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"Be fit, my age, big c**k":
Engagements with Hegemonic
Masculinity, Hetero(homo)normativity
and Discrimination among Queer Male
Dating App Users in Malmö and
Copenhagen.

A Thematic and Summative Content Analysis

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Abstract

This exploratory research addresses a significant gap in feminist, cultural, and digital geographies by examining the geographic variations of how hegemonic masculinity, hetero(homo)normativity and discrimination is exhibited by MSM dating apps users in two distinct city contexts. Drawing from a post-structuralist humanistic perspective, the study explores how dominant ideologies shape exclusionary online queer spaces made unique by digital placemaking. This was done through an open-ended questionnaire, profile observations and varying content analysis. The feminist epistemology and moving hypothesis allowed for a flexible methodological approach to capture the unpredictable and employ triangulation to counter inevitable biases in non-positivist research.

The findings showing similarities support the hypothesis that gender normative pressures influence the self-(re)presentation among MSM dating app users. Both Copenhagen and Malmö users' profiles demonstrate photographic and textual elements that privilege and sustain hegemonic masculinity, hetero(homo)normativity, which thrives on discriminatory language. The gay ideal portrayed in these profiles revolves around non-effeminate, white, young, athletic, and handsome men. Age, race, and sexual position play significant roles in how these profile attributes are displayed, with variations observed between the two cities. Such variations do not directly support the hypothesis but provide more nuance to the discussion.

In Malmö, users' profiles align more closely with the hetero(homo)normative ideal, emphasizing traditional masculinity and conforming to homonormative expectations. The portrayal of muscular or thin bodies, partial nudity, and adherence to sex roles reinforce masculine or feminine coding. Users in Malmö feel more pressured to conform to these norms, resulting in a higher frequency of explicit sexual content, harassment culture, and photographic anonymity.

In contrast, Copenhagen profiles showcase alternative bodies and identities, often exhibiting a dominant-submissive narrative akin to BDSM culture. Users in Copenhagen feel less obligated to conform to normative ideals, dismantling stigma associated with kink culture. However, this alternative profile marketing in Copenhagen

also leads to heightened instances of homophobic and misogynistic discrimination, perpetuating masculine dominance.

This research reveals how digital placemaking influences varying performances of hegemonic phenomena, even between close geographical contexts. Contemporary understandings of self-(re)presentation and queer digital geographies allow us to contextualize how these intersectionality's that sustain a masculine hierarchy are translated to a digital space, while online disinhibition explains its amplification. Dating apps restrict users to stereotypical categorical identities and encourage impression management through choreographed photos and social attraction based on nearby surroundings. This emphasis on place-based norms contributes to the geographic unity observed in masculinity and homonormative displays during profile observations. While traditional masculinity remains prevalent, the prominence of the Guy Next Door identifier suggests a desire to negate excessive masculinity without aligning with alternative subgroups. The anonymity of MSM online users facilitates increased engagement in sexual advancements and discrimination.

Future studies in comparative MSM dating space should focus on specific forms of discrimination which could not be fully explored due to the need for comprehensive comparisons in a limited timeframe. Participants' concerns of the hypersexual culture encouraged by these apps warrants further investigation. Additionally, multiple MSM dating apps should be used for a comprehensive understanding of the broader community.

Keywords: MSM dating apps, hegemonic masculinity, heteronormative, homonormative, misogyny, body shaming, racism, queer digital geographies, self-(re)presentation, online disinhibition

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	4
List of Tables	7
List of Figures	7
Glossary of Terms	8
1. Introduction	10
1.1. Hypothesis	12
1.2. Research Questions	12
2. Background	13
2.1. Hetero(homo)normative Queer Virtual Spaces	15
2.2. MSM Online Racial Discrimination	17
3. Conceptual Framework	19
3.1. Feminist and Queer Digital Geographies	19
3.2. Online Disinhibition	21
3.3. Self-Presentation and Impression Management	22
4. Methodology	24
4.1. Deductive Exploratory Research	24
4.2. Ontology and Epistemology	25
4.3. Positionality and Reflexivity	26
4.4. Methods	27
4.4.1. Case Study: MSM Dating Profiles and Community Perceptions	27
4.4.2. Ethics	29
4.4.3. Online Survey	30
4.4.4. Sample Size	31
4.4.5. Profile Observations	32
4.4.6. Unstructured (Open-ended) Questionnaire	35
4.4.7. Summative Content and Thematic Analysis	39
4.5. Validity and Reliability	43
5. Results	43
5.1. RQ1: Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen convey masculinity differently on their profiles through photographic and textual means than MSM dating app users in Malmö?	44
5.1.1. Visual Masculinity Norms	44
5.1.2. Textual Masculinity Norms	45
5.1.3. Feelings towards Photographic and Textual Norms	48
5.1.4. RQ1 Summary	50
5.2. RQ4: Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen experience different pressures to act masculine and exhibit traits that align with hetero(homo)normative ideals than MSM dating app users in Malmö?	51
5.2.1. Masculine and Homonormative Pressures	51

5.2.2. An Absence of Masculine and Homonormative Pressures and Promotion	54
5.2.3. Body Regulation Pressures	55
5.2.4. Photographic and Textual Anonymity	56
5.2.5. Hypersexual Culture and Harassment	56
5.2.6. RQ4 Summary	57
5.3. RQ2: Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen engage with homophobic and misogynistic, racist, and body shaming language on their profiles differently than MSM dating app users in Malmö?	58
5.3.1. Homophobia and Misogyny	58
5.3.2. Body Shaming	60
5.3.3. Racism	61
5.3.4. RQ2 Summary	62
5.4. RQ3: Is there any correlation with how MSM dating app users' photographic and textual masculine and homonormative displays differ by (a) age or (b) race or (c) sexual position in relation to Copenhagen and Malmö?	64
5.4.1. Age	64
5.4.2. Race	64
5.4.3. Sexual Position	65
6. Discussion	66
6.1. Hegemonic Masculinity, Anti-effeminacy, Body Expectations, and Race	67
6.2. Self-(re)presentation, Queer Digital Geographies, and Toxic Online Disinhibition	69
6.3. Research Contribution, Limitations and Future Studies	70
Bibliography	72
Appendix	79

List of Tables

Table 1 - Thematic Analysis Code Development	79
Table 2 - Summative Content Analysis Table	81

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Questionnaire Recruitment Text	85
Figure 2 - Introductory Page (Questionnaire Section 1)	86
Figure 3 - Study Information Webpage	87
Figure 4 - Demographics (Questionnaire Section 2)	88
Figure 5 - Photographic and Textual Norms (Questionnaire Section 3)	89
Figure 6 - Stereotypes and Pressures (Questionnaire Section 4)	90
Figure 7 - Discrimination (Questionnaire Section 5)	91
Figure 8 - Thank You Page (Questionnaire Section 6)	91
Figure 9 - Participant Residential Breakdown	92
Figure 10 - Participant Age Breakdown	92
Figure 11 - Participant Ethnic Breakdown	92
Figure 12 - Participant Sex Position Breakdown	93
Figure 13 - Participant App Use Breakdown	93
Figure 14 - Nvivo Codebook	94
Figure 15 - Coding Guidance Example (from Braune and Clarke, 2006)	94

Glossary of Terms

This glossary is to help the reader interpret the findings of this thesis, as the data references categorical identifiers - sexual position preferences, and subgroups - often used by queer men. Although more identifiers exist, only applicable terms are defined.

