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SEGREGAYTION:
The Exclusion of Black Bodies in gay (cyber) spaces
By
Kelvin James Stallings

**Capstone Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Studies**

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Abstract

Gay spaces such as bars, clubs, and cruising locations are intended for the socialization of gay men, providing a historical role in shaping LGBTQ communities. These spaces are thought to be protective against various kinds of discrimination from the outside world, however the maintaining racial segregation revealed. My project first contextualizes these historically gay spaces through historical accounts, and some personal narratives, by addressing issues of both racial segregation and sexuality of black homosexuals. The project moves from the historical gay space to contemporary spaces focusing on the social networking app, Grindr, which similarly maintains the white normative presence in both gay historical spaces, as well as today 's virtual spaces like Grindr.

Keywords: Queer, LGBTQ, Cyberspace, Grindr, Segregation, Racism, And

Critical Race Theory

INTRODUCTION:

MYTH OF A NATION

In June of 2015 the federal government in the United States repealed bans from same-sex couples marrying across the nation. Now, gays and lesbians have the same marital rights as heterosexual couples, who had these all along. This moment seemed to be an end to a long battle for the LGBTQ community. The liberation of these peoples in the United States has been a long drawn out political process. I stress the politics, which have played the changing hand.

In Marc Stein's, "Birthplace of the Nation: Imagining Lesbian and Gay Communities in Philadelphia, 1969-1970," the message of inclusion is deconstructed as a political strategy to further the liberation of the Gay Rights movement. Stein narrows in on the word nationalism, and this is very important in situating the Gay community. Using Lisa Duggan, who writes, "nationalisms have a long history in gay and lesbian politics and culture." (255). Stein specifically draws out the collectivity of a nation; by this it conceptualizes what a nation of peoples have in common. In the context of countries, and nationalism, people have patriotism in common, or at least that is one way in which nationalism can be expressed. Applying this homosexual, a type of nation or community is created based on the commonality of sexual orientation.

A myth appears in D'Emilio's research, which tells of famous Stonewall Riots, when queer men and women in the gay enclave of the West Village fought back against the NYC police. It is said that Puerto Rican and Black Drag Queens, and a butch lesbian instigated the Riots by throwing a brick at an officer (Drexel, 121). The inclusionary gay

community is political myth. I point to the invention of the gay rainbow flag, which did not always exist. By critically analyzing the invention of the gay rainbow flag, it becomes a myth, since it did not always exist. Previously I have mapped out how homosexual occupied very different spaces, based solely on race. Using Roland Barthes *Mythologies* is how I base these events as myths, whether or not this story actually happened, what it does provide is a narrative, which carries a message, a myth of a nation.

In 1970, Gilbert Baker went to San Francisco, which by that time, San Francisco had become the center of the arising gay culture, and lifestyle. Harvey Milk was the first gay politician to hold office in a major American city, after knowing Baker for a short time he challenged him to make a flag that would represent the liberation of gay people. Baker began working on a flag. He dyed the fabrics himself and, with the help of volunteers, “he stitched together eight strips of brilliant color into a huge banner that spoke volumes: hot pink stood for sexuality, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for nature, turquoise blue for art, indigo for harmony and violet for spirit.” (A Brief History).

I must point out that there’s no color for diversity, or even mention of diversity. Indigo was not included in the flag, so even harmony within the community is not represented on the rainbow flag. He remembers vividly the moment when his new flag was first raised. There had already been a rainbow flag associated to the Masonic association for young women, but after the assassination of Milk, the gay flag became the sole symbol of the gay community. Soon versions of this Flag were being mass-produced on coffee mugs, key chains, and T-shirts etc. The flag was flown outside of

businesses' and some government buildings in order to display alignment with gay people and their liberation (A Brief History). This last part is what connects well to *Mythologies*, the rainbow flag is an obvious signifier of homosexuality, and functions as a symbol to support these people who occupy that space. Flags are political: further deconstructing them points directly to nationalism.

The rainbow flag is an empty signifier of myth functioning as a symbol of liberation, and support of that liberation. Here lies the denotative meaning. This is why businesses hang these flags outside, just as historically; many business had signs that said 'no fairies,' or 'no blacks,' there's nothing unclear about those messages. The full signifier of the rainbow flag can clearly distinguish the distortion-taking place in the myth because a flag is political. I would also argue that the distortion lies in the myth which supports all LGBTQ peoples as a nation, without addressing the intersection of race, but using race to appear as diverse, and inclusionary, for example, stonewall riots, with the Black and Puerto Rican drag queens being the catalyst in defining a movement (Drexel, 121).

The distortion of the rainbow flag is a part of the political statement made by white gay men (Baker, and Milk) ignoring diversity in its formation, or at least the contextual history of racial segregation. Lastly the mythical signifier is how it is applied amongst culture, people must believe in it. The rainbow flag is most definitely believed in, this reflects in the mass production of the flag. Today, it does not matter what color you are, or even how you identify sexual the myth of the rainbow flag has truly taken every shape, in bracelets, leis, beads, balloons, every pride parade in the U.S in the world

is painted rainbow. The rainbow flag has become synonymous with the pride of not only gay men, but also all homosexuals, and queer peoples.

After addressing the Myth of a Nation, we can contextualize the background, which displays segregation in gay spaces. I want to preface that this contextual history provides framework in order to argue the marginalization of black homosexuals, within the gay community through spatial occupation. Moving forward, Washington D.C provides an example or case study, which author Brett Beemyn has successfully contextualized the environment of racial segregation amongst gay men socializing in D.C's post-World War II environment. Similarly, Harlem, and Chicago will provide context to the history of racial segregation amongst homosexual men, the spaces they created, and occupy. Like D.C, there was black experience, and white, separately functioning. Both Harlem and Chicago provide examples of artificial integration, by this I point to the invasion of white bodies in black spaces for entertainment, however this cannot be accomplished the other way around. These spaces also portray the very separate lives that white and black homosexuals occupied during the 1930's. When visibility of homosexuality had just taken its first steps out of the closet.

