



Gender, Place & Culture

A Journal of Feminist Geography

ISSN: 0966-369X (Print) 1360-0524 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>

'The meat market': production and regulation of masculinities on the Grindr grid in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

Carl Bonner-Thompson

To cite this article: Carl Bonner-Thompson (2017) 'The meat market': production and regulation of masculinities on the Grindr grid in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24:11, 1611-1625, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2017.1356270](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1356270)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1356270>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 27 Jul 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 3941



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles [↗](#)

'The meat market': production and regulation of masculinities on the Grindr grid in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

Carl Bonner-Thompson

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

ABSTRACT

This article explores the regulatory practices that shape the production of embodied masculinities in profile pictures in the online dating app, Grindr. Mobile dating applications are becoming increasingly enmeshed in everyday socio-sexual lives, providing 'new' spaces for construction, embodiment and performance of gender and sexuality. I draw on 31 semi-structured interviews and four participant research diaries with men who use Grindr in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a post-industrial city in North East England. Exploring the ways men display, expose and place their bodies in online profile pictures, revealed the production of two forms of masculinity – *hypersexualised masculinity* and *lifestyle masculinity*. I argue that the regulatory practices that shape men's bodies in everyday spaces work to produce these masculinities. I take a visual approach that pays attention to the spatial practices that produce pictures, but that also pays attention to other senses, particularly touch. Paying attention to the visuality of the Grindr grid enables an understanding of the instability of online/offline dichotomies, as it is the interactions of online and offline spaces that enable the production of digital masculinities.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 March 2017
Accepted 15 May 2017

KEYWORDS

Masculinities; geographies of sexualities; Grindr; bodies; digital geographies

'The meat market': consuming digital masculinities

Josh: I think any dating profile sort of thing is a place for advertising, it's selling yourself essentially, you obviously, you're using that profile with an aim in mind, so it's a market, it's a meat market essentially. You do have to advertise yourself to a certain extent, you do have to convince someone like that you are what they want and what they desire. So yeah, like Grindr is a place like that, I truly believe that.
(Josh, 23, white British)

Scholars in digital geographies and new media and digital cultural studies argue that digital spaces are deeply entangled with the fleshy corporeality of embodied

CONTACT Carl Bonner-Thompson  c.a.b.thompson@ncl.ac.uk

© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

experience (van Doorn 2011; Longhurst 2013; Kinsley 2014; Rose 2015). Such work argues that (dis)embodied experiences should be further explored to understand how digital technologies reconfigure everyday lives (Parr 2002; Rose 2015). As Kinsley (2014, 378) states, this involves thinking about the 'manifold ways in which technical activities convene assemblages of bodies, objects, languages, values and so on and fold them in and out of spatial practice'. Drawing upon conceptual and theoretical ideas offered by 'digital geographies', this article examines *how* spaces, bodies and technologies are mutually constituted in and through Grindr (Parr 2002; Kinsley 2014; Chen 2015). I focus on the taking and choosing of Grindr profile pictures to understand how men who use Grindr bring their bodies into digital being (Parr 2002; van Doorn 2011; Kinsley 2014). I argue that regulatory processes and practices that shape the everyday material lives of men produce masculinities across the Grindr grid. I contribute to debates in feminist and digital geographies by paying attention to how the interactions of online and offline spaces (re)produce and subvert discourses of gender and sexuality across multiple places.

Work in critical men's studies argues that bodies are the focal point for the combination of material and discursive symbolism (Morgan 1992; Connell 1995; Messerschmidt 1999). Geographies of masculinities pay attention to how embodied masculinities emerge in and across the spaces and places that they are practiced (Jackson 1991; Berg and Longhurst 2003; Hopkins and Noble 2009). Geographers have built on these insights by exploring issues such as masculinities and age (Hopkins 2006; Richardson 2013), sexualities (Gorman-Murray 2006, 2013), fleshy corporeality (Longhurst 2005; Waitt and Stanes 2015) and emotion and sensuality (Evers 2009; Warren 2015). Much of this work attends to the ways masculinities come to be regulated, produced, ruptured, (re)shaped and challenged in men's everyday lives, practices and geographies (Yea 2015). I develop this work by highlighting how regulatory practices that shape masculinities emerge in the digital through the (re)production of gendered and sexualised bodies.

Grindr is an online dating application targeted at men. The platform has arguably become a popular place for fleeting erotic encounters, sexualised behaviours and 'hooking up' (Tziallas 2015). When a user logs into Grindr they are provided with a grid of other users. The grid consists of small boxes showing scaled down versions of user profile pictures. This grid shows men in order of location, with the top profile being the user's own, and others become more geographically distant the further the user moves down the grid. Users can scroll through the grid and view the profiles of other men, but can only access a limited number of profiles unless they pay a subscription fee.

Existing research around Grindr tends to focus on gay men's 'risky' sexual behaviours (Rice et al. 2012), HIV interventions (Burrell et al. 2012), or the production of poor mental well-being (Miller 2015; Jaspal 2017). These studies can pathologise gay men's sexual subjectivities, as they conflate Grindr practices with sexually transmitted diseases and mental health discourses. Such discourses can essentialise the bodily complexities that shape gendered and sexualised subjectivities. Instead, I

examine how masculinities and sexualities are negotiated and produced through the Grindr grid to understand the lived experience of being a man who uses Grindr.