Term	Definition
Sexual Position Preferences	
Bottom	The person who is penetrated during (gay) anal sex. It can be applied generally to describe a partner who takes on a more passive role, whether in a sexual encounter or relationship. ⁴
Side	Someone who does not engage in penetrative (gay) anal sex. ⁴
Top	The person who penetrates their partner during (gay) anal sex. It can be applied generally to describe a partner who takes on a more active role, whether in a sexual encounter or relationship. ⁴
Versatile (Verse)	A person who is open to both giving and receiving anal sex. ⁴
Gay Subgroups (also known as Communities/Tribes)	
Bear	A gay man who is hairy, sometimes bearded, and has a stocky physique. ⁴
Bisexual	A person who experiences romantic or sexual attraction to individuals of multiple genders. ⁴
Daddy	An older gay man who is in a romantic or sexual relationship, where there is often a power dynamic as the older partner has greater financial or social resources. ⁴
Discreet	Someone who is not open about their same-sex attraction but is still pursuing same-sex encounters. ⁴
Drag Queen	Someone, typically male, who dresses in feminine-coded clothing and adopts exaggerated femininity and feminine gender roles for purposes of fashion or entertainment. ⁴
Guy Next Door	A man who possesses a kind, captivating charm, and attractiveness, despite lacking awareness of it. They are not inclined towards exploiting potential partners, often demonstrate a causal approach to dating - avoiding hastiness. They are described as better romantically

	than people often expect. ¹
Jock	Perceived as someone who is inclined towards athleticism and likes sports. ³
Leather	Someone who engages in the sexual fetish or has pleasurable interest in sexual acts involving leather suits, whips, slings, etc. ³
Military	Someone with any association to the military. ²
Muscle (Mary)	A gay man who exhibits a prominent and visibly muscular physique. ⁴
Otter	A gay man who is hairy, sometimes bearded, but possesses a smaller physique and weighs noticeably less compared to a bear. ⁴
Queer	Initially used against gay men as a derogatory slur, but is now often used by the LGBT community as a self-affirming and inclusive umbrella term. ⁴
Transgender	Someone whose gender identity or gender expression does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth. ⁴
Twink	A young gay man, typically in their teens to early 20s or with a youthful appearance. They are generally attractive, lacks significant body and/or facial hair, and has a slim physique. ⁴
Non-tribe Gender Identities	
Gender Non-Conforming	A person or behavior that challenges/rejects traditional expectations associated with their gender identity or assigned sex. ⁴
Non-Binary	A person who identifies as a gender other than exclusively male or female. ⁴

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1. Introduction

Examinations of online engagements and displays amongst queer men, especially men who have sex with men (MSM) are of interest to many scholars who wish to comprehend how virtual environments can impact engagements with dominant ideals, especially regarding gender expression (Raj, 2011; Miller, 2015; Miller and Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Saraiva, et al., 2020). Virtual spaces hold great prevalence for queer communities, and the popularity of MSM space is influenced by the health neglect many MSM endure (Miller, 2015). MSM youth often do not receive sexual health education (especially from school-based sex education) and general community support (Mustanski et al., 2011). Thus, they often turn to the internet to gain insight on safer sex, to consolidate their sexual identity, to initiate their 'coming-out' phase, and to garner support from and gain access to virtual queer communities. With the rise of internet popularity, was a close alignment with gay internet users as anonymity allows engagement with sexuality exploration and access to other MSM internet users who are unattainable in-person (Mustanski, et al., 2011). It is in fact twice more common for MSM internet users to meet their first partner online as opposed to heterosexual men (Mustanski et al., 2011; Callander et al., 2012). Although similar statistics globally are unclear, virtual space for LGBTQ+ individuals, especially for MSM, is prevalent.

Regardless of the crucial role the internet plays in the sexual health development of MSM youth, it is a 'double-edged sword', exposing MSM to homophobic messages (Mustanski et al., 2011) among other discrimination. The internet often surfaces hatred from individuals that is absent in a physical context, and MSM profiles act as a vehicle for such displays (Miller, 2015). Earlier literature has shown that MSM apps foster homonormative values i.e. men who conform to hegemonic (heteronormative) masculinity are privileged, which correlates to an exclusive binary of traits aligning to non-effeminate, whiteness, youth, and athleticism (Raj, 2011; Han et al., 2014a; Miller, 2015; Miller and Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Saraiva, et al., 2020). Similarly to homonormative queer physical space, these queer virtual spaces include manifestations of misogyny, racism (Riggs, 2011; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016) and toxic muscular body expectations (Yelland and Tiggemann, 2003; Miller, 2015). Thus, femmophobic language is one of the most dominant exclusionary languages in MSM virtual

environments (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016), MSM profiles often state race-related partner preferences more frequently than heterosexual men (Phau & Kaufman, 2003), gay men have more concern for body size and shape than their heterosexual counterparts, and queer men subgroups of those who do not adhere to traditional masculine ideals are centralized around their ‘alternative’ body (Miller, 2015).

Against this backdrop, this thesis acts as a marriage between physical and virtual queer space, and aims at exploring how *anonymous online environments* allow MSM to look for romantic and sexual endeavors while mitigating stigma surrounding queerness and sexuality exploration. This often promotes normative forms of masculinity, queerness, and gender, sustaining exclusion. This aim is fulfilled through a *hypothesis* that reveals how the prevalence of this issue may vary among MSM users in *two different cities*. This thesis is grounded on a case study of a spatial comparison *to assess how masculinity, queerness and discrimination is expressed and negotiated by MSM dating and hookup app users in Malmö and Copenhagen.*

Despite cultural similarities between both cities, how men are socialized based on cultural expectations and hegemonic ideologies likely impacts vast differences in masculine expression. As informed by Tuan (1974) adopting a humanistic version of space narrative when approaching human geography helps to emphasize how power discrepancies are always attached to space. When in harmony with feminist, cultural and post-structuralist theories, we can see how place is an agglomeration of ‘norms’ and discriminatory principles tied to a specific geographical space, placing a spatial-temporal lens on dominant ideologies. Feminist and queer digital geographies show how data is contingent on space, and its specific norms are sustained through digital placemaking as mediated by our mobile application interactions (Bonner-Thompson, 2023; Głowczyński’s, 2023). The intentional limiting nature of dating app interfaces make users rely on spatialities during self-presentation (Birnholtz et al., 2014). Studies that examine interactions amongst MSM online dating app users do exist within social sciences, but there are no human geographic studies that explore spatial differences, providing an opportunity. This exploratory research utilizes existing cultural, feminist and queer digital geography theories to develop new understandings of normative gender, sexuality, and discriminatory spatial processes.

1.1. Hypothesis

A working hypothesis is used as a starting point for this thesis, meaning it is adaptable, not restricted by relational expectations, and works in conjunction to the possibility of unexpected results, aligning well with this study's non-positivist frameworks and my personal experiences influencing the research design (Casula et.al., 2021). The hypothesis states:

Due to gender normative pressures, MSM dating app users in Copenhagen, Denmark more frequently abide to hegemonic masculine ideals, hetero(homo)normativity, and engage in discriminatory language than MSM dating app users in Malmö, Sweden, despite geographic proximity.

1.2. Research Questions

To confirm or dispute this hypothesis, the research questions are as followed:

1. Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen convey masculinity differently on their profiles through photographic and textual means than MSM dating app users in Malmö?
2. Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen engage with homophobic and misogynistic, racist, and body shaming language on their profiles differently than MSM dating app users in Malmö?
3. Is there any correlation with how MSM dating app users' photographic and textual masculine and homonormative displays differ by (a) age or (b) race or (c) sexual position in relation to Copenhagen and Malmö?
4. Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen experience different pressures to act masculine and exhibit traits that align with homonormative ideals than MSM dating app users in Malmö?

2. Background

Space is often seen as a relative entity, or 'snapshot' fixed to its location and time, but through a humanistic geographical perspective, it should also include social aspects that are always correlated to human interactions and experiences. This humanistic perspective of space is tied to how we interpret and comprehend the world and so within cultural and humanistic geography, place can be described as an agglomeration of distinctive characteristics that inhabit a space (Tuan, 1974).

Through this lens, we see power discrepancies are attached to space. Sexuality and gender discourses are embedded to space, rendering spatial observations crucial when undergoing queer-related research. For example, Bain and Podmore (2020) discussed how queer individuals experience more sexuality-related segregation in rural environments in contrast to cities. Such landscape discrimination aligns with Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson's (2010) paper discussing how queer legitimacy was aligned with urban environments, as there was an increase in visibility of homosexuality in cities. Additionally, they highlighted that the lack of 'natural' spaces and other negatives that were associated with city life, such as pollution, correlated to this queer visibility and was seen as a breach to hegemonic masculinity. This highlights the geo-politics that exist in space between the empowered and disempowered. Post-structuralist geography reveals how as a society we often abide by prominent ideologies such as hegemonic masculinity, and throughout various spaces and institutions, we are socialized to adopt gender norms (Cresswell, 1996).

Socialization is a crucial topic often intertwined in feminist, cultural and post-structuralist geographies. This is a process of which we as individuals learn what is considered 'normal' or 'acceptable', which is associated with hegemonic and mainstream ideologies (Britannica, 2018). Since dominant ideologies and therefore socialization, are context-specific and influenced by institutional spaces, we can see how there could be differences due to culture and geography with how masculinity is 'performed' in Denmark and Sweden. The socialization towards heteronormativity as a mainstream ideology shapes why men abide to hegemonic masculine rules and highlights how queer spaces (both physical and virtual) take on homonormative characteristics, or from a

humanistic perspective - placemaking, which excludes non-white, non-normative sexuality and gender minorities (Mattson, 2015; Miller, 2015; Knee, 2019; McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021; Parmenter, et al., 2021). To understand exclusionary homonormative queer space, we must first touch on the intricacies of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity.