GAY SPACES=WHITE HISTORIES

After arriving in Chicago for college, I was 19 and had acquired a fake ID. I was able to get into bars, and I specifically began to explore Boystown, a Chicago sub-neighborhood populated with thousands of gay men. Boystown consists of one main street, Halsted; along this street are various gay businesses. Restaurants, bars, clubs, gyms, salons, and even one bathhouse, all advocating, supporting and encouraging the

contemporary gay lifestyle. From afar, this neighborhood seems like a gay utopia, oddly located in a city burdened by various crimes. The situation in Chicago is portrayed in the media as a city covered by a dismal shadow of murder, and though there is some truth in this, Boystown still functions as a utopia for some gay men because it provides all that a gay middle class American man could want.

The neighborhood of Boystown is located in Lakeview a northern Chicago neighborhood. Lakeview lies between the north side of Chicago and downtown. The south side of Chicago is where much of the violent crime occurs; however crime occurs in many areas throughout. One important detail about section, in between downtown and the northern parts, is that it is populated with mostly white people, according to a statistical census done by statisticalatlas.com, records show Lakeview's white population at 79%, Lincoln Park's, 81%, and Near North Side at 71% (Race & Ethnicity in Lakeview). It is not to say that people of color do not live in these area, but the disproportion specifically referring to Latino, and Black Chicagoans whom live in areas away from downtown and the stretch up toward the beginning of the north side. These demographics of race in certain Chicago neighborhoods are obvious.

Urban spaces help to exemplify how contemporary gay life becomes a culture, and by understanding the contextual history behind this space, later helps to assess and contextualize virtual spaces, like Grindr. An urban space like Boystown has a history with regulating who can, and cannot participate in that lifestyle. The liberation gay men gained have fought for is not just through white experiences, though they are overemphasized, while black homosexual experiences are regulated, and marginalized. Through the era of civil rights, gay liberation movements used messages of inclusion to

politically position these men and women as a community. This project analyzes the histories which exclusion was practiced amongst gay men, and moves into more contemporary spaces like Grindr where practices of exclusion ultimately continues and mimics these historical practices of segregation amongst gay men.

The ability of homosexuals to visibly practice and live their sexual preferences and desires as a lifestyle and culture is a contemporary concept. In the book *Heterosexuality/Homosexuality*, the authors write about the historical context of same-sex loving males, which has a long, and complicated past, because every culture approaches this differently. For example, in the Ancient world, homosexuals we know today would be unrecognizable. For an instance, in Ancient Greece, the practice of pederasty was common, this relationship was between a young boy, and an older male of status (Whirter, 17). It was almost like a sexual mentorship, as odd as that seems to our contemporary views. It was acceptable for older men to be with young boys, but it was unacceptable for men of the same status and age to have sexual relations with each other. In Persia, this was practiced similarly, as did the Ancient Romans, who continued this practice. By then it was acceptable for men of the same age to have relationship as long as they did not belong to the same class. Historically, penetration plays a huge role in these ancient same-sex relationships. The younger male or lower status male should always be penetrated, if the older or male with societal status is penetrated this could mean loss of status or social humiliation (Whirter, 17). This displays how practices of sexuality transform over time, and is influenced by culture.

By the 1950's, the contemporary homosexual had barely begun creation where boundaries of class or age were fluid within same-sex relationships. Homosexuality had

been deemed a mental disorder; this granted the formation of the Kinsey scale. A scale devised to define homosexuality. During this time, about 40% of the male population said they had had a homosexual experience. 13% said they had more homosexual experiences than heterosexual, and 4% admitted to being strictly homosexual (Whirter, 5).

Mentioning some of this historical context is important, because it tells us there are records of same-sex relationships throughout history, and displays a certain type history of white, European history. The fact that there are records about same-sex relationships shows the hierarchy/hegemony of history being European centered. It's not to say that other cultures do not have a history of these relationships, but the far more records are about white males, specifically referring to Ancient Greek sexuality. To add white males have had the ability to conducted much of this research over time. Even the central idea of homosexual is founded within the social hierarchy of white men being at the top. Information about homosexual men is segregated, because black sexualities are hardly mentioned in this early history. It is essential to understand, that while I shed light on white homosexual experiences, it is to exemplify the focus of academic research on white homosexual men disproportionately to black homosexuals experience or identities.

Washington D.C

During the first half of the 20th century the United States segregated white and black people, so it is not a jump to assume that black homosexual and white homosexuals were also segregated. The hegemonic white ruling ideologies, which not only surrounding heterosexual, also existed for, homosexuals, this marginalized homosexuals as whole, but some more than others. Brett Beemyn's article, "A Queer Capital", covers social interactions between race, class, and gender using Washington D.C' s early 20th century

gay community. Beemyn begins by pointing to the significant increase of gay people in metropolitan areas after WWII (183). In Washington D.C, demand for workers during the war doubled the city's population. Historian John D'Emilio states, "The unusual conditions of a mobilized society allowed homosexual desire to be expressed more easily in action. For many gay Americans, World War II created something of a nationwide coming out experience" (As qtd in Beemyn, 183). Beemyn mentions spaces in which gay men were allowed to meet and publically socialize, which he points out wasn't previously happening openly in the modern era. An increasing number of house parties, drag balls, as well as new bars, and popular cruising spots appeared.

Cruising specifically is an important aspect of gay culture. This leads into the hookup culture, which surrounds Grindr. Cruising locations are usually predetermined, and known by both heterosexuals and homosexuals of that specific community as an area where men meet to have sex. It may not always be so obvious, but you can bet one heard about the location either from another homosexual or through a community's grapevine. The social function of cruising not only creates a network of socialization amongst men seeking other men, but functions as location to hookup. Since so many men were still closeted, many were still practicing some form of heterosexuality, which meant for some cruising allowed them to keep this part of their lives secret.