Analysis of 30 interviews and four participant research diaries revealed two relational productions of embodied masculinities on Grindr profiles – *hypersexualised* and *lifestyle* masculinities. Although these are not the only masculinities that occupy the Grindr grid, they were the most commonly embodied by participants and therefore most dominant. Hypersexualised masculinities are produced through photos that focus on bodies and exposed flesh and skin. In these pictures the context of the image is blurred or the body takes up all space obscuring the background. It is the absence of a visible context and place that gives rise to the hypersexualised embodiment. Hypersexualised Grindr users are assumed to be attempting to attract men who are interested in fleeting sexual encounters. Conversely, lifestyle masculinities are produced through pictures where bodies are given some context (e.g. a beach, a bar, or music event). These places have significance to the image as they work to produce specific performances of gender. These two productions of embodied masculinities are not mutually exclusive – those men who construct a lifestyle masculinity can still be sexualised and vice versa. However, 'lifestyle' highlights how men who use Grindr attempt to construct a profile that encapsulates broader practices (e.g. leisure, tourism, or work). Furthermore, these productions do not exist independently in online spaces, and instead they are interwoven with the ways masculinities come to be regulated in everyday lives (van Doorn 2011; Longhurst 2013).

Before I explore the empirical material that has informed these typologies, I discuss the methodology, highlighting how a visual approach pays attention to place and appreciates the senses beyond sight. Following, are three empirical examples. In the first, I demonstrate that productions of hypersexualised masculinities are attempts to 'sell sex' through the exposure of parts of the flesh and the skin. In the second, I show how productions of lifestyle masculinities emerge through the regulatory practices that shape men's material offline bodies and therefore, men who use Grindr aim to market more 'active' dimensions of the self. The third example highlights how hypersexualised and lifestyle masculinities can intersect. I draw upon regulations of aged masculinities on Grindr to highlight how skin can be used to (re)create digital bodies and confuse lifestyles. Through these examples, I highlight how everyday spatial practices and processes can blur the boundaries of these two typologies as they inform the production of one another.

Newcastle has received great investment in leisure, services, culture and tourism to re-develop and re-brand the post-industrial city as a cosmopolitan place that is desirable to visit. Gay pride in Newcastle is a commercialised event that is heavily policed and has become a 'family-orientated' celebration of non-heterosexuality. The non-heterosexual zones of the city have also become desexualised, commodified and branded 'safe' places. This zone is informally named the Pink Triangle – a section of the city that is 'triangulated' by the location of non-heterosexual bars/clubs. Many cruising and public sex zones were placed under increased regulation

and re-development. Consequently, the non-heterosexual night time economy became sanitised and unwelcome to, what Casey (2007) describes as, the 'Queer unwanted' – queer bodies that do not conform to the young, white, able-bodied, men that most commonly frequent the 'scene'. These processes that exclude 'older' men are evident in my research, and several participants explained how they must be negotiated through the Grindr.

Newcastle's gay scene is also dominated by white men, and white bodies go unnoticed, unpoliced and produced as having 'no race'. Issues of race and ethnicity were not prominent in discussion of Grindr with participants. However, as whiteness is dominant in Newcastle, men are rarely confronted with their privilege. Therefore, the typologies I discuss are in relation to identities articulated by white men. In Newcastle, it was issues of body size and age which are more dominant for men who use Grindr. The following section discusses the methodological approach that underpins the conceptualisation of the typologies.

'Recruiting from the meat market': men, masculinities and methodologies

Previous research examining masculinity across dating websites has relied on visual methods, such as content analysis of profiles (Payne 2007; Mowlabocus 2010; Siibak 2010; Walker and Eller 2016). This article explores the visuality of Grindr profiles. Pink (2012) highlights how place and locality are central to visual methodologies. She argues that visuality should examine how material and digital practices and localities become entangled in the visual. Therefore, technologies that produce images are not detached. Instead, they are complexly embedded in a multitude of offline experiences (Banks 2001). How we experience the visual dimensions of the digital is multi-sensuous. This draws attention to the ways that images are more than visual, instead they come into cultural being through touch, sounds, smells, tastes and sights (Pink 2012). Therefore, I focus on how the production of masculinities on Grindr are done to foster a desire to touch in other users. I use ideas offered by Price (2013) who argues that the eyes act as organs of touch. For Price, the eyes can approximate touch in a way that can bring bodies closer, or keep them at a distance. I use these ideas to suggest that men who use Grindr are attempting to create their digital bodies as 'touchable', in a way that attracts other users.

I build on this work on visuality by paying attention to the power dynamics that shape the interconnectedness of the online/offline. Thinking about the materiality of the visual and the digital is a way for feminist geographers to examine the power relations that co-produce online spaces (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2015). By focusing on the eyes as organs of touch, I suggest that looking, or being looked at, is shaped by regulatory discourses and practices. Through interviews and participant research diaries I explore how the material regulations of masculinities (re)produce pictures, images and profiles. Therefore, I pay attention to the

ways interactions of online and offline space enable gendered and sexual power relations to emerge.