Heteronormativity refers to the dominant ideology that heterosexuality and its associated ideals are the default and desired sexual orientation to identify as, and is the most socially encouraged (Harris & White, 2018). This relates directly to hegemonic masculinity, the ideology surrounding what is considered normal male behavior to exhibit, which is spatial-temporally sensitive (Oxford Reference, n.d.). This is intertwined with precarious manhood, as masculinity is often positioned as a status that is hard to achieve but is easily lost, and so men feel the need to act within a binary of stereotypically masculine behaviors to sustain this position (Hammaren and Johnson, 2014).

Being submerged in precarious manhood ideals often results in homosocial relationships (same sex social bonds) among heterosexual men where misogyny and homophobia, such as through homophobic slurs, are normalized within interactions to safeguard privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe, 2005; Hammaren and Johnson, 2014). Alternative masculinities, such as masculinity attached to non-heterosexual men, are outside of the hegemonic masculine rules, and so are seen as manufactured and susceptible to exclusion (Rose & Johnson, 2017), hence homophobic tactics to reinforce group masculinity. Additionally, misogyny also strengthens hegemonic masculinity due to its correlation to the anti-feminine mandate which refers to how behaviors and expressions that can be correlated to femininity, such as emotional expressionism, are often avoided by men as ideal masculinity is void of 'feminine' attributes (Anderson et al., 2019).

The policing of masculine behaviors among men, a core subject within this research, are attached to many cross-disciplinary subfields that examine gender. When applied to a humanistic geographical perspective, it helps to show how specific ideologies are reinforced to form exclusionary place. For instance, symbolic power, often associated with a myth, is the process used to legitimize certain ideologies within a specific space

and time period, aided by agnotology (intentional ignorance creation) to help with the socialization of individuals to abide to norms regulated by hegemonic groups (Lefebvre, 2003; Slater, 2021).

2.1. Hetero(homo)normative Queer Virtual Spaces

The LGBTQ+ communities' negotiation for legitimacy is tied to whiteness (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 2010) and so a racialized space as encouraged through homonormative values is often infused to its placemaking. Homonormative refers to sexuality/gender identities and expressions that more align to heteronormative ideals and expectations as mediated by stereotypes and mainstream culture, and by this nature a homonormative space is dominated by cisgender, white, upper-class gay men who construct a LGBTQ+ environment that negotiates normalcy in relation to their privileged identities as it aligns to the hegemonic masculine hierarchy (Knee, 2019). This means its inhabitants are controlled by dominant ideologies and must situate themselves within this binary of accepted identities or they risk exclusion.

Through Knee's (2019) examination of gay neighborhoods, homonormative-conforming cisgender white gay men use their privilege as a form of legitimacy for 'othering' those who do not conform to the identity of the space, further solidifying how space is classed, gendered, raced and hegemonically influenced. Pham (2019) illustrates this through highlighting how past geographic studies note that enough 'queer capital', as garnered through 'queer-coded' appearances and behaviors, is needed by women to acquire access to LGBTQ+ spaces. This leads to the segregation of non-white and numerous intersecting identity individuals who do not conform to mainstream queerness (Mattson, 2015; McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021; Parmenter, et al., 2021),

We see this racialization of homonormative queer physical space with studies examining how said environments embrace a 'façade' of being 'racially neutral' (Held, 2017). This could be linked to a phenomenon where whiteness is considered the norm, making it invisible and not seen as a racial category, which through not recognizing racialization in white spaces, potentially reinforces racism. Such discrimination, as influenced by online disinhibition (see *subsection 3.2.*) is arguably more pronounced in online space (Miller, 2015).

This obedience to the hegemonic masculine regime has manifested itself in unique ways in an online landscape. For example, Reynolds (2015) showcase how ‘straight’ men who are seeking same-sex sexual relations will display a form of authentic (stereotypical) heterosexuality in front of openly queer individuals on an online forum as a performance of hegemonic masculinity. In regard to dating apps, Waling (et al., 2022) highlights how the decisions cis-heterosexual men make regarding photos to display on their Tinder dating profiles is influenced by hegemonic masculinity, specifically regarding body image, which contrast the more authentic photos they wish to display.

Naturally, scholars have also examined masculine engagements amongst MSM dating app users. Such apps enable a contemporary form of sociability, providing efficient means and crafting participatory spaces in which gay men can find others for romantic and sexual interactions in their geographic area, while being distant from segregated spaces (Raj, 2011; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Saraiva et al., 2020). Regardless, aesthetics play a critical role in online dating and MSM culture which when paired with user anonymity, the traditional masculine app branding (promoting anti-effeminate language), and emerging new sexual templates around cultural otherness and whiteness discourses, the result is an amplified virtual gay space of homonormative (masculine) body expectations and discrimination (Raj, 2011; Miller, 2015; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Quite simply, men categorized as non-effeminate, white, young, athletic, and handsome are preferred (Saraiva, et al., 2020).

Homonormative pressures impact those ‘coming-out,’ who wish to use their appearance to gain gay authenticity but are scrutinized for lacking this unattainable ‘gay ideal.’ (Hutson, 2010; Miller, 2015). For instance, Yelland and Tiggemann (2003) highlighted how gay men had a significantly higher drive for muscularity than women and heterosexual men and only gay men self-esteem correlated negatively in relation to others’ appearance, muscularity and weight. Being rejected for not meeting this gay ideal will often lead to many gay men questioning their identity (Miller, 2015). Such homonormative pressure rolls into MSM focus on aesthetics. Based on Hatala and Prehodka (1996) content analysis of gay and lesbian personal advertisements, gay men's personal advertisements suggested they have more focus on the physical attractiveness and sexuality of their potential partners, contrasting that of the personality characteristic

focus of lesbians. If gay men do not meet the standard of normative masculinity for body attractiveness, they are often grouped by their 'alternative' bodies, and aesthetics are crucial for gay men subgroups. Examples include how gay bears see (and are perceived by) their larger, harrier bodies as masculine, and directly oppose/demonize twink body thinness femininity (Miller, 2015).

Despite the dominant narrative that the ideal gay man is feminine, the gay masculine norm is actually now more embedded to masculinity and an explicit rejection of femininity (Han et al., 2014a; Rose & Johnson, 2017, Miller, 2015), drawing closer parallels to hegemonic masculinity. Miller and Behm-Morawitz (2016) discuss the anti-feminine mandate through highlighting MSM femmephobia and masculine preferences, focusing on profile descriptions that highlight more anti-effeminacy and/or pro-masculinity than the reverse. Jack'd (MSM dating app) users reference their own masculinity in their profiles but none refer to themselves as feminine. Devaluing femininity may lead to effeminate men to conform to the stereotype as a tactic to shield themselves from the discrimination, often utilized by members occupying the lower hierarchy of a group (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Since homonormativity is so intertwined with heteronormativity, and therefore hegemonic masculinity, this study often refers to both as hetero(homo)normative.

2.2. MSM Online Racial Discrimination

Men who fall out of this hetero(homo)normative characterization on MSM dating apps are reduced to a secondary role, potentially amplifying already existing segregation (Saraiva et al., 2020). This characterization hinges on whiteness. Due to the distance created between users in virtual space (a trait of online disinhibition), racial preferences for potential partners are pronounced more online, and more often by gay men than heterosexual men (Phau & Kaufman, 2003; Miller, 2015). This is supported by Raj's (2011) study where potential sexual endeavors are stained by profiles and conversations where intimacy is governed through race, masculinity, and whiteness norms, where whiteness is the desired capital and non-white-passing bodies are excluded. Racial minorities and their 'otherness' culture are seen as a pleasurable resource for 'white culture' (Raj, 2011; Held, 2017).

Despite clear racialization, the ideology queer space adopts of inclusivity (void of discrimination) make white gay men often unaware of the sexual objectification faced by gay men of color, which is met by resistance when objectification is discussed, sustaining the façade of racial neutrality (Teunis, N. 2007; Held, 2017). Additionally, Riggs (2013) reveals troubling implications of how this racial-discrimination towards a particular race group is window-dressed (shielded from criticism) as just a 'personal preference.' Racialized language utilized by online users can be framed for different purposes, such as for marketing or through varying categories of discrimination (Callander et al., 2012; Miller, 2015). Marketing includes an individual describing themselves in relation to their race to be more appealing to others. Positive discrimination includes having a partner preference for a particular race or explicitly including all races. Negative discrimination is excluding potential partners based on race. (Callander et al., 2012). Such observations of textual displays on varying racial language is crucial for this thesis, hence the observations of MSM self-adverts (see *subsection 4.4.5*).