Beemyn mentions various restaurants which gay men and women frequented—but they were all white, though some did serve African Americans. Legal segregation of restaurants ended in 1953, when the Supreme Court ruled D.C. restaurants could no longer racially discriminate against black people (187). Even then restaurants continued their discriminatory practices. The Chicken Hut, a popular gay space put reserved signs

on the tables so when African American customers asked for a table they could tell them there were none. With this, D.C. African Americans created gay spaces, Beemyn recognizes the segregation of class existed within these communities (187). For example, Nob Hill was a middle class African American gay establishment, and Beemyn points to instances when lower class black did not feel like they were welcome. However this was uncommon.

“Queer Capital,” reveals the metanarrative surrounding gay men fails due to the lack of African American identities. I find this to be very problematic, because it overemphasizes the role of gay bars in gay culture, which inherently overemphasizes white men’s presence. In considering black sexualities, I find it negligent to think about this without first addressing its past with slavery. The marginalization, and fetishization of our bodies’ stems from the countries’ past with physically owning black people. The aftermath of slavery is where I base most of my contextual history.

BLACK SEXUALITIES

*Why does society have difficulty honestly dialoging about sexuality?
From where does fear of Black sexualities emerge?*

What structural forces have been shown to constrain the choices or perceived agencies of black people based on their race, class, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation?

In, “Last Taboo: Why Pop Culture Just Cant Deal with Black Male Sexuality,” Wesley Morris takes us through a short history of why black sexuality is so commonly marginalized while at the same time fetishized through representations in media. Morris

begins by first addressing nudity on television and movies, and that for the most part women have been sexualized in media, and for the most part white women. Today, we have seen snippets of male genitalia in media, “Game of Thrones,” “WestWorld,” and various movies, like “The Overnight,” “Vacation,” and “Get Hard,” in which the genitalia of notable male actors have been represented or portrayed in one way or another, however it is important to note these actors are white.

Today, these violent aggressions have deteriorated, but not disappeared, they’ve more so turned into micro-aggressions. Morris exemplifies, Lena Dunham who made a comment at last year’s Met Gala, saying she was disappointed that Odell Beckham Jr., a black NFL player had not paid her enough attention, which obviously devalued her status as a white woman, as if Beckham Jr. must pay attention to her because she’s a white woman interested in him. Another example is in the movie “Ted 2,” a Seth McFarlane film with an animated bear, Ted, who supports Mark Wahlberg’s character. In one scene a mishap at a fertility clinic occurs that leaves Wahlberg covered in semen, a staff member tells him not to worry, it’s just the sperm of man with sickle-cell anemia, a disease that affects African-Americans more so than any other group. Ted, the talking teddy bear, replies, “You hear that? You’re covered in rejected black-guy sperm... You look like a Kardashian.” Morris points out that this statement concludes an animated teddy bear has a greater claim to humanity, and sexuality, than the black people it mocks. Morris’s article connects some modern representations of how black sexuality is perceived in media, but stresses the importance of the contextual history behind these ideologies, and specifically black male sexuality; it has been described as dangerous,

deviant, and threatening; all while maintaining a status of fetishisms, pointing specifically to the black phallus.

There's a whole part to black sexuality, which lies in heterosexual norms and masculinity. The black male is expected to perform masculinity better than the white man (Childs 146). Especially when comes to controlling women, it is important to keep in mind that black women's sexuality is perceived as very different, where black men's sexuality is feared, women's is highly sexualized, both share fetishized prescribers, but women must also submit to not only the gaze of black men, but men in general. I do not want to compare or relate gay black men's and women's experiences, they both function very differently. However, black sexuality becomes some what of a commodity, not only is it feared, it is highly sexualized, and amongst gay men black male sexuality is sought out of objectification for idea of a large penis. The BBC (Big Black Cock) is one form of terminology, which displays how black bodies are objectified as sexual objects. I seek to connect this part about Black Sexualities to what should be addressed in the gay community, and how diversity is relevant to gay studies, and culture.

While growing up, my experience as a black person was unchallenged. Sure, there were instances of racial bigotry toward my siblings, and I, from our white peers in our small Nebraskan hometown; but for the most part things were not racially charged, or so it seemed. In a rural environment like Nebraska, everybody knows everybody, usually through association by last names. For example, a kid I grew up with was quite successful with his football career after high school, and went on to play at a Division I university on a full-ride scholarship (in Nebraska this is huge deal!). His last name resonates throughout the entire state, by this; I mean people would easily be able to

associate his last name with his football achievements. This example extends on a deeper basis, there's a lot of repetition in last names so for example; when meeting someone you could say, "I am So&So", and they could reply, "Oh, I know a So&So, " and by that people can assess and place you.

In context for myself, I would explain or state my mother and stepfather's last names and people in the area were likely familiar with them. My blackness was not challenged: once the association with my white family was made clear, I was a certified black body, approved by white normativity. In many situations and settings, Black people are filtered through normative spaces. Black bodies have to perform according to the prescribed norms of society; for example, some black women straighten their hair to fit in with normative standards. Black men are even more scrutinized in this filtering process within gay spaces. Black men must fit into the homo-normative.

HARLEM

In *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, A.B. Christa Schwarz takes us to the center of black homosexuality. The Harlem Renaissance is commonly known as the revival of black knowledge in the United States, this includes, art, literature, and music. Writers like Claude McKay, Richard Bruce Nugent, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes are amongst the well-known names of the Harlem Renaissance. These men are especially important, because they were expressing homosexuality in their art forms.

Beemyn and Schwarz use George Chauncey's analysis of homosexuality during the 1920's through the 40's, who attributes much of the attitude toward sexuality to the declining economic state during the Great Depression. Two characters that tend to define

what homosexuality of the time was were the ‘fairies’, which are the openly effeminate men, and ‘butches,’ which refer to more masculine looking and performing women. These two examples became cultural identifiers of homosexual behavior, which as a side note Chauncey believes helped to cloak and hide the gay middle-class, allowing them to blend as normative, since outsiders believed homosexuals only looked like one or the other.