As part of my project I set up a profile on Grindr between July and December 2015. My profile asked users if they would be interested in talking about their experiences of gender, sexuality and Grindr. I used three different pictures of myself during this time. Once a participant had contacted me, I provided more information about the interview. For example, I explained that it would be informal and semi-structured, and I offered users the option to read over information sheets and consent forms before agreeing to take part. The forms were sent via e-mail. If the user agreed to be interviewed, we arranged a time and place to meet via e-mail or through Grindr. I conducted interviews in public cafes in Newcastle city centre or in a Newcastle University building. Despite having the option, most participants preferred that I chose the location.

All participants in this study identified as gay men and were aged between 20 and 50. 25 men identified as white British, and the remaining five identified as Filipino, British Pakistani, Pacific Islander, mixed race and Southeast Asian. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, with open discussions about how participants used Grindr, the sexual and non-sexual experiences they had with men from Grindr, what qualities they found attractive in men and how they saw themselves as men. Four of these interview participants agreed to write participant research diaries, which were sent to me via WhatsApp and e-mail. The interviews and diaries were coded with NVivo and analysed using a grounded theory approach.

The pictures I used were of my smiling face and clothed torso against a wall. I attempted to 'construct boundaries' by being explicit about my research intentions to limit the amount of people that may have (mis)read my online presence as looking for sex or dates (Cuomo and Massaro 2014; Taylor, Falconer, and Snowdon 2014). As a young, gay man who has previously used Grindr socially, I could easily be understood and recognised as an 'insider'. Cuomo and Massaro (2014) argue that some feminist research 'insiders' may actually benefit from constructing certain boundaries as a way to protect the wellbeing of researchers and researched. I used the phrase 'looking for research participants only', alongside details about the project as a way to 'separate' myself from Grindr users. However, I still received multiple sexually suggestive and explicit messages and pictures. My face and my body were sometimes the focus of these messages, and users said things such as, 'I didn't read your profile, I just saw your cute face and long hair'; and 'wow, you're hot'. One non-respondent commented on one particular picture where I was wearing a shirt with the first two buttons undone. Upon realising that I was not interested in a 'hook up', he said 'you're being a tease, showing us all your chest like that'. In the context of the conversation he was making a joke, however this did prompt me to change my picture to one where my body was more fully 'covered'. On reflection, my body and profile were subject to a form of regulation. Despite attempting to construct a researcher profile, I was still clearly entangled in

the sexual politics that shape Grindr. My exposed body emerged as a site of erotic potential. Once other Grindr users understood that I was not using the space for dating or hooking up, the exposure of my body was policed. Therefore, my body – the constitution of the fleshy and the digital – was entangled in this research (Longhurst, Ho, and Johnston 2008). This could arguably be a way for other users to attempt to negotiate my rejection of the sexual uses of the app. It is important for researchers using apps for recruitment to fully consider the potential readings of their bodies and their parts in profile pictures. Despite attempting to engage in ‘boundary-making’ (Cuomo and Massaro 2014), the sexualised nature of this online space often shaped the way my body was understood, and the ways that regulation of online identities occurred. The following section further explores hypersexual masculinities by drawing upon empirical examples.

‘Sex sells’: hypersexualised masculinities

Some Grindr users chose to show different parts of their unclothed bodies in their profile pictures. Only certain body parts are able to be exposed in pictures as Grindr have ‘profile guidelines’ that restrict complete nudity. Therefore, users are unable to use naked pictures, or pictures that highlight the shape of their genitals through clothing. The degree of exposure varied, and included, but was not exclusive to, shirtless men, and men in underwear and unbuttoned clothes. Some pictures focused on particular parts of the body, leaving out the ‘full’ body. In the following quote, a participant describes his exposed body in his profile picture and how and why he chose it:

Joe: it’s a picture of my body with my shirt open, the reason I picked it is cos’ I was sat own on the couch and I was eating ice cream and I was like I should really start my diet now, this was a couple of weeks back, and I went, ‘how bad am I actually?’. And I went to the mirror, unbuttoned my shirt, took a photo and I actually quite liked the outcome of it.

Carl: Is there any reason you chose to have your shirt open in the picture?

Joe: I feel it just starts a lot more conversation with people, showing a bit of flesh. Sex sells, and if you’ve got to sell yourself on these apps, that’s the way to do it. (Joe, 24, white British, call centre assistant)

Joe is attempting to increase interest in his profile by using images of his skin and flesh, as he has come to learn that bodies that reveal more skin are more desirable across the grid. In this example Joe’s body becomes ‘dismantled’ and one ‘part’ – his torso – is the main feature of his digital body (Mowlabocus 2010). This part of his body is used as something to be consumed, and he is doing so in a way that he thinks can demand the ‘gaze’ of others in the ‘competitive’ grid. The ways men look through Grindr can be multi-sensuous. Looking is something that we do with our eyes, but we also ‘touch’ with them (Marks 2000; Price 2013). Grindr seeks to put people ‘in touch’, both through conversation but also cutaneous

touch. As mentioned earlier, Grindr is centred on location and proximity, showing users within a localised, geographic radius. In this sense, the aim for many men is to meet in the flesh and to touch the skin. By showing the skin, men who use Grindr are attempting to create a desire to touch in users on 'the other side' of the screen. Therefore, digital masculinities emerge when bodies and skin become sites of eroticism and sexuality, with hypersexual bodies intersecting with youth, size, shape and whiteness.