Lastly, it is important to discuss the intersectionalities between masculinity and race. Despite reports from different gay men of color groups that support the high levels of discrimination faced while inhabiting the gay community, the cause of said discrimination varies for each racial group (Han et al., 2014a). Teunis (2007) paper on the gay male community in the USA highlights how race is tied to sexual roles. A mode of sexual objectification queer men of color face is how they are put into preconceived sexual positions based on their race, and not of their own choice.

Queer Asian men are racially stigmatized in the gay community as being feminine, especially by white gay men. Queer Asian men feel inadequate due to this emasculation and assumption that they are submissive bottoms who are desperate for sexual engagements with white men. Masculinity does not exist in a vacuum, and is tied to the ability to draw a contrast to a more feminine 'other.' White men use this tactic on Asian men to solidify their masculine status as the ideal. These stereotypes are frequently adopted by Asian men during sexual interactions as a way to please gay white male expectations, sustaining this marginalization (Han et al., 2014a). Queer Black men note being positioned as tops regardless of their preference for other sex roles and often

identify as ‘down low’ (discreet) as a sexual identity independent of being gay which is perceived as white (Han et al., 2014b; Miller, 2015).

3. Conceptual Framework

Socialization and discrimination are tied to a spatial-temporal context so despite potential similarities between two locations, MSM are impacted by current hegemonic normalities, affecting how they engage with self-presentation and online disinhibition when making dating profiles. The context of these MSM virtual dating spaces is influenced by data which is shaped by everyday spatial engagements. Thus, variations of how these men online perform hegemonic masculinity, hetero(homo)normativity, and discrimination is based on space, place and culture, which all influence the digital. The conceptual framework will further illuminate this spatial relationship with sexuality and gender identity, data, and a virtual amplification of norm expression. Such concepts are solidified as spatially specific through placemaking by mobile technologies.

3.1. Feminist and Queer Digital Geographies

Feminist and queer geography comprehension of the digital fosters a relationship between data, identity and power (Bonner-Thompson, 2003). His chapter on “*Trusting data: the everyday geographies of gay men and digital data*” (p.147) shows this through how digital infrastructures and its code are created in conjunction to bodily and identity norms, which directly intertwines inequalities to digital devices. Feminist and queer geographies then incorporate embodiment and body theoretical understandings to grasp people's way to relate with the digital and the emotional politics involved as these digital relationships help them to foster ways of being. Feminist digital geographies focus on how diverse groups of people are affected by digital technologies. He showcases the importance for geography to ponder the connection between intersectionality and data and how they are mobilized in space and place. Quite simply, data relationships surface in relation to our embodied identities and places, shaping our overall experience of space. For instance, data and algorithms are mishandled and often situated to and sustain racism, misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia. Getting a greater comprehension of data's negative impact can come through engaging with

feminist, queer and postcolonial approaches, as we examine not only how people of different identity arrangements are affected, but power relations that surface and are contested and negotiated.

Narrowing in on queer men, *trust* is an emergent process where data-related relationships form and are spatially-temporally dependent (Bonner-Thompson, 2023). This symbiotically merges well with the idea that digital data can be seen as incomplete 'things' which cannot provide the full picture of complex embodied lives. Bonner-Thompson's (2023) study showed that white gay men did not feel at risk with their gender, race, and class identities when it comes to digital data, but once their sexuality was in the picture, their trust was breached as they worried how this collected data could impact their life. This highlights how trust with collected data is nuanced in relation to intersectionality.

Overall, it is crucial to understand that this feminist and queer geography interpretation of data highlights its contingency to everyday processes of bodies, objects and spaces, hence these everyday perspectives on data reveal the potential for it to be incomplete/'broken' (Bonner-Thompson, 2023). It is through this geographic interpretation we can see the flawed human nature of digital data, as well as comprehend how data rises in correlation to intersectional identities.

Główczyński's (2023) chapter on "*Digital Placemaking: experience places through mobile media*" (p. 199) brings into focus the relevance of geography in comprehending mobile applications. The increase in mobile media has reshaped placemaking practices as stakeholders are able to utilize their devices and software to, in the moment, capture and share data and link it to a space. The person who receives this data is subjected to an essential role in the socio-cultural construction of place, as they become a creator themselves in the process. Relationships are moderated by mobile media between people, technology and of course place, so the mobility of these technologies and their fostered interactions directly regulate a sense of place. This helps to explain why many MSM dating apps' identities are geographically specific in relation to a unity of photographic and textual profile norms, which differs based on the context of a place its users help foster and sustain.

3.2. Online Disinhibition

Disinhibition refers to behavior that emerges when there is a lack of concerns with how said behavior will harm one's self-presentation and provoke judgment by others (Joinson, 1998). The online disinhibition effect takes place when individuals do things online that they would not do in-person/offline (Suler, 2004; Miller, 2015). This is either 'benign' or 'toxic,' where the former involves displaying very personal emotions and gratuitous kindness, and the latter consists of rude language, bullying, and other harmful behaviors. The toxic online disinhibition effect influences the discriminatory problems previously highlighted on MSM dating apps.

Three features of online disinhibition aid in conceptualizing this thesis: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, and dissociative imagination (Suler, 2014; Miller, 2015). *Dissociative anonymity* discusses how internet users adapt or hide some or all of their non-virtual identities, fostering a form of anonymity which could make users categorize an offline persona separate from an online one. This allows absence from taking responsibility for their communication online. *Invisibility* is where online environments allow its inhabitants to not be seen, covering their physical presence and sometimes their virtual presence. An example is 'unidentifiability,' where online users can exist in a shroud of not fully being known, with a lack of eye contact being a fundamental factor. This factor in itself is a major contributor for the encouragement of toxic online disinhibition. Lastly, *dissociative imagination* suggests that the 'characters' manufactured to exist online are online only. This crafts a safe place where the individual is free to do and say things they would not in a non-online setting (Miller, 2015).

All three online disinhibition features provide major insight as to why MSM online users engage in discriminatory language more explicitly and frequently than offline (Phau & Kaufman, 2003; Raj, 2011; Miller, 2015; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). It is important to consider that online disinhibition allows queer men to find each other in a more accessible environment through safer means (Miller, 2015). This highlights how both advantages and disadvantages needed to be considered when using this concept

while examining MSM space, despite the negative factors being more of a concern for this thesis topic.

3.3. Self-Presentation and Impression Management

Self-presentation theory, as coined by Goffman (1956) frames online users self-adverts and social interactions as performances where an actor markets and edits themselves to form the ideal (and sought after) impression to their audience; the other users of the app (Oakes et al., 2020). These actors exhibit cues which are deliberately 'given', through verbal communication, and unintentionally 'given off', through nonverbal communication (Oakes et al., 2020). Such given cues are strategically malleable while given off cues are challenging to control, and so actors are partially restricted when manipulating the portrayal of themselves during in-person interactions. In an online environment, given off cues are mostly absent, and so social cues that are usually subtle are amplified. This leads to dating app users over-relying on minimal cues to inform their perceptions on the person they are virtually interacting with, resulting in the construction of stereotypical representations (Oakes et al., 2020).

Relatively, users strategically select what cues they wish to give off as a way to regulate the impressions they desire to provide to others, and dating apps provide an environment where users have greater control over how they are represented; *self-(re)presentation* (Oakes et al., 2020). This *impression management* implies people are aware of how others will perceive them during this profile curation phase (Waling et al., 2022). Self-(re)presentation suggests dating app users idealistically present themselves, often deceptively (Oakes et al., 2020). These apps create an expectation that individuals must provide an adequate amount of personal information before any in-person dates (Whitty, 2007). To obtain a potential date, app users must learn how to effectively self-present or 'market' themselves which often involves presenting a balance between their 'ideal' self and their 'authentic' self (Whitty, 2007; Waling et al., 2022).

Physical attractiveness is a major trait that leads to successful online dating profiles, which is conveyed through photos and physical attributes textually shown through selected categorical identity markers and descriptions (Birnholtz et al., 2014). These attributes are intentionally given (not given off) and indicate one's physical appearance, such as self-identifying as 'muscular' for a body type category - whether true or not. Another component are profile photos where their importance level greatly relies on the selected dating app. For example, Grindr (a popular MSM dating app) is heavily image-based and has a text limit of 250 characters for users profile descriptions whereas other MSM dating apps, like Scruff, provide more characters for elaboration (Oakes et al., 2020; Waling et al., 2022). Regardless, careful image curation to make oneself more desirable is essential on dating apps, as users understand their profile photo is a representation of one's identity, personality and body (Waling et al., 2022). Additionally, a more detailed form of impression management can be made through one's setting, known as *social attraction* (Birnholtz et al., 2014). This is an attempt for a person to relate to a specific entity or group through identifying themselves in relation to their geographic location. This helps to establish they are nearby and display cues of factors that could shift in relation to institutional and geographic boundaries, such as race and socioeconomic status.