Once a white neighborhood, Harlem became predominantly a black area of Manhattan, as a result of the large portion of African-Americans migrating from the South into Northern metropolitan areas . Claude McKay termed Harlem the Negro Capital of the World; Harlem as a safe space for black identities living in NYC during the Jazz and Renaissance age. Schwarz points out that the binary of homo/heterosexuality did not yet exist in terms of prescribing sexuality during this time (7-8). It is explained that today when we look back at sexual activities, we apply our contemporary concepts of sexuality. At this moment this had only just begun social construction. Schwarz uses the word, “inverts,” which describes the act of same-sex relations, but provides more of a loose framing, because many homosexual men and women were still participating in the normativity of heterosexuality.

In Harlem, 95% of the buildings and businesses were own by white owners according to the COF (Committee of Fourteen), which was responsible for censoring public spaces in New York City. The report released in 1928 conveys the comfortability of both the NYPD, and COF to keep Harlem New York’s red-light district because it continued the racial segregation, as well as creating a site of attraction (Schwarz 9). It is described as fascination with “the primitive, the dangerously licentious, oversexed figure

of earlier times was now idealized as an uninhibited expressive being,” as, writes Steven Watson (qtd by Schwarz 9). “Brown and black bodies- the color seemed lustier than white...full lips that quickened flesh to move,” Nathan Huggins writes in reference to the inhabitants of Harlem (qtd by Schwarz 9).

Harlem is described as, “too far away to be dangerous, yet close enough to be exciting.” The deviant location, and behavior of Harlem attracts white homosexual men and women (Schwarz, 9). Harlem becomes a site of black expression for white entertainment, it is described as an escape from the pressures and conformity of white society. However, Schwarz urges readers to understand that this is white people invading black spaces, not the other way around. These spaces are termed as interzones by Kevin Mumford (11).

Bruce Nugent points out, “Blacks suddenly had the freedom to have white sex partners, quoted in Schwarz. Nugent states that there was no definitively gay part of Harlem; however, in one of his own novels, he writes about exclusively gay parties in Harlem (11). Much like Chicago, Drag Balls in Harlem are a huge attribute to visibility of black homosexuals. Unlike Chicago, both fairies, and butches were able to function as they were in broad daylight or the dark of night. Even compared to Greenwich Village, another New York City neighborhood, Harlem during this period was a space solely for black people, and specifically for black homosexuals. The co-existence of black hetero and homosexual peoples in Harlem is often attributed to the marginalization of all black people. There was no room to discriminate for deviant behavior, because you were first black before you were gay (Schwarz, 14-15).

The non-discriminatory behavior of Harlem is why it became very attractive to white hetero- and homosexual men and women. Langston Hughes writes that ideally white people were not welcome in Harlem, but due to economics, they were tolerated, because they were the ones with money to spend. Schwarz describes this as sexual colonialism, because white people in Harlem were looking for a discursive, non-normative, and non-conforming ways of life in a racialized space. Again, I want to stress, it was ok for white people to invade black spaces, and not vice-versa, and though today, those lines have been blurred, and there are plenty of black people in white gay spaces, again, they must conform to the homo-normative.

CHICAGO

Homosexuals are spread through out Chicago, though the concentration of gay atmosphere lies within Boystown. To be clear there is diversity in Boystown, however, that diversity exists in pockets of homo-normativity, which addresses the problematic privilege we see in the queer community today as they intersect with White privilege, capitalism. It is important to understand three things about this Lakeview neighborhood, Boystown, one, the economic status of the people living in Boystown, must be sufficient. Secondly, the economic structure commonly theorized about U.S demographics do not disappear in gay neighborhoods, and lastly this result in a type of informal segregation amongst Boystown homosexuals.

It was not my intention to have Chicago is a site where I can exemplify the segregation that occurred within the gay community, but I think it is important to understand Boystown as a gay sanctioned space; this explains the positioning of this

Gayborhood. This section explores some of the historic sites in which gay culture in Chicago appears, and how there are two separate historic gay spaces in Chicago.

In “Before Paris Burned,” we are introduced to the less prevalent past of the performance of drag in Chicago. Author Allen Drexel paints us a small portrait of black homosexual life in the early 20th century, focused on Chicago’s Southside drag scene, which was one of the most visible forms of black homosexuality at the time. During the 1920’s there were a number of known gay establishments throughout the city of Chicago. Drexel points to an account of Nancy Kelly a retired clerical worker who recalls the first time he saw a Drag Queen:

I saw Joanne at the corner of 31st St and State Street. And the guys was laughin, you know, so I laughed too, until I saw her. She was standin’ the corner with her hand on her hip, her hair drawn to the back into the ponytail like, you know. But they wasn’t botherin’ her or nothin’... She worked at the Cabin Inn, you know. They do her you know. I was fascinated... I knew I was gay since I was twelve years old. But I just watched her. The make was scintillating. And I thought, “I’m gonna do that.” (124).

In a moment of self-reflection and identity, Kelly sees another black man in drag and is instantly is mesmerized, and decides he too wants to dress in drag. Joanne and soon Kelly would’ve been performing in Drag parties on the Southside. Though these parties would’ve overtly participated in the queering of homosexuality, they negotiated these terms in completely different spaces from their white cohorts.

Chicago’s Southside Allen Drexel describes as a world of Drag, in which African-American homosexuals are participating in, and one of the biggest events took place on

Halloween.. In the 1930's the Finnie Balls, created by Alfred Finnie, were probably the first moment in which gay men of color were highly visible in the Chicago gay scene. These also gained extensive coverage throughout the 20th century from black press like, *The Chicago Defender, Jet, and Ebony*. The presence of drag queens in public spaces signified the refusal of black gay men to be invisible or mask their differences to white society. Despite race and class people from all over the city attended these balls (121). Drexel and I both argue drag was an escape for black gay men to alleviate not only the economic stress of the Depression, but also being visibly Black in a white segregated supremacist society. Drexel goes to the extent to argue that attitudes toward homosexuality within the black community were not always so hostile. This is attributed mainly to the acceptance of drag in a black working class community.