Joe understands his skin as a site to 'sell' his body. However, taking the image was not a sexual practice. The act of eating and tasting ice cream produced a feeling of unhappiness around his body size and shape, and lead him to photographically document his body. Feminist geographers have highlighted how food and eating are visceral practices that are saturated with power relations formed through place (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008; Longhurst, Johnston, and Ho 2009). The taste of sweet food led Joe to question his eating practices in a way that urged him to think about regulating his body size and shape. The motivations that produced the picture are therefore shaped by the regulation of embodied masculinities and not necessarily eroticism. Furthermore, the picture is also produced through reflections on his lifestyle, particularly eating and exercising practices. However, when the image is uploaded into Grindr's profile space(s) it becomes culturally recognised as erotic. Therefore, the ways masculinities are embodied in the digital do not neatly map onto material identities. Instead, they take on new meanings that are produced by the instabilities of online and offline dichotomies. This is one way bodies become digital.

In an image of a torso with no background or recognizable geographical context, the exposed skin becomes the site of importance. As offline places and contexts are not visible, the body is the site through which gendered and sexualised discourses emerge, rather than a constitution of flesh, objects, places and 'things'. By removing other embodied dimensions of the self (e.g. the face) and focusing on other body parts, the construction of gender and sexuality is partial, giving rise to the hypersexualised idea of a profile image. This production of hypersexualised masculinity is used by men to market themselves as sexualised bodies in the hopes of touching.

Although the skin and flesh can become sexualised, this is not always the case – skins are understood in multiple ways. Ralph discusses his picture choice as a way to mask his identity. In the picture, Ralph's torso is toned and lean, with his abdominal muscles clearly visible. His body also 'takes up' all the space in the image:

Ralph: so it's a picture of my torso ... My torso is my body. My body is what I'm living in. It's as much as what I'm living in as my face is, so for me there's nothing wrong with having that on there, you know. I don't like the idea of being recognised in public and approached by people I have chosen not to speak to or mix with on Grindr. (Ralph, 22, Mixed Raced, Retail)

Ralph specifically highlights how the exposure of his skin is not a way to produce a hypersexualised body. The skin becomes a way he can produce a digital body

that is rooted in his materiality, but that simultaneously masks his face. Therefore, other Grindr users are less likely to recognise him in offline spaces. As Ralph worked in a retail store in Newcastle city centre, he did not want other Grindr users to be able to address him whilst working. The production of this partial digital body is a way to prevent online and offline identities from being coherent. For Ralph, he does not want to be read as a hypersexualised body in his offline working spaces. In this sense, the exposure of skin is a way to de-sexualise identities. As erotic Grindr practices do not necessarily map neatly onto working and professional masculinities, they are attempted to be kept distinct and separate. Therefore, the ways masculinities are produced in and through Grindr are entangled in offline identities and practices. In this sense, Grindr users are managing and negotiating their identities as they construct digital bodies. In the following section, I explore how this entanglement produces lifestyle masculinities on the Grindr grid.

'I knew my body was good': lifestyle masculinities

Images of muscular and toned bodies are often used in marketing campaigns and have become a desirable form of embodied youthful masculinity. The exposure of such bodies on the Grindr grid can be understood in this way. In his interview, Axel discusses how he chose to use a particular picture of himself from a holiday that showcased his 'good body'. In this example, the front of Axel's body is shown, from head to toe and only wearing swimming shorts:

Axel: I was very horny when I was traveling Asia so I had sex with a lot of people and met up with a lot of people ... I got back to Newcastle in September and I was kind still in this holiday mode, uni hadn't really started properly, I was talking to a lot of guys.

Carl: why did you chose that picture of yourself?

Axel: I just back from holiday [travelling Asia], and I had a picture of me in the beach and stuff and people were like 'ooh, nice beach' ... well I mean, I knew it was a nice picture, I looked nice on the beach, having a great time, also, I knew my body was good so I was just like why not ... yeah no, I was just aware that I looked good ... (Axel, 21, white British, undergraduate student)

Later in the interview Axel described what he thought of as a 'good body':

... like a holiday body, like what you want when you're on holiday, like triangle shaped, great arms, not hairy, just like, yeah.

Axel defines a muscular body as one that is hierarchically 'better' than a body that is not. The features of a 'good body' conform to contemporary ideas of desirable western masculine embodiment (Tanner, Maher, and Fraser 2013). Bodies of men that are lean and muscular and have little or no chest hair dominate media and advertising culture (Alexander 2003). Axel's ideas of 'looking good' are clearly enmeshed in this, and therefore he has chosen to use his regulated size and shape to 'sell' his profile. In this sense, his visible muscular torso becomes an embodied

symbol of achievement of desirable youthful masculinity (Yea 2015). Axel also gives his body context as he suggests that his 'good body' is a 'holiday body'. This constructs his sized and 'haired' body as one that has spatial and temporal specificity. Through regulating his body shape and size, Axel has achieved what he defines as a 'holiday body', meaning his exposed body's masculinity is 'in place'.

