up, nail-polish, and/or “women’s clothing.” These openly feminine displays are in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity which discourages effeminacy in men. These users defy hegemonic masculinity by not only presenting femininely but also proving that gay men can be, and have an attraction to, femininity. Unlike Joel Simkhai’s belief that men are innately masculine, feminine performing Grindr users prove men can perform in numerous ways, and get laid while doing it.

Another direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity are trans* male and female users. Trans* men oppose this because as current, or previously, female bodied people, they contradict the discourse that gender is contingent on sex. Hegemonic masculine enforcing gay men are forced to question their naturalized understanding of maleness and masculinity as trans* men

perform masculinity but may not anatomically be male. Trans* women also contradict the naturalized discourse, but do so by opposing masculinity. Many of these women choose to join Grindr because they maintain male genitalia and therefore prefer to be with gay men other for either friendship or sex. The fact that these women join Grindr proves there is a group of Grindr users who prefer the companionship of women over masculine men. Once again, the hegemonic privileging of male masculinity is contradicted by users who may have male anatomy but perform hyper-femininity as a woman and other users who choose to interact with them.

Other users employ rhetorical tactics to perform their counter-hegemonic resistance. As one user states “Im not fem or masc, Im just me,” a reasonably composed contention. Other users are more radical such as one who asserts “I will not talk to you if I can’t see your face. Have



some tact guys... Lastly: socially constructed notions of masculinity are laughable” (*Illustrated above*). This is both an attack at “discreet” and self-described “masculine” users. Discreet users are those who do not upload a picture displaying their face such as “torso shots” and pictures of landscapes. Users do this for a multitude of reasons, but it is commonly viewed as undesirable as users like these seem to desire less superficial interactions. Equally passionate, queer statement observed include “you all use the word ‘masculine’ too much, what happened to just being yourself?” and “Come on guys, take off your mascs. Masculinity is a social construction.” All of these almost hostile assertions openly contest the hegemonic masculine privileging and naturalizing of masculinity, calling on their fellow users to be themselves.

The final queer counter-hegemonic technique is the submission of hegemonic masculine enforcing users on the blog website, “douchebagsofgrindr.com.” Users from around the world acknowledge that the hegemonic Grindr clone is exceptionally problematic and must be identified and ridiculed. Every day new submissions are posted on the blog from around the world to show the obnoxiously racist, classist, ageist, femmephobic and hyper-masculine performances by users and that it is acknowledged and unacceptable. In this way, hegemonic Grindr clones are not gaining blind consent; they are also receiving powerful opposition from not only within the application but from the wider cyberspace. Counter-hegemonic users are engaging with queer discourses to resist, and ultimately overthrow, gay male hegemonic masculinity. As these counter-hegemonic users prove, Grindr is not simply a hyper-masculine monolith but has a diverse assortment of queer people. Their desires are also vast not singularly seeking hookups but desiring real connections through friendships and long term relationships.



While scrolling through the sexual cyberspace of Grindr, users seem to gush by like a cascading waterfall of enlarged pectorals, glistening abdominals, flexed biceps, meticulously groomed facial and chest hair. While this may appear at first encounter to be all it is, that is only a surface level observation.

While some users do perform similarly to the 1970s gay clone, “thrusting forward” their most quintessential masculine features, others perform in more fluid, gender queer ways. Hegemonic Grindr clones do enforce strict hegemonic masculine ideals and receive ample consent from other users, but they also receive powerful opposition. These radical queer users not only perform in counter-hegemonic feminine ways, they directly confront sexual gatekeepers and tell them to take off their mascs. Much like the Grindr emblem, Hegemonic Grindr clones hide

behind an intimidating, masculine mask which they believe is not only natural but attractive to other gay men. As queer theory teaches us, masculine gender performance is a culturally instituted façade which confines gay men into narrow, clone-like boxes. Grindr users must remember they are more than just a hollow mask, they are apart of a vibrant, multifaceted and liberated queer community which loves and embraces all gender and sexual performances.

Appendix:

Bear: a hairy, heavy-set, older gay man

Bottom: late twentieth century term still used today to denote the receptive partner in anal sex. Typically submissive (with the occasion of a “power bottom”) and “effeminate”

Daddy: an older gay man who acts as a fatherly figure to a younger gay man with the added element of sex. They are then termed “sugar daddy” if financial support is supplied to the “sugar baby”

Discreet: a man not socially out of the closet (openly gay) who either participates, or is interested in participating, in same-sex sexual encounters

Fairy: The early twentieth century term for a “flamboyantly effeminate homosexual man (whose self-presentation resembled that of a female prostitute)” (Chauncey 624), typically working in the sex trade and donned female-identified clothing

Otter: a combination between a bear and a twink; a young, thin, hairy gay man

Poz: the abbreviation for an HIV positive person

Punk: a non-effeminate, “physically slighter youth who let himself be used sexually by an older and more powerful man, the wolf, in exchange for money, protection, or other forms of support,” (Chauncey 642)

Queer: used here as both an umbrella term for non heterosexual/heteronormative people and communities along with a specific political and academic agenda

Trade: A man considered by himself and society to be “normal” (heterosexual) who would, on occasion, overlook a fairy’s sex to “release his urge” when a suitable woman was not available (Chauncey 623)

Trans*: the all inclusive term for transgender, transsexual, gender variant, gender non-conforming individuals

Top: late twentieth century term for the insertive partner in anal sex. Typically dominant though not necessarily “masculine”

Twink: a young, thin, hairless gay man

Vers: the abbreviation for “versatile,” a gay man open to, interested in, equally stimulated by both receptive and/or insertive roles in anal sex

Wolf/Husband: “abided... the conventions of masculinity and yet exhibited a decided preference for male sexual partners,” engaging in homosexual activity more exclusively (Chauncey 641)

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