Drexel also informs that Jazz and Blues clubs on the Southside were popular amongst homosexuals, black, white, male or female. Also that many clubs held specific time slots for the homosexual crowd and performing would be Drag Queens. However, being in drag in public was risky because it violated locale dress ordinance (126-127).

Drexel comments specifically John D'Emilio's research tells of the famous Stonewall Riots, when queer men and women fought back against the NYC police. It's said that Black and Puerto Rican Drag Queens, with a butch lesbian instigated the Riots with police confrontation (Drexel, 121). D' Emilio and Drexel recognizes what this does for the gay liberation movement as a whole because it paints an inclusionary picture when in reality black gay experiences are heavily under-represented in gay culture.

Drexel quotes Stephan Lee Dais' poem about being gay and black in Chicago:

I want to serve my community as a man, as a gay man and a member of the black community. I also want my human right respected as a man, a gay man, and a member of the black community. I don't want to be labeled a faggot anymore than I want to be called a nigger. I have been forced by the society to pay a price for being black. I don't want to pay yet another when price when I come home [to the black community]. (127).

When you grow up in the Midwest of the United States, Chicago becomes the default metropolitan zone. Denver and Omaha are both large cities situated in the American Midwest, and while both have skyscrapers, Chicago is more comparable to the New York City of the Midwest. As the third largest city in the United States, many people travel and live in Chicago. For many Nebraskans, it is a trip to the 'big city.' Before I moved here, I had visited multiple times while growing up. On one of those trips, I remember we took a Taxicab from downtown up to see the Blue Man Group in Lakeview, a block from the main strip of Boystown. At the time, I was 13, and I vividly remember my mother asking the Cab driver about the area we were in, and he replied, "This area is Lakeview, but the street we are on is Boystown." My mother inquired further, and he explained it was an area where a lot of gay men live, and gave her a brief background about how it's one of the oldest gay neighborhoods in the U.S. I remember the man also stressed more than once, "They stay in their area, and they get left alone." It was almost threatening, but it carried a sense of agreement. At 13, I was focused on my mother, and the cab driver not recognizing me as one of these gay men, but there was a lot more to unpack in this conversation.

It's not like Chicago heterosexuals, and homosexuals sat down and agreed that they would stay in their bounds, but it was an informal or unspoken word. Gay men felt comfortable to express their sexual desires in this neighborhood, and others saw it as a spectacle. David K. Johnson about white gay lifestyles happening in Chicago during the 1930's. In "The Kids of Fairytown: Gay Male Culture on Chicago's Near North Side in the 1930s," Johnson writes about locations in the city in which gay men were able to act more openly queer, and spots in which cruising locations in the city were.

Johnson also relays the experience of some gay men in the 1930's and their experience as Chicagoans, what they did, who they met with, and what it meant to be a homosexual in early 20th Century Chicago. These firsthand accounts that Johnson writes about come from a study done by the faculty and students at the University of Chicago in the department of sociology. Professors Robert Park and Ernest Burgess began to apply a technique they coined called 'urban ecology' in which they encouraged their students to use the city's culturally diverse landscape to become their primary source (98). Many of those research projects students focused on homosexuals and their experiences in Chicago. The most extensive study was conducted by Earle Bruce, interviewed over 40 homosexual men, and conducted nearly 50 tests pertaining to homosexuals and their personalities, all whom were white.

By 1938, Burgess's sociology course contained a true/false question: "In large cities, homosexual individuals tend to congregate rather than remain separate from each other." Johnson notes the answer was "true." At the time, the word homosexual had just become household terminology, and it's safe to say that there was negative energy surrounding the public opinion of homosexuals during the period, but also, increasing

curiosity about these queer men, especially in the midst of depression. Johnson uses literature as an example to point to as evidence. The secrecy of homosexuality was beginning to step out of the closet through literature (99-100). One novel, *Twilight Men* by Andre Tellier was a known queer read; many books pertaining to homosexual experiences, and relationships begin to be romanticizing, and not demonizing.

These books became sites of information about homosexual men and women and their lives. At one point Johnson notes an interview with a North-side librarian who comments, “ I thought of these people as pansies, low down. After I read the books I realized that they were human, a person.” (100). So books like *Twilight Men*, *Strange Brother*, and *Well of Loneliness* became widely available to the working class, began to influence public opinion of homosexuality, though Johnson notes that middle and upper class retailers didn't carry these books due to their suggestive details.

Harold, a white working-class gay man had read books like those previously mentioned and begun to seek out a gay life in Chicago. Harold had heard talk about spots in which “pansies” would meet, such as a corridor in the Wrigley Building, on Michigan Avenue. Johnson also writes about how this is intriguing, because this building is visible and centrally located which still hold true today concerning the location (101). Oak Street Beach was a known cruising location; up along the waterfront to North Avenue, men were able to initiate sexual encounters without needing to be conspicuous.

In 1933, *Variety* magazine had written a series of articles in which they discuss the queer environment of Chicago, the Water Tower area, located in the heart of the city, becomes known as “Fairytown, or Towertown.” This can obviously be positioned as an archetypal Boystown neighborhood. After the repeal of Prohibition, some businesses

became increasingly exclusive to gay men (102). One of the most popular was Waldmen's on Rush Street. This establishment catered to middle-class white men, and was thought to house a more upscale crowd of gay men. However, Johnson mentions that private parties were more common meeting places for gay men and women, because it allowed for themes, and for guests to be true to their sexuality and their desires (104-105).