The spatial dimensions of the picture matter in digitally mediated masculinities. In this example, Axel is also advertising the idea that he is having a 'great time'. He attempts to construct a profile that highlights his ability to have fun, be active and have a happy lifestyle, alongside his body size, shape and body hair. In this sense, there are class dimensions as the picture reflects Axel's geographical mobility – being able to travel to 'exotic' locations in south-east Asia. Although the body can be seen from head to toe, it is the exposed 'part' that Axel places more emphasis upon. This spatial situatedness, the exposed skin, and its muscularity all work together to (re)produce a form of lifestyle masculinity. As the exposed body can be spatially recognised, it gives a broader context to gendered and sexual identities, and therefore can be understood as a more 'complete' picture of the self. The place, objects, things, skin and body in the picture work to produce this lifestyle masculinity.

Lifestyle masculinities emerge when men who use Grindr seek to (re)construct a digital body that is entangled with everyday and material geographies. The regulatory practices that can shape men's material bodies – for example, size and shape – work through the productions of masculinities in the Grindr grid. In spite of this, being aware that he is 'looking good' suggests that the visibility of Axel's body is used as a tactic to foster a desire to touch in other men who use Grindr. His interview also highlights how he was 'horny' when he put his profile picture up on Grindr, suggesting that his motivations were also shaped by embodied moods and desire. Therefore, a sexualised subjectivity can seek to produce lifestyle masculinities. Regulation of masculinities, lifestyles and sexualities are therefore entangled in how men who use Grindr produce their digital bodies. The following section explores the ways these two typologies come to be entangled through intersections of age.

'Got me tits oot for the lads': ageing masculinities

So far I have highlighted how lifestyle and hypersexual masculinities are not mutually exclusive. I develop this through the intersection of age to highlight how hypersexuality is a negotiation of gendered and sexual lifestyles. The seven participants I spoke to who were over the age of 35 often spoke about being too 'old' in 'gay years'. This would prompt them to use strategies to resist ageist discourses. One strategy was to leave the 'age' category blank, whilst using pictures of their exposed torsos. Age is not the only aspect of identity that people sometimes chose not to display on their profile. However, it was an identity category that 'older' users chose not to disclose as a way to appear more desirable across the grid. Gareth

and John talk about not using age and putting a shirtless picture on their profile. Gareth had recently changed his picture after a friend had advised him that he would get more men interested in him:

Gareth: So I put my topless picture on, like on an evening, woke up the next day, loads of messages, standard. Got me tits oot [out] for the lads like. And I don't have me age on there, as you probably noticed, again cos age is, I'm dead in gay years, and it is, kind of, it's quite sad that people look at the number and they write you off. And I've chatted to guys ... we've talked about meeting up, we've liked the interaction, we exchanged pictures, we like what we see, 'oh and by the way, how old are you?' 'I'm 42'; 'oh, okay, sorry a bit old for me'. (Gareth, 42, white British, A&E nurse/actor)

John: People don't declare their age, I didn't put my age, because it's a taboo in the gay world. So at first very discreet, very limited, no photograph, then I changed the photograph, then I put a more risqué photograph on which got a lot more responses, which obviously tells you a lot about what it's for, so it does change, but as and when, as and when.

Carl: what did you change your photo from and to?

John: well it was from nothing to a picture of my torso from my chin down to about here [hands are placed beneath his chin to about his waistline]. (John, 50, white British, special needs support)

Gareth and John are seeking to reduce the stigma attached to their aged body. Commercialised gay and queer spaces can (re)produce ageist discourses in ways that make 'older' bodies feel unwelcome, unwanted and undesirable (Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Casey 2007). Casey (2007), in particular points to the ways that the 'gay scene' in Newcastle is unwelcome to 'older' bodies through its commercialisation and focus on youth and 'younger' bodies. Casey (2007) argues that they become the 'queer unwanted'. The otherness that is attached to 'older' gay men's bodies is clearly not exclusive to spaces of the night-time economy, but seeps into digital technologies to regulate sexual and gendered identities (Downing 2013).

The option to 'hide' the numerical value of age is used as a form of resistance to the ageist discourses that celebrate 'young' bodies. For those men that may be deemed 'too old' for non-heterosexual dating apps, temporarily removing barriers of 'otherness' can also be achieved by focusing on the skin. Gareth chose to use a picture of his shirtless body in a de-contextualised surrounding, as an attempt to centre his fleshy materiality over numerical age. Despite being policed by normative ideas of gender and age, individuals have the agency to manage and negotiate these power dynamics in and through place and time (Tarrant 2014). Research with men in the USA and Finland has highlighted how middle-aged men engage in embodied practices to 'slow down' or resist bodily ageing processes. Practices such as physical exercise and controlled diets (Ojala et al. 2016) and cosmetic surgery (Kinnunen 2010), have been highlighted as ways for me to subvert ageing bodies to appear younger. As a way to resist ageism on Grindr, Gareth and John attempt to draw more attention to unclothed skin by showing flesh. Here, body parts are

used to enable sexualities to emerge. This strategy is an attempt to foster a desire to 'touch' in other Grindr users when the skin is seen on their screens. Lifestyle masculinities (age) are prevented from emerging in the categories that produce digital bodies, alongside pictures. Images that reflect a part of men's lifestyles can give an indication of age, therefore they are 'left out' of profile pictures. Digital spaces have the ability to enable men to (re)make and play with their ageing sexualities and masculinities (Frohlick and Migliardi 2011), in a way that reduces attention on the ageing lifestyles. Creating such ambivalence around age can seek to undermine ageist discourses as pictures of exposed body parts can be seen as an attempt to undermine the importance of quantitative age.