Online disinhibition may influence this need for potential disingenuous performances, as this representation or 'on-stage persona' could be curated to different audiences and inconsistent to the 'off-stage' (authentic) self (Goffman 1956; Waling et al., 2022). Interestingly, the *stuff* (interpersonal and material elements) is something often overlooked in Goffman's understanding of identity, as these elements help to achieve authenticity, such as how dating app interfaces determine what degree of authenticity can go into one's profile (Waling et al., 2022). Dating profile creation is a continuous self-reflexive process, where one's understanding of their authentic self is influenced by ever-changing material realities and everyday actions.

Since the body is significant and a form of currency for one's online dating app presentation, it is argued that 'true masculinity' surfaces from men's bodies, marking bodies in relation to social relationships as situationally meaningful. Masculinity has been criticized over the last decade, so when it comes to male self-presentations on

dating apps, they may be increasingly aware of their portrayal of masculinity, despite the sustenance of hegemonic masculine ideals. Thus, a need to strike a balance of desirable masculinity and authenticity (Waling et al., 2022). These concepts were incorporated into the analysis of this thesis when comprehending the geographic variations on the extent of these self-(re)presentations within MSM space.

4. Methodology

The niche nature of the conceptual framework, i.e. MSM dating app gender and sexuality expressions, self-presentation, spatialities, and virtual amplifications, all pair symbiotically with the flexibility of the working hypothesis and exploratory methodological approach. Methods and analysis that provide in-depth interpretations of non-positivist data and allow for unpredictable outcomes were employed. This helps to mitigate some issues associated with the primary researchers' (my) embedded bias as reflected upon while engaging with a feminist epistemology. This section provides a further explanation of the research design.

4.1. Deductive Exploratory Research

This thesis is grounded on an exploratory research approach by engaging in the development of a new hypothesis for an already explored topic (Swedberg, 2020). In this case, it's the geographical comparison between MSM users' masculine, queer, and discriminatory expressions in Malmö and Copenhagen.

Exploratory research is by its nature, inductive, implying it is based around a specific observation and not usually founded in existing theory. Thus, it does not mesh deeply with prior bodies of knowledge. A common criticism of exploratory research is the lack of precision for the methodological approach and the unfixed results produced. To confront these issues, deductive qualitative approaches help to confront the lack of rigor and other downsides associated with exploratory qualitative research (Casula et.al., 2021).

Adopting a *deductive qualitative analysis* (DQA) approach emerging from comprehensive literature reviews and theorizing acts as a bridge between the benefits of engaging with prior theory while granting an opportunity for the growth of new theories, in order to produce more insightful hypotheses. When applied to exploratory research, deductive reasoning allows engagement with a working hypothesis which aids in linking the various stages of the research process and in identifying strengths and flaws within the study (Casula et.al., 2021) and to triangulate i.e. using a variety of methods and analysis techniques, to improve the project's validity.

4.2. Ontology and Epistemology

Considering the conceptual framework and the gathered qualitative data which examines gender and sexuality ideological expressions and pressures, this project aligns closely to a critical theory research paradigm. A *spatial-temporal ontology* is utilized, meaning reality is impacted by gender, culture, and social values to comprehend dominant ideologies like hegemonic masculinity due to its heavy relation to context, as an ideology is susceptible to change based on the geographic area and time frame it inhabits (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Additionally, a *subjectivist epistemology* is utilized, meaning situated knowledge, the context around data production, is fundamental (England, 2006). An example includes respondent bias during unstructured tests. Since unstructured questionnaires are a primary data source of this thesis, response sets, where individuals lean towards an option even if it is unlikely, such as a preference for options (or in this case opinions) of 'true,' or evasive options like 'uncertain' (Berg & Rapaport, 1954). Thus, when no item contents act as a foundation to direct participants' response picks, response set tendencies appear. This is especially tricky as self-administered questionnaires must effectively inform the participant on the studies intention, without swaying their opinions by pertaining a description and questions that will foster bias as influenced by the researcher. Understanding the means and limitations of how this data is produced is important for grasping what it can and cannot tell us, and to develop strategies to reduce these issues in the method design. Lastly, this thesis is grounded in a *feminist*

epistemology where I make apparent my positionality and reflexivity in shaping personal bias when engaging with the data (England, 2006; Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019).

4.3. Positionality and Reflexivity

Understanding how and where individuals learn gender norms, and the means in which sexuality and gender minorities traverse avoiding the discrimination that is inevitable with moving against hegemonic culture has been the focal point of my research in the later years of my undergraduate studies. This was due to my exposure with literature on masculine negotiations and the intricacies of racial intersectionality shifting how an individual displays and is perceived in relation to hegemonic masculinity. In relation to this thesis, studies that explored how queer men in countries where homosexuality is illegal used MSM apps such as Grindr as a form of liberation were of particular interest. This is because I identify as gay and grew up in a conservative country where non-heterosexual identities were demonized due to hegemonic ideologies that align with Christianity. Producing gender and sexuality geographic research allows me to add to this nuanced discussion.

Regardless, I am a privileged ‘academic’ who is embedded in the subfields of feminist and cultural geographies. Thus, I have a deeper comprehension of how societal ideologies may influence our beliefs, which in turn shifts my perspective of normative forms of masculinity. More specifically, my willingness to oppose its practice which skews how I view and assess data surrounding this concept. Secondly, my viewpoints being tied so directly to academic molds of this phenomena could have the opposite effect, indirectly applying assumed perspectives and narratives that still promote a hegemonic script rather than oppose it, falling into a trap of symbolic power as discussed by Slater (2021). Hence my use of open-ended mixed-methods and analysis.

Additionally, my interactions with Grindr have directly influenced this thesis. Firstly, as a black person I have been subject to the racial fetishization as discussed in *subsection 2.2.* by Raj’s (2011) research, especially by MSM users in predominantly white cities (a phenomena mentioned by Miller (2015)) such as London, Canada and Lund, Sweden. This racial discrimination which intersects with hyper-masculine behavioral

expectations and assumptions regarding sexual position, accumulate my experience traversing hetero(homo)normative online MSM space, supporting ideas discussed in the background section.

Secondly, I have noticed a drastic shift in profile textual and photographic displays of masculinity between Grindr users in Malmö and Copenhagen. This influenced the hypothesis since from my experience, these displays of hegemonic masculinity and discriminatory language appeared more frequently in Copenhagen. This textually includes profile statements such as ‘masc 4 masc’ (implying they are a ‘traditionally masculine’ man who is looking for a romantic/sexual interaction only with someone they perceive as masculine), and visually through profile photos showcasing their shirtless-muscular body, crotch, and engagement in sports. It is important to state that this perception of hegemonic masculinity is tied to an American-European cultural context.

4.4. Methods

4.4.1. Case Study: MSM Dating Profiles and Community Perceptions

Despite cultural similarities between the neighboring cities Copenhagen and Malmö, the way masculine and gender norms are instilled in men could drastically vary due to differing societal hegemonic ideologies. Therefore there was a desire to examine the difference with how MSM users interact and present themselves on MSM dating platforms in both cities despite geographic approximation. Evidently, both cities were selected due to their proximity and cultural similarities despite being in different countries, my personal perceptions of masculine display shifts as I referenced in *subsection 4.3.*, and the idea that both countries are considered rather progressive towards sexuality and gender discussions (Leofstream, 1998; Heede, 2015). This is of interest to highlight how discrimination and hetero(homo)normative values thrive through toxic online disinhibition even in ‘left-leaning’ countries (Amnå, 2006).

Additionally, existing studies on MSM in both cities do not necessarily provide insight into potential masculine and gender expression differences. For example, Wimark’s

(2016) paper focuses on migration pattern motives amongst gay men in relation to Swedish cities, including Malmö. Meanwhile Shield (2017) study examines how immigrants in Copenhagen use MSM dating platforms such as Grindr and PlanetRomeo to engage in activism relating to race and exclusion, as well as for networking purposes similarly to social media sites like Facebook. Such studies are useful in their own right to highlight physical and virtual spatialities of queer men, but research examining MSM masculinity and hetero(homo)normativity, ideologies that are spatially-temporally sensitive, are not tied to these unique contexts and so are absent.