During the 1933 World's Fair, there were even more people in the city, which meant more chances to meet other queer men. Pertaining to Oak Street Beach, one account, Rodney, who said, "loads of belles...they threw their arms around one another and carried on, you would think you were in a Turkish Harem." (103). Rodney's statement can be decoded in a thousand ways, however, it does portray the ability and visibility gay men were gaining. Harold met his lover of two years at the time Max. Max, another interviewee of Bruce's, was a resident of the suburb Elgin, but made frequent visits into "Fairytown" (103). Harold and Max's relationship was initiated by a known cruising location, and this is how these spots allow you to network to meet other homosexuals. Harold's story also mentions where he was living, which was between the Chicago River, and Division Street, where about 20,000 single people lived in apartments (102). Johnson describes the economic climate of the Depression and how that led many to occupations like hustling or prostitution, which both gay men and women participated in order to alleviate their poor conditions (102).

Johnson uses Bruce's study to create a detailed portrait of what social life was like for these gay men in Chicago, which was truly a network of men whose interests were to be visible, but left to themselves. For many working-class men and women monetary

funds were hard to come by so having a network of people to borrow and depend on was essential during the Depression. Using this essay Johnson writing helps to contextualize what's happening for white men in Chicago, at this time, and previously Drexel's essay does the same for black homosexuals during early 20th century in the Chicago. One aspect of Bruce's research is the pool of individuals he interviewed not only were they all white, but he disproportionately interviewed effeminate men, though his intentions are unknown, this reveals the false narrative stereotyping all gay men as 'fairies', as well as the network of men and their personalities, since each was referred by one, and other. Keep in mind that there are a variety of personalities and people that are homosexual, or queer, so the experiences Bruce gains from his interviews look at only a small portion of homosexuals. There were still plenty of men who choose to live a more normative lifestyle while participating in queer activities; but there was even a larger population of homosexual individuals who were marginalized by the gay lifestyles of Fairytown in the thirties.

I argue that today, Boystown in Chicago functions in a similar way, though racial segregation cannot be legally practiced today. Spaces like 'Fairytown' located in Chicago North Side is just as inaccessible to black homosexuals then, as Boystown is to black homosexuals now. I expose of gay lifestyles as non-progressive by pointing to the racial segregation practiced in the 1930's, now I seek to update this as still practiced today in virtual spaces.

Cyberspace & Contemporary Gay Space: GRINDR

Today, gay spaces still exist, like bars, nightclubs, and cruising spots; however, they have successfully made the jump into cyberspace. Earlier I pointed to the strategic political formation of gay liberation, in where myths of inclusion arise, like the LGBT rainbow flag. By focusing on the historically context of segregation concludes that inclusion was not always the interests of certain gay men, and that the price of segregation in gay spaces has thrived while changing tactics throughout the 20th century. One of those would be the charging of covers for bars, economics, and race are connected, which leads to white men able to occupy these spaces, because financially gay men of color would not always be able to pay these covers.

That should reiterated that white men were able to fluidly move in and out of black gay spaces, but during segregation this could not be done as a black man vice versa. Previously, Harlem is used to portray this; white men and women were free to socialize in predominantly black areas, but not the other way around. This contributes to the sense of black people as exotic, deviant, or non-conforming to white spaces. Moving into our contemporary era we can understand that racial lines are not as intense, but they have not disappeared, there is still great divide between black and white people in the United States.

Distance between physical space and virtual space has been completely blurred in the last two decades through a number of ways. The Internet plays a very large role in our

daily lives. Cyberspace in general has invaded actual physical practices. An obvious result is the visible deteriorated use of our United States postal service. Even newspapers have moved to a digital space, because it is more efficient to check the Chicago Tribune's Internet page versus actually ordering the newspapers and waiting for it in the mail.

The Internet or Cyberspace has been theorized as a commercialized space, and realizes within there are tensions between the private and public sectors. It is important to first address the Internet as a product of the military and government; its purpose was used as such during the mid-20 century. During the 1990's the civilian Internet was introduced, which changed the way in how we interact. Hurwitz recognizes the difference between the civilian cyberspace and private sectors (660). Once introduced, it was hard to maintain control in how the Internet was being used. Various political groups that have used the Internet as platforms to inform 'the web,' and the speed in which information travels, thus providing frameworks to the project to support cyber theory.

Turkle's essay, "Looking toward Cyberspace Beyond Grounded Sociology," functions to legitimize the Internet as a space in which millions are linked. She introduces us to MUD's (multiple user domains), which are chat rooms, bulletin boards, and news groups, all spaced within the larger functioning Internet (643). Turkle describes the exploration of cyberspace as an enthralling experience. However, the importance in recognizing other users in cyberspace brings online participants to determine a 'self' within this space juxtapose to others. Turkle specifically is referring to the idea of online dating.

Today, we have approached an age in which the Internet invades every social constructions, and physical spaces. A main function of the gay bar, and cruising is to

meet, socialize, have sex with other queer men, or women. These spaces historically have been separated from heterosexual spaces, in order to maintain comfortability amongst gay community. Using a previous comparison, like postal mail moving into the age of email, the function of the gay bar moved from physical space to cyberspace. This occurred first through various online dating sites, but the most successful and most widely used, is an app called Grindr. A space in which men interested in men can meet, socialize, and cruise, all from the comfort of their smart phones.

On March 25, 2009, CEO Joel Simkhai launched his iPhone app, Grindr. At the time the 3G networks, and the Apple Apps store were only eight months old. In Jamie Woo's book, *Meet Grindr: How One App Changed the Way We Connect*, the story of Grindr unfolds and contextualizes what it means to have an app solely intended on helping queer men meet. Woo is careful to call this men queer, because the online traffic records of Grindr mean more than just gay men use the app, the use of queer helps broaden the subject base.