Although, these strategies may seek to challenge everyday ageism, they can simultaneously reinforce the value of youth and young bodies in contemporary western societies (Kinnunen 2010; Ojala et al. 2016). Regulatory practices that shape Newcastle's 'gay scene' come to be recognised as older men come to produce their digital bodies. In other words, ageism shapes how older men choose to digitally present themselves. These strategies may undermine, but do not necessarily destabilise ageism. The (re)construction of material bodies – digital and fleshy – through the ideologies of age can seek to stabilise the desirability society places on youthfulness (Kinnunen 2010). Older bodies must find ways to negotiate the ageism that works through the Grindr, (re)making their sexualities to avoid being the 'queer unwanted' (Casey 2007). Therefore, the ways we (re)make bodies digital is constantly being learned as we negotiate regulation.

Hypersexualised masculinities can emerge through resistances to regulatory processes. However, as the above example highlights, this subversion may only be temporary. Other users can come to (re)place the importance of numerical age on bodies during conversations. Therefore, although age can be disrupted, identity categories are constantly re-emerging in and though online and offline spaces (Chen 2015). Therefore, age, sexuality and gender must be constantly negotiated through internet dating and hook-ups (Frohlick and Migliardi 2011). This example highlights how the dichotomies of online/offline spaces are unstable. Production of digital masculinities are dependent on the interactions of online and offline space. Online and offline spaces and bodies are co-producing experiences of gender and sexualities on the Grindr grid – the ways bodies become digital is (re)shaped by offline practices, discourses and embodiments.

Producing and regulating masculinities on the Grindr grid

This article has examined how the regulation of embodied masculinities works to (re)produce digital bodies in and through the Grindr grid. By exploring the practice of taking and selecting profile pictures, I demonstrate how men who use Grindr produce two common forms of masculinities – hypersexualised and lifestyle. Hypersexualised masculinities emerge through a focus on the skin and flesh. Lifestyle masculinities are often more spatially 'recognisable' as they are produced

through objects, things and places. I argue that these forms of masculinities are produced through the ways that material bodies are regulated in offline lives. Thinking through the visibility of the Grindr grid highlights how the motivations for taking and selecting pictures do not neatly map onto the cultural meaning they are given in digital space. Therefore, digital and material bodies are complexly interwoven, emerging in and through multiple practices, objects and places. The productions of masculinities are formed by intersections of age, class, race, body size and shape and sexualities. It is through the interaction of online and offline spaces, identities and materialities, that bodies and identities are (re)constructed, (re)configured and (re)created (van Doorn 2011; Longhurst 2013). Therefore, instabilities of online/offline dichotomies require men who use Grindr to negotiate power dynamics and learn ways to continually (re)produce digital bodies.

I have taken a multi-sensory approach to the visual to highlight that the practice of looking is also about touching. The production of digital bodies is about a desire to be touched by other men. Men who use Grindr think carefully about their profile pictures. Questions around how their bodies look, what parts of their bodies can be seen and the locations of their bodies are often considered. This enables men to attract other men who use Grindr through digital screens. Men in this context do not necessarily only allow themselves to be passive 'objects' of consumption, but also actively produce masculinities that enable them to attract and consume particular men (Frank 2014). This highlights the importance that age, body size and skin play in the formations of desire and sexualities for men who use Grindr in Newcastle.

To conclude, I highlight two insights into geographical scholarship that are informed by this research. First, that a multi-sensory approach to the production of online dating profiles can highlight how embodied regulations and practices shape the formation of digital bodies. Such an approach can highlight how people are learning to negotiate online and offline bodies, identities and spaces. Paying more attention to this can further challenge online/offline binaries, whilst exposing the power dynamics that (re)produce experiences of digital practices. Secondly, building on Longhurst (2013, 676), I hope that other researchers will 'examine similar topics that reconfigure the visual and material through embodied processes, practices, and technologies'. Exploring how bodies, sexualities and gender work together to co-produce online experience can advance feminist geographical scholarship on desire, embodiment and materiality.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Pamela Moss and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful critique and guidance. Your advice and knowledge has made this article much stronger. Thank you to Lizzie Richardson and Daniel Cockayne for organising this special issue, and for asking me to be involved. I would also like to thank my supervisors Peter Hopkins and Mark Casey for the help

in drafting this work. Finally, I would like to thank the participants that took the time to share their Grindr stories – without them this would not have been possible.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by Economic and Social Research Council.

Notes on contributor

Carl Bonner-Thompson is a PhD student at Newcastle University, UK. His supervisors are Professor Peter Hopkins and Doctor Mark Casey. He formally served as the editorial assistant for *Gender, Place and Culture*.