This exploratory study aimed to address the gap in feminist, cultural, and digital geographies, through a post-structuralist humanistic perspective, when approaching how hetero(homo)normative characteristics shape queer places, fostering an exclusionary identity to a specific space. This geographic perspective is to provide context to the ‘why’ of varying displays of hegemonic masculinity and discrimination in these two different city contexts.

Grindr was originally selected as the MSM online dating app to be observed for profile observations as it has the largest number of MSM users, is widely recognized, (Grindr, 2022; Oakes et al., 2022) and doesn't market to a specific demographic of MSM; such as how another MSM app, *Growlr*, targets the bear subgroup. The app observations changed from Grindr to Scruff for several reasons. Firstly, as mentioned in **subsection 4.4.2.**, understanding the user guidelines is a fundamental aspect of online research. In the case of Grindr, in the *Promotion and Solicitation* section of the community guidelines, research, including recruitment, is explicitly prohibited. This included profile observations, which was confirmed in an email response from a Grindr escalations specialist when I questioned the type of research prohibited. Scruff's terms of service does allow for research to be conducted, as long as it is not for commercial purposes (Perry Street Software, 2023). Secondly, Scruff seems to be the second most prominent MSM dating app, having more than 15 million users (Oakes et al., 2022). Through sampling several prevalent MSM dating apps such as Hornet, Jack' d, and Scruff, I found that Scruff was the only other app than Grindr that had more than my sample size of users in close proximity to the train stations of both cities.

4.4.2. Ethics

This thesis consists of an online survey with two methods for gathering data; a questionnaire and profile observations, each with their own analysis technique; thematic analysis and summative content analysis respectively. Aspects of this method design, especially the profile observation approach, were inspired by Miller's (2015) techniques due to his paper's focus on Jack'd users' self-descriptions, presentations and partner preferences.

Before proceeding, it is worth discussing ethical concerns that surface through internet usage. Researchers should add another 'wall' to sustain participant anonymity where possible (Alessi & Martin, 2010). In regards to conducting profile observations, this data is quasi-public, as such profiles are visible to anyone who downloads the app, and as indicated in the terms of service, user content section, Scruff users are responsible for their own content and what they wish to showcase on their profiles (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Perry Street Software, 2023). A similar approach to Birnholtz (et al., 2014) was taken where profile details at an individual level, as recorded in these observations, were not provided in the results and discussion sections of this thesis, to avoid the potential identification of users.

As it concerns the questionnaire, disabling cookies was crucial. Despite the convenience cookies provide, such as allowing participants to pause questionnaires to return later and having to not re-enter personal information, cookies should not be used without participant consent (Alessi & Martin, 2010). If cookies are enabled, this could promote concerns among participants on data compromise, which could sway them from sharing sensitive information around sexuality and gender. The convenience cookies provide can increase questionnaire completion rate but risks anonymity, so they were not utilized. The participants were made aware of this on the questionnaire introduction page. This introduction page must provide adequate information on the study, explain what is involved through participation, and outline risks and benefits with participating (Alessi & Martin, 2010). These recommendations were followed (see *Figure 2* - all figures in appendix) but links on the introduction page lead participants to a Canva webpage (see *Figure 3*) for more study information, as a way to condense the

introduction. Participants may experience distress when answering sensitive topics regarding sex and gender, and so a content warning was included on the questionnaire introduction page (Alessi & Martin, 2010) to accommodate question 13's sensitive topic. All questions were optional, which participants were made aware of on this same page.

Alessi and Martin (2010) emphasized the importance of avoiding overly technical language when posting about the questionnaire, keeping the study description brief. This helps to not overwhelm the targeted demographic and others who encounter the recruitment. Users who are interested can click the link to the questionnaire which provides more detail. The recruitment text (see *Figure 1*) included a simple description of the questionnaire topic and the participation criteria.

Obtaining consent is crucial and anonymous questionnaires often utilize implied consent once sufficient insight on the study is provided (Alessi & Martin, 2010). This then means that by proceeding to do the questionnaire, the participant consents. Implied consent was indeed utilized and explicitly stated after the participation criteria was listed on the introductory page. This means that participants were aware that by clicking '*I understand and wish to participate*', they consented and met this criteria. The participant could not move onto the following sections without selecting this. Lastly, the user guidelines of the MSM apps and the sites used for questionnaire recruitment and profile observations were followed, i.e. the Malmö reddit requesting the questionnaire recruitment text to be sent to page moderators for approval first.

4.4.3. Online Survey

Alessi & Martin (2010) through an online survey involving sexuality and gender minorities, highlighted how internet methods differ from traditional methods. Using the internet for recruitment is usually significantly less expensive. This pairs well with convenience sampling, which is frequently used to recruit members of the LGBTQ+ community, a usually hard-to-reach population, making reliable sampling frames often unusable. Even LGBTQ+ subpopulations can be reached through the internet, such as

queer individuals residing in rural environments. Additionally, virtual communities who adopt a specific identity or interests are accessible, such as bear MSM through Growlr.

Online surveys allow participants to more easily remain anonymous (Alessi & Martin, 2010) which is useful for sensitive topics such as sexual behavior. Despite these benefits, it is worth noting that nonprobability sample types, such as convenience, often contain biases, so making notes on where and how the recruitment 'ad' is posted is crucial, as it could provide context to respondent characteristics (Alessi & Martin, 2010). This safeguard was adopted for the questionnaire recruitment and profile observations.

4.4.4. Sample Size

In qualitative research, sample size is situational and in relation to the research paradigm assigned to the investigation in question (Bobby, 2016; Patten & Newhart, 2017). Qualitative research that is more embedded within a non-positivist paradigm is more focused on developing a depth of understanding over a breadth, implying each participant can potentially provide crucial insight (Bobby, 2016). If the sample size is clearly justified in relation to what is being researched and the research paradigm employed, it likely can be utilized. Nevertheless, sample size literature for qualitative research usually recommends studies to have between 20 to 50 participants and to include a diverse set of participants (Patten & Newhart, 2017).

This paper's target demographic consists of MSM dating app users, 18 years or older, who reside in Copenhagen and Malmö. Considering this project is embedded in critical theory and open-ended qualitative research that allow for participant depth, I believe it would be viable to aim for more than quarter to half of the profile observation population, for the questionnaire. To keep it more diverse, no specific demographic or subculture of queer men was targeted for the questionnaire and profile observations. Convenience sampling was used as encouraged by Alessi & Martin (2010) for reaching sexuality and gender minority participants.

The sample size for the profile observations were 60 (30 per city). The questionnaire recruitment text was posted on queer Facebook and Reddit pages where my demographic could be reached, that allowed research (as detailed by their user guidelines) such as the '*Copenhagen-Malmö Queer Network*.' These page moderators were contacted so they could review and decide whether this invitation could be posted. Additionally, many people were individually messaged on Scruff and invited to partake in the questionnaire. Scruff profile guidelines does allow for recruitment, as long as the link to an external site is only available on the user's profile and not sent to a person through direct messages. The recruitment text with the link was in my profile description and people were only guided to view my profile in direct messages if they wished to participate.

The sample size goal for the questionnaire was between 30 to 50 (15 to 25 per city). Scruff users who are closest (based on the app's proximity) to the central stations of their respective cities were sent questionnaire recruitment text. This is because both central stations are relatively downtown in densely populated areas. This convenience sampling is also how the profiles to be observed were selected. For ethical concerns, the questionnaire anonymity means respondents cannot be correlated to profile observations directly. This means if there is a spillover of participants between the profile observations and the questionnaire, their answers do not make their identification clear. To reduce participant spillover further, recruitment and profile observations took place at multiple time intervals over several weeks and never at the same time, as touched upon in *subsections 4.4.5* and *4.4.6*.

4.4.5. Profile Observations

Personal advertisements of MSM dating app users, as represented through the photographic and textual elements of their profile, are important to observe when comprehending MSM self-presentations. These profiles are not created by their users with a concern of being monitored by researchers, which provides a more 'realistic' snapshot of how they market themselves when looking for and attracting potential sexual and romantic partners (Miller, 2015). This provides researchers with a unique opportunity to move past response bias found in the constructed reality of interviews

due to the power dichotomy between researcher and interviewee (Rapley, 2001), and questionnaire response preferences towards the 'correct answer' (Berg & Rapaport, 1954).

The profile observations allowed for a direct descriptive comparison of the photographic and textual elements of MSM users dating profiles which support or counter the answers provided in the online questionnaire. Although the observations added more nuance to research questions 1 and 2, it aimed at providing greater insight into the 3rd which was not directly being addressed by the questionnaire. The latest version of Scruff, 7.1.0 (54142) was used during the observation phase. This is worth noting as MSM apps design interfaces frequently change, and users are restricted by the current design interface of that specific app. These apps are not fixed in time, and so the technological context was noted to avoid issues of obsolete findings (Oakes et al., 2020).