During June of 2009 the app received mention on a British television show, *Top Gear*, the show host went through a simulation of the app, and how it works. After this Simkhai told Woo in an interview, "The impacts was instant, we had about 10,000 downloads overnight, increasing our base by 50 percent, within a week were up to 40,000 users." (Woo, 13). More currently at any given moment there's over a million users logged onto Grindr at once. Records in which Woo relays the user traffic of the App describes New York City as region with the most users. In the U.S's top cities there are about 302,339 users in New York City, 228,265 in Los Angeles, and 164,316 users in Chicago (15). With over five million users in four years the app has experienced a

quicker process of site population than earlier queer male connection websites, such as Gaydar, established in 1999, and Manhunt, 2001. By 2010 Gaydar reached six million users worldwide, and in 2008 Manhunt's user count was near four million (15). It is important to understand some of the technicalities of the app in which it has transformed the way homosexual men meet, hookup, and form social relationships. In the chapter, "The Significance of Location," Jaime Woo continues to discuss Grindr in his novel, *Meet Grindr*. Woo deconstructs Grindr to the point where it can be analyzed as a GPS locating system, which is exactly what the app utilizes with smartphones.

A previous capstone starts some of the conversation about Grindr, Duncan Shuckrow's *Take Off Your Masc: The Hegemonic Gay Male's Performance on Grindr*, explores much of what Woo mentions in his book, *Meet Grindr*, but to be clear Shuckrow focuses on the performance of the male body on Grindr, something Woo only mentions. Shuckrow's project alludes to what I seek to connect in our sociological, and psychological interactions, which we perform in real life, still exist in cyberspace. Sociology first approaches cyberspace in a traditional way, by applying Freudian analysis to the self in cyberspace, Turkle argues that cyberspace is too packed with various ideologies for a Freudian approach to make sense, and believes Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari's French philosophical approach provide a framework that 'the self' in cyberspace is allowed more than just one-on-one interactions (643). Turkle makes it clear when participating with MUD (Multiple Domain Users) one creates a persona, and how one acts in a chat room may be completely different in another space, much like the previously mentioned theorist theorize on how we socialize in our daily lives. In cyberspace the boundaries are limitless, because it takes place in virtual space.

Turkle credits Erik Erikson's idea of the psychological moratorium which refers to the years of our adolescents, when we fall in and out of love, slack on responsibilities, overall making various youthful mistakes. Turkle argues that this psychological moratorium is frozen in virtual reality, because online activity takes place in a non-physical/confrontational space, despite your age. Consequences for acting out of the norm online aren't really there. Online participants are free to experiment, and possibly partake in activities they may not normally in their daily lives, and since you are not physically interacting with others the consequences are arguably not there. This is how Shuckrow's, "Take off your Masc" is relevant, and starts the conversation I seek to extend. I think the Internet provides a space of experimentation, however, I argue that. Interacting online the consequences are arguably not there, especially on Grindr. Certain aspects of the app allow the possibilities to partake in activities some may not normally in their daily lives, like being blatantly racist.

One of those aspects would be the ability to filter out users based on age, weight, height, relationship status, and most importantly to my argument, ethnicity. Filtering users means there are a number of users who are not being seen by each other based on racial background. As a black user, I have personally been with white friends, and there are users they have access to and I do not. It is possible for users not to state ethnicity in their profiles, and that would be a loophole, in which users would have access to those that have filtered them out.

Shuckrow argues that a consequence is the agency Grindr creates which supports a hyper-masculine environment, while I argue it also supports a white-supremacist gay space, which historically have always existed. Addressing this as the hegemonic gay

Grindr. Grindr users are allowed in their profile a variety of details, which makes up their online presence, i.e. a title, profile picture, as well as, a section about you. This is the very visual side to Grindr. A profile can display with a number of signifiers that explain users intentions on Grindr; however, users are allowed to leave their profiles blank. You don't have to post a profile picture, though this means you are less likely to get attention. A profile allows for any picture, a title name displayed, and word limited about you section. You also have the option to complete the ethnicity, age, weight, height, and now HIV status/last tested date, it is important to state these are optional, but these criteria also let users filter others out for a price. There are two Grindr's, one that is free, and one that you can subscribe to and pay a monthly fee of an equivalency of 12 U.S Dollars. This is truly where the argument becomes most significant is when the subscription fee is paid; because of the monetary funds it takes to purchase a Grindr-Xtra profile.

However, its not like people are dying to breach this line. Filtering features are not the only way that users racially discriminate, in their profiles, Woo states there is text written by users that say things like "No blacks, No Asians," etc. Users are allowed to write what ever they'd like on their profiles. It is also very important to note that the filter feature tries to be politically correct based on a white governments use of the word ethnicity, which also carries a history of being a Band-Aid solution to unrest with political reference to racial categorization. At least, you have the choice to chose your racial ethnicity as "Black." and not African-American.

In "No Rice, No Curry And No Blacks: The Sexual Racism Running Rampant Within the LGBT Community," Yusuf Tamanna addresses the blatant racism that takes place on Grindr. "Requests like 'No Blacks' or 'No Asians' have become regular phrases

on apps like Grindr with some users going as far as to clump different ethnic groups together based on food. ‘No Rice’ means East Asians need not apply and ‘No Curry’ lets South Asians, like myself, know that I haven’t a chance in hell. Vulgar stuff, right? Well that depends on what side of the fence you look at things,” writes Tamanna.

A group within the LGBT community, who experience both discrimination and fetishization on gay dating apps more so than any other racial group, is Black men. As mentioned earlier in “Black Sexualities,” black men are stereotyped as the black man being dominant, and having an extremely large penis. Tamanna adds, we are suppose to be rough in bed and borderline aggressive. Many users on gay dating apps see no problem in enforcing this idea. Even worse than that, there are cases where users on Grindr have called black men the N-word and likened them to Zoo Monkeys after their advances haven’t been reciprocated. Noting that such objectification isn’t just at the hands of white gay men, in fact many gay men of color have been known to fetishize black men in the same way (Tamanna).