References

- Alexander, Susan M. 2003. "Stylish Hard Bodies: Branded Masculinities in Men's Health Magazine." *Sociological Perspectives* 46 (4): 535–554. doi:[10.1525/sop.2003.46.4.535](https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2003.46.4.535).
- Banks, Marcus. 2001. *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage.
- Berg, Lawrence D., and Robyn Longhurst. 2003. "Placing Masculinities and Geography." *Gender, Place & Culture* 10 (4): 351–360. doi:[10.1080/0966369032000153322](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369032000153322).
- Binnie, Jon, and Beverley Skeggs. 2004. "Cosmopolitan Knowledge and the Production and Consumption of Sexualized Space: Manchester's Gay Village." *The Sociological Review* 52 (1): 39–61. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00441.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00441.x).
- Burrell, E. R., H. A. Pines, E. Robbie, L. Coleman, R. D. Murphy, K. L. Hess, P. Anton, and P. M. Gorbach. 2012. "Use of the Location-based Social Networking Application GRINDR as a Recruitment Tool in Rectal Microbicide Development Research." *AIDS and Behavior* 16 (7): 1816–1820.
- Casey, Mark. 2007. "The Queer Unwanted and Their Undesirable 'Otherness.'" In *Geographies of Sexuality: Theory, Practice and Politics*, edited by Gavin Brown, Kath Browne, and Jason Lim, 125–135. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Chen, Chih-Ping. 2015. "Playing with Digital Gender Identity and Cultural Value." *Gender, Place & Culture*: 1–16. doi:[10.1080/0966369X.2015.1013455](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1013455).
- Connell, R. W. 1995. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cuomo, Dana, and Vanessa A. Massaro. 2014. "Boundary-making in Feminist Research: New Methodologies for 'Intimate Insiders.'" *Gender, Place & Culture*: 1–13. doi:[10.1080/0966369X.2014.939157](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2014.939157).
- van Doorn, Niels. 2011. "Digital Spaces, Material Traces: How Matter Comes to Matter in Online Performances of Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment." *Media, Culture & Society* 33 (4): 531–547. doi:[10.1177/0163443711398692](https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711398692).
- Downing, Gary. 2013. "Virtual Youth: Non-heterosexual Young People's Use of the Internet to Negotiate Their Identities and Socio-sexual Relations." *Children's Geographies* 11 (1): 44–58. doi:[10.1080/14733285.2013.743280](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.743280).
- Evers, Clifton. 2009. "'The Point': Surfing, Geography and a Sensual Life of Men and Masculinity on the Gold Coast, Australia." *Social & Cultural Geography* 10 (8): 893–908. doi:[10.1080/14649360903305783](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360903305783).

- Frank, Elena. 2014. "Groomers and Consumers: The Meaning of Male Body Depilation to a Modern Masculinity Body Project." *Men and Masculinities* 17 (3): 278–298. doi:10.1177/1097184x14539509.
- Frohlick, Susan, and Paula Migliardi. 2011. "Heterosexual Profiling." *Australia Feminist Studies* 26 (67): 73–88. doi:10.1080/08164649.2010.546329.
- Gorman-Murray, Andrew. 2006. "Homeboys: Uses of Home by Gay Australian Men." *Social & Cultural Geography* 7 (1): 53–69. doi:10.1080/14649360500452988.
- Gorman-Murray, Andrew. 2013. "Straight–Gay Friendships: Relational Masculinities and Equalities Landscapes in Sydney, Australia." *Geoforum* 49: 214–223. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.09.014.
- Hayes-Conroy, Allison, and Jessica Hayes-Conroy. 2008. "Taking Back Taste: Feminism, Food and Visceral Politics." *Gender, Place & Culture* 15 (5): 461–473. doi:10.1080/09663690802300803.
- Hopkins, Peter. 2006. "Youthful Muslim Masculinities: Gender and Generational Relations." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31 (3): 337–352. doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2006.00206.x.
- Hopkins, Peter, and Greg Noble. 2009. "Masculinities in Place: Situated Identities, Relations and Intersectionality." *Social & Cultural Geography* 10 (8): 811–819. doi:10.1080/14649360903305817.
- Jackson, Peter. 1991. "The Cultural Politics of Masculinity: Towards a Social Geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16 (2): 199–213. doi:10.2307/622614.
- Jaspal, Rusi. 2017. "Gay Men's Construction and Management of Identity on Grindr." *Sexuality & Culture* 21 (1): 187–204. doi:10.1007/s12119-016-9389-3.
- Kinnunen, Taina. 2010. "'A Second Youth': Pursuing Happiness and Respectability through Cosmetic Surgery in Finland." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 32 (2): 258–271. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9566.2009.01215.x.
- Kinsley, Samuel. 2014. "The Matter of 'Virtual' Geographies." *Progress in Human Geography* 38 (3): 364–384. doi:10.1177/0309132513506270.
- Longhurst, Robyn. 2005. "'Man-breasts': Spaces of Sexual Difference, Fluidity and Abjection." In *Spaces of Masculinities*, edited by Bettina van Hoven and Kathrin Hörschelmann, 165–178. London: Routledge.
- Longhurst, Robyn. 2013. "Using Skype to Mother: Bodies, Emotions, Visuality, and Screens." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31 (4): 664–679.
- Longhurst, R., Elise Ho, and Lynda Johnston. 2008. "Using 'the Body' as an 'Instrument of Research': Kimch'i and Pavlova." *Area* 40 (2): 208–217. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00805.x.
- Longhurst, Robyn, Lynda Johnston, and Elsie Ho. 2009. "A Visceral Approach: Cooking 'at Home' with Migrant Women in Hamilton, New Zealand." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34 (3): 333–345. doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2009.00349.x.
- Marks, L. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*. Durham, NJ: Duke University Press.
- Messerschmidt, James W. 1999. "Making Bodies Matter: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body, and Varieties of Violence." *Theoretical Criminology* 3 (2): 197–220. doi:10.1177/1362480699003002004.
- Miller, Brandon. 2015. "'They're the Modern-day Gay Bar': Exploring the Uses and Gratifications of Social Networks for Men Who Have Sex with Men." *Computers in Human Behavior* 51 (Part A): 476–482. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.023.
- Morgan, D. 1992. *Discovering Men, Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities*. London: Routledge.
- Morrow, Oona, Roberta Hawkins, and Leslie Kern. 2015. "Feminist Research in Online Spaces." *Gender, Place & Culture* 22 (4): 526–543. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2013.879108.
- Mowlabocus, Sharif. 2010. *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the Digital Age*. Farnham: Ashgate.