MSM apps usually have a very photo-centric user interface, having a grid of profiles represented by thumbnails showcasing a lead profile photo and their profile title. This grid only shows a limited number of nearby profiles, organized by closest geographic proximity thumbnails, and clicking on the thumbnail provides brief demographic information, often being height, weight, and age, and scrolling showcases more categorical identifiers, such as sexual position preferences and their profile description. Filling out any of these profile sections and identifiers is often optional (Birnholtz, 2014; Oakes et al., 2022).

The profile observations of Scruff users took place through a descriptive semi-structured format. This meant notes were taken on fixed photographic and textual criteria, but such descriptions were not fixed to answering a list of pre-set questions and elaboration varied based on what was provided on their profile. As noted in the theoretical framework, these users' self-(re)presentations are influenced by the app's user interface, which often places more emphasis on the photographic elements (Waling et al., 2022). In this case, Scruff's unique user interface attribute is the *communities* categorical identifier (Oakes et al., 2022) such as jock, queer, daddies, and 19 others during Scruff 7.1.0 (54142) (see the *glossary* for the ones applicable to the results). This

was incorporated into my profile observations to see if there were preferences of a community Scruff users wished to self-identify as and community preferences for their potential romantic and/or sexual partners. This could correlate to hegemonic masculine or hetero(homo)normative privileging. Additionally, notes were made of their profile photos and textual elements (description and username) to see if there was a correlation to masculinity, as referenced by research question 1. Notes were also made on their profile photos and textual elements to see if there were any correlation to homophobia, racism, misogyny and body shaming/regulation as referenced by research question 2 and emphasized throughout various subsections of the background. Lastly, their age, race and sexual position were also noted to see if there is any intersectional relation to their photographic and textual choices as indicated by research question 3.

These profile observations were made in both cities during weekends and weekdays, between the hours of *12pm* through *10pm*, from *April 1st* to *April 12th, 2023*, as an attempt to get a diverse set of participants. This is why the weekend was of great emphasis, as many Scruff users may be working their jobs on weekdays. Profiles that repeat during different data collection time points were excluded upon their second viewing. Profiles that referenced they live outside of the country of observation were also excluded. Lastly, if the profile only included a face picture but no written information nor filled out categorical identifiers, then they were not observed. However, faceless profiles with descriptions or categorical identifiers were allowed since interpreting text without visuals is more straight-forward.

Overall, 30 Scruff profiles were observed and manually coded per city in tandem to the following keyword categories, as explained in ***subsection 4.4.7***:

1. **Hegemonic Masculinity:** *Manly, Dominant, Traditional Manhood, Muscular, Penis Size Marketing, Sexual Roughness*

2. **Homophobia:** *Homonormative Promotion, Non-homonormative exclusion*

3. **Racism:** *Racial marketing, Racial Fetishization, Racial Exclusion*

4. **Misogyny:** *Femmephoria, Anti-effeminate*

5. **Body Regulation:** *Body Shaming, Alternative Body Fetishization, Alternative Body Grouping, Muscularity Promotion*

4.4.6. Unstructured (Open-ended) Questionnaire

Unstructured questionnaires feature open-ended questions that allow participants to answer freely, which is useful for continuous variables where one cannot possibly predict all potential answers (Kazi & Khalid, 2012). Straightforward questions are crucial for this format. Participants can express opinions while being less tied to bias from only having pre-made alternative response options (Malhotra, 2006). This makes it easier to determine ideologies, attitudes, and motivations. Social sciences which specialize in gender and sexuality, where unseen characteristics to qualitative data is inevitable greatly benefit from this questionnaire type and as supported by Malhotra (2006), so does exploratory research. A valid questionnaire efficiently collects high quality data with high comparability which cements its credibility. To support this further, Kazi & Khalid (2012) listed characteristics that a valid questionnaire should meet, which was frequently reflected upon:

"(i) simplicity and viability

(ii) reliability and precision in the words

(iii) adequate for the problem intended to measure

(iv) reflect underlying theory or concept to be measured and

(v) capable of measuring change" (p. 515).

Additionally, when creating questions, Malhotra's (2006) *four W's* served as a guideline, where the issue within the question should always be defined and in context to the *four W's*: *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where*. This structure of the *four W's*, as exemplified in a table (page 89) helped to avoid crafting a non-concise question which could sprout replies shrouded in confusion.

An unstructured questionnaire was crucial to comprehend how MSM dating app users who reside in Copenhagen and Malmö feel about interacting with others, their experience with viewing others' self-presentations and their own self-presentations when utilizing these apps. Their answers could provide an unpredictable consensus that directly contradicts the profile observations, especially in regards to research questions 1 and 2. For example, participants might not perceive MSM app profiles photographic and textual elements as excessively masculine, despite the observations showcasing otherwise. Additionally, participants' perceptions of questions may differ by aspects of their identity, showcasing the intricacies of intersectionality in relation to discrimination experienced and masculine pressures, improving the validity of the data in addressing the research questions. The questionnaire provides insight into research question 4 which could not be addressed by the profile observations.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, 5 being demographic-related multiple choice questions and the other 8 are open-ended questions which provide participants with space to elaborate as much as they feel. The 14th 'question' is more of a comment box on the final *thank you* page of the questionnaire and serves as an opportunity for the participant to freely add to the discussion. These 13 questions are split into 4 sections, where participants have to select '*continue to next section*' to see the next set of questions. *Google Forms* was used to host the questionnaire, due to its format flexibility. This meant a hybrid format could be created, which operated between the typical questionnaire structures of *one question at a time* and *all questions at once*. This hybrid allowed me to group sets of similar questions in specific sections (see **Figures 4 through 8** for the questions and section explanation), enabling participants to view questions that may cause for overlap in answers, but would reduce the chance of swaying their opinions due to later questions being topic specific. Although participants

are allowed freedom to view prior sections, this still served as a way to gain the benefits of both questionnaire formats.

On the questionnaire introduction and study information pages, a disclaimer was made so that users would know that questions using the word *queer* pertained to all non-heterosexual sexual orientations. This was to avoid the term *queer* being correlated with its derogatory meaning. Furthermore, *gay* was not used as the umbrella term since it may closely be correlated to those who identify as homosexual and could be seen as exclusive to other non-heterosexual sexual orientations. Despite its prevalence to describe this study's demographic, *MSM* was not used to avoid further confusing language as often encouraged by methodological studies (Malhotra, 2006; Alessi & Martin, 2010; Kazi & Khalid, 2012). This sentiment is consistent through all text participants engage with, as more simplified terminology was employed to dismantle the power dichotomy often found between the researcher and participant and to avoid exercising an epistemic authority. For example, '*Gender pressures*' was used to substitute hegemonic masculine and hetero(homo)normative gender role ideals, and '*Discriminatory language*' as a way to describe homophobia, racism, body shaming and misogyny. To avoid encouraging bias which could influence the idea of 'a right answer', such content was written with more neutrality. Questions were reworked several times and made more simple to comprehend based on sampling the questions and gathering feedback from friends who met the participation criteria.

The questionnaire for this study was self-administered, which implies questionnaire distribution without the researcher partaking in further explanations and discussion with the interviewee (Kazi & Khalid, 2012). Naturally, this makes it cheaper, and the participant is less prone to information bias from the interviewer. Unlike interviewer administered questionnaires, self-administered allows the researcher to efficiently obtain larger sample sizes, cover more geographical area, incorporate difficult-to-reach populations, and is the best means of collecting data around sensitive topics. It is clear why this mode of administration was adopted here, using the internet as the distribution technique. The questionnaire was officially published online on the *28th of March, 2023* and individual recruitment invitations through Scruff were sent out until mid April.

Questionnaire answers were excluded if participants only filled-in the demographic information (multiple choice) but added nothing to the open-ended questions.

The questionnaires garnered 48 respondents, with the lowest response rate from the main questions (excluding question 14 on the *thank you* page) being 44. 25 of the participants resided in Copenhagen and 23 in Malmö. A further breakdown of the demographic information can be found from **Figures 9 through 13** and will be referenced throughout addressing research question 3 in the results. These replies were coded in NVivo with 22 children code under 9 parent code categories. **Table 1** (all tables in appendix) provides further justification for the code categories, but a list of the parent and children code can be found below:

Photographic Masculinity:

1. Photos of partial nudity, crotches, muscularity
2. Pressure to visually showcase masculinity

Textual Masculinity and Anti-effeminate Discourse:

3. Descriptions on muscularity, (sex)ual performance, penis size
4. Textual masculine privileging, pressure, anti-effeminacy

Photographic and Textual Homophobia:

5. Photos, pressure aligning to a (sex)uality-gender identity
6. Descriptions, pressure aligning to a (sex)uality-gender identity
7. Descriptions of (sex)uality-gender identity preferences, exclusion

Photographic and Textual Body Regulation:

8. Photos, pressure of body self-marketing
9. Descriptions, pressure of body self-marketing
10. Descriptions of body preferences, fetishization, shaming

Textual Racism:

11. Descriptions, pressure of racial self-marketing
12. Descriptions of racial preferences, fetishization, discrimination

Photographic and Textual Anonymity:

13. Profiles of faceless (body) photos, no photos
14. Descriptions with minor, no (non-sexual) info

Feelings toward Photographic and Textual Normalcies:

15. Enjoyment or neutrality with profile photo and description norms
16. Dislike, frustration with profile photo and description norms

Hypersexual Atmosphere, Risky Behaviour and Violence:

17. Alludes to hypersexual, sexual risk culture
18. Mentions of unsafe scenarios and violence

Absence of Masculine, Homonormative Pressures and Discrimination:

19. Masculine, queer stereotypes are not promoted
20. Users' interactions are not changed in this virtual space
21. Does not feel pressured to abide to masculine, queer stereotypes
22. Has not experienced discrimination.

4.4.7. Summative Content and Thematic Analysis

Both analytical strategies fall under the family of a content analysis, where a summative content analysis was to assess the profile observation notes and the thematic analysis for the questionnaire respondent data. Both are similar and utilize a grouping process to help mobilize a consensus. The consensus is usually found based on the words with the highest frequency since it is seen as of greater prevalence when it aligns to the

phenomena being answered (Stemler, 2000). A common problem would be the fact that synonyms are often used to encompass the same phenomena, so concepts that are applicable are overlooked. This can be solved through combining these synonyms under a keyword as it relates to a context. So the summative content analysis aims to gather similar sentences and words from the data that apply to the keywords, while adding an interpretation of the context through a 'thick description' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2015). This was useful for comprehending descriptive notes on MSM dating app users profile photographic and textual elements, to assess potential meanings between words (relational) and possible relationships between all profile aspects, such as selected categorical identifiers and their pictures.

A thematic analysis was essential for interpreting the data of the questionnaires, as when adequately employed it is a flexible tool that can be incorporated with many qualitative research methods and is especially useful for research paradigms focused on participatory approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006) such as critical theory. Similarly to a content analysis, a central strength is that a consensus can be found through similar narratives within a dataset, and their meanings can be assessed (Stemler, 2000; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes generated show the central components of each questionnaire question which can help illustrate differences and similarities between Copenhagen and Malmö participants.

Overall the content analysis process persists in narrowing down a plethora of words in a body of text to smaller categories as regulated by the specific code developed for this grouping process or through combining specific text attributes to formulate conclusive narratives (Stemler, 2000). The former process is how the thematic analysis of this thesis was performed, while the latter explains the summative content analysis. Not only did both analysis techniques allow for hegemonic ideologies to potentially present themselves but the subject of gendered negotiation paired with the openness of the answers provided (due to the semi-structured nature of the questionnaire) allowed for social and psychological interpretations of the data. With a thematic analysis especially, unanticipated insights can be identified within a dataset, as encouraged by the flexible methodology. This is especially useful when examining gendered phenomena such as

how masculinity influences beliefs, expressions, and behaviour (Braun and Clark, 2006).

For the summative content analysis, the keywords were formed based on the fundamentals of online masculinities in relation to MSM and their exclusive digital spaces as highlighted in the background. Therefore the keywords are *hegemonic masculinity*, *homophobia*, *racism*, *misogyny* and *body regulation*. Such keywords consist of several words that act as synonyms to them, such as how the misogyny category encompasses data that highlight anti-effeminacy, as shown at the end of **subsection 4.4.5**. This was done deductively, not engaging in any prior notetaking of the profiles on Scruff.

The profile photographic and textual elements were noted in annotations which align to these keyword categories. Creating such annotations consisted of deriving meaning from the high frequency of similar content, in which case said meaning provided elaboration on the thick description and helped to embody how these words relate in reference to the keyword (Hsieh & Shannon, 2015). This helped to formulate the summary for each category, which are the similarities and differences of each attribute of the MSM user's profile. To produce the summative content analysis, the profile observations were manually coded since the notes were made in a table from one document, making the lack of numerous document referencing irrelevant.

For the thematic analysis, specific code was developed to aid in categorizing similar questionnaire answers together. This was deductively developed which implies the code was created before the questionnaire data was gathered. The topics are known as parent codes and the initial codes that fall under these categories are 'children' which act as questionnaire answer predictions to solidify their topics. Braun and Clarke's (2006) paper was often consulted when following the stages of a thematic analysis. When creating the code development table (see **Table 1**), the following were considered:

1: This project's research questions (especially the intersectional, photographic and textual aspects) and background subsections greatly influenced the development of the parent code as well as the children code predictions. This was a *theory-driven* approach

as a specific set of questions were asked, based on the background and formed the foundation for coding the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). My reflexivity which touched on my experience with using MSM apps also shaped these predictions.

2: Coding of the *complete* data set was performed over *particular features* since the questionnaire was designed with the intention for all aspects of an answer to be grouped under numerous parent codes if applicable (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Naturally, the parent code encompasses numerous ideas which justify the existence of that category as it aligns to the research questions.

3: With the flexible exploratory approach, readaptation was encouraged despite the deductive approach taken for code development. The open-ended nature of the questionnaire creates ‘open’ data which requires heavy revision before code development if done inductively (Kazi & Khalid, 2012). With the time-constraints and answer unpredictability, this is one reason for the adoption of the adaptable deductive coding format. This allowed for more code to be added if an idea reoccurred numerous times which could provide unforeseen insights that aids in answering the research questions. Thus, the *Hypersexual Atmosphere, Risky Behaviour and Violence* parent code category was added later and was not a part of the initial deductive code development.

Software coding took place where *Nvivo* was used to facilitate the coding process, as the questionnaire answers were individually imported and named after their demographic information. This was to utilize document referencing, making *answer-to-identity* examination easier, as intersectionality is fundamental to research question 3. The children code was applied through the questionnaire answers to identify trends by pairing code with applicable data excerpts. If the children code generated viable results, this further supports its existence and justifies the parent code (see **Figure 14** for an example of the codebook in *Nvivo*). This topic can be considered a theme which was then grouped to showcase similarities and differences. **Figure 15** provides an example from Braun and Clarke (2006) that served as simplified guidance for the coding process.

4.5. Validity and Reliability

Triangulation is intertwined in the methodological design of this paper, further reinforced by structural support of the micro-conceptual theoretical framework. Simply put, a working hypothesis helps reinforce the validity through informing deductive exploratory research methodologies and data collection while in conjunction to triangulation of using mixed methods (Casula et.al., 2021). As noted by Stemler (2000), triangulation helps the validity of qualitative research through its encouragement of a diverse set of methods, multiple data sources, different analysis tools, and a large range of multidisciplinary theories. This sentiment has been supported in the prior sections of this thesis. This research being non-positivist and heavily embedded to context, as implied by the critical theory paradigm, especially the spatial-temporal ontology, suggest that reliability is limited due to difficulty in replication. Bias is inevitable, so it must be confronted at all stages of this project through considering the context around the methods and frequently engaging in my positionality and reflexivity.

5. Results

This section aims to address the four research questions through pairing the profile observations and questionnaire responses together to highlight the geographic similarities and differences in how MSM dating app users engage with hegemonic masculinity, hetero(homo)normative ideologies, and discriminatory language. **Table 2** showcases the summative narratives generated from the profile observations which aided in answering the questions. It is worth noting that throughout the results, Grindr is almost used as a synonym by questionnaire participants for other MSM dating app normalcies. This is not surprising since it is the most used app by questionnaire participants. When interpreting the results, refer to the codebook in **Table 1** or **subsection 4.4.6**. Additionally, quotes in **blue** represent photographic profile elements, and **green** textual. **Orange** is used to symbolize both.

5.1. RQ1: Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen convey masculinity differently on their profiles through photographic and textual means than MSM dating app users in Malmö?

The photographic and textual means of conveying masculinity are understood through both the questionnaire and profile observations. For more depth, the questionnaire provides insight into participant feelings towards these norms.

5.1.1. Visual Masculinity

Code 1 consisted of 22 references (coded excerpts) from 24 respondents in Copenhagen and