“Black men are objectified from the get-go on gay dating apps and when they challenge the status quo they’re met with derogatory racial insults. Fed up with the constant barrage of ignorant and racially fuelled requests and abuse they get on dating apps; some black men have taken to social media to expose the true extent of what they experience.” (Tamanna).

So why is racism so blatantly allowed on Grindr? Not only do I argue that Turkle’s psychological moratorium is actively being applied in the virtual space of Grindr; a space where consequences to racism are somewhat not there. In an interview, Grindr CEO Joel Simkhai is asked how he would feel if profiles said “No Jews,” specifically referencing to

his racial background, he replied, "As a Jewish man, I wouldn't like it, but we encourage users to state it in a positive way: 'Only looking for Christian guys', or whatever. I'm not going to solve racism." While the interviewer replies, "You could at least try." Simkhai laughed. Simkhai has been pressured to address some of the racialized activities that take place on his app, and as a white man ignoring this, he in turn promotes it, in one interview he replies, "Racism has always existed," and in this moment my project comes full circle.

I consider these statements from the founder of Grindr, a type of endorsement for racism on his own app. In this Grindr is, for all its technological innovation, another example of gay spaces as white spaces, which have a history of declaring, who can, and cannot participate. Racism has always existed, even in historically gay spaces. Gay men have always had spaces in which white men were able to function without the confrontation of race.

Today, I realize that all sorts of people live in Boystown, I live in the neighborhood, and I'm black. However, there's a homo-normative culture that arises out of Boystown. It is also important to note that in public spaces such as Boystown you cannot racially discriminate, and still while the United States, condemns public racism. I seek to connect this idea between Boystown and Grindr. On Grindr you can filter out based on racial background whereas today in bars, you cannot. In the era of Donald Trump when racism is rampant, and videos of racial injustice go viral on the Internet; it shows in some aspect that people are not ok with it. However, the Internet acts as a shield for many who wield racist thoughts. America is as diverse as is the gay community, which owes some of its success to the Black civil rights movement; it was not just a

movement for black people. Civil rights advanced the status of various human rights movements, including gay liberation.

However, this process is political, and ignoring the history behind how segregated gay men have been is negligent. White gay men should not make the mistake of advancing their interests much like white women have during feminist movements. Since this is a white oriented society, there is one of responsibilities white people are accounted to, because they are in a position of privilege. Joel Simkhai should not shrug off racism happening on a space he's created for gay men to socialize, and meet, especially because he's a white man.

Conclusion

The historical spaces frequented by gay men in urban areas, has clearly been emphasized as culture throughout this project. I do want to stress that this is not the only culture LGBTQ peoples have, and that homosexual men occupy a large portion of this culture, but as I stated earlier, this community is incredibly diverse. This diversity is not only in the spaces we occupy, but the influence we have over mass media and culture today. It truly resembles the rainbow flag; a myth, which is for the LGBTQ community, it is not necessarily bad, because it is successful in various ways. However, I argue that there are cracks in the myths such as these when it comes to racial diversity, and gay men. I've argued that these spaces were created at a time when racial segregation was practiced legally, I also argue that this over time and through the political process of myth this has transformed into cyberspaces like Grindr.

The community or myth of a nation becomes contradictory, when the interests, and advancement of one group of people occurs, while others do not. When the

experiences of one group of people is highly represented in media, while others are not. I argue that in the eyes of white gay men, black men have been in a stasis since the appearance of gay culture. To participate in spaces like bars, nightclubs, and now Grindr, you must conform to white homo-normativity. The exception to this is performance drag, which even today has black presences, however, I'd argue that it's been assimilated into the homo-normative culture.

With the advancement of a right-wing agenda in the United States, we must confront racism. It is unacceptable, as much as it is ridiculous. In the past year terms like White privilege, and White supremacy are uttered, confronted, and addressed on a daily basis, because people realize how much this actually affects their lives if you are not white. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has established a presence world wide, that says we are black, not only are we human beings, we aren't going anywhere.

Culture is most definably layers of various sociological interactions, as well as our past interaction amongst each other. For the most part millennials have been socialized, and raised in a progressive environment, especially through technology. Not only is our worldly landscape diverse, it is connected in an instance through technology. In a moment you can send a message or a comment on Facebook to someone in Japan. As millennials our worldly landscape very much shapes how we interact with each other not only in person, but online.

Social media is quite awe-inspiring. I remember the first moments of Facebook, and Instagram, but it is important to remember how these things change the way we socialize, and think of our selves. This article argues that since millennials have grown with instant gratification in our lives, we've lost touch with our fellow human, and their

experiences. Focusing in on the interests of ourselves can be problematic: capitalism is much to blame for this since we've been put on a path toward capital and profit since grade school.

In spaces such as Grindr, can be customized to ones interests. Specifically, by using the filter feature on Grindr, you are continuing the categorization of people by race. There are various aspects you can filter out, but I argue race, or as Grindr lists, as ethnicity should not be a feature you are allowed to filter, because what that does is continue the segregation already functioning within gay spaces. Whether its our interests as individuals, or as a community, diversity is an important aspect in being human, because we all come from various walks of live. Race is not a defining factor, however, it cannot be ignored because of our societies' history of racial oppression toward black peoples.

For the most part homosexual experience recorded of mass representation is centered on white men. In the formation of these space and community, segregation was still being practiced amongst white people in this country. I argue that myth helps to blur or distort these facts, objects like the rainbow flag signify inclusion, and community. Events like the Stonewall Riots also help to communicate this message. However, we cannot ignore the contextual history, or the political aspect of gay liberation. Movements of liberation in connection to gay men, and women have very much succeeded because of the success of civil rights. It is problematic to spread the myth of inclusion amongst gay men, when many are segregated, and still being filter out of spaces online such as Grindr. Allowing the feature of filtering, specifically by ethnicity, is not only historical negligent,

but incredibly insensitive to the various men of color who have done much to shape gay culture today, and were not always been credited as such.

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