- Ojala, H., T. Calasanti, N. King, and I. Pietilä. 2016. "Natural(ly) Men: Masculinity and Gendered Anti-ageing Practices in Finland and the USA." *Ageing and Society* 36 (2): 356–375. doi:[10.1017/S0144686X14001196](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X14001196).
- Parr, H. 2002. "New Body-geographies: The Embodied Spaces of Health and Medical Information on the Internet." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (1): 73–95.
- Payne, Robert. 2007. "Str8acting." *Social Semiotics* 17 (4): 525–538. doi:[10.1080/10350330701637106](https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330701637106).
- Pink, Sarah. 2012. "Visual Ethnography and the Internet: Visuality, Virtuality and the Spatial Turn." In *Advances in Visual Methodology*, edited by Sarah Pink, 113–130. London: Sage.
- Price, Patricia L. 2013. "Race and Ethnicity II: Skin and Other Intimacies." *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (4): 578–586. doi:[10.1177/0309132512465719](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512465719).
- Rice, E., I. Holloway, H. Winetrobe, H. Rhoades, A. Barman-Adhikari, J. Gibbs, A. Carranza, D. Dent, and S. Dunlap. 2012. "Sex Risk among Young Men Who Have Sex with Men Who Use Grindr, a Smartphone Geosocial Networking Application." *Journal of AIDS and Clinical Research* 3 (SPL ISSUE4).
- Richardson, Michael J. 2013. "Embodied Intergenerationality: Family Position, Place and Masculinity." *Gender, Place & Culture*: 1–15. doi:[10.1080/0966369X.2013.855710](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.855710).
- Rose, Gillian. 2015. Rethinking the Geographies of Cultural 'Objects' through Digital Technologies: Interface, Network and Friction. *Progress in Human Geography*. doi:[10.1177/0309132515580493](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515580493).
- Siibak, A. 2010. "Constructing Masculinity on a Social Networking Site: The Case-study of Visual Self-presentations of Young Men on the Profile Images of SNS Rate." *Young* 18 (4): 403–425. doi:[10.1177/110330881001800403](https://doi.org/10.1177/110330881001800403).
- Tanner, Claire, Jane Maree Maher, and Suzanne Fraser. 2013. *Vanity: 21st Century Selves*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tarrant, Anna. 2014. Domestic Ageing Masculinities and Grandfathering. In *Masculinities and Place*, edited by Andrew Gorman-Murray and Peter Hopkins, 241–254. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Taylor, Y., Emily Falconer, and Ria Snowdon. 2014. "Queer Youth, Facebook and Faith: Facebook Methodologies and Online Identities." *New Media & Society* 16 (7): 1138–1153. doi:[10.1177/1461444814544000](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814544000).
- Tziallas, Evangelos. 2015. "Gamified Eroticism: Gay Male 'Social Networking' Applications and Self-pornography." *Sexuality & Culture* 19 (4): 759–775. doi:[10.1007/s12119-015-9288-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-015-9288-z).
- Waitt, Gordon, and Elyse Stanes. 2015. "Sweating Bodies: Men, Masculinities, Affect, Emotion." *Geoforum* 59: 30–38. doi:[10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.12.001).
- Walker, Lisa L., and Jackie L. Eller. 2016. "Raising Capital: Claims of Masculinity among Men on Match.com." *Men and Masculinities* 19 (1): 42–63. doi:[10.1177/1097184x15575157](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x15575157).
- Warren, Andrew. 2015. "Crafting Masculinities: Gender, Culture and Emotion at Work in the Surfboard Industry." *Gender, Place & Culture*: 1–19. doi:[10.1080/0966369X.2014.991702](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2014.991702).
- Yea, Sallie. 2015. "Masculinity under the Knife: Filipino Men, Trafficking and the Black Organ Market in Manila, the Philippines." *Gender, Place & Culture* 22 (1): 123–142. doi:[10.1080/0966369X.2013.832657](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.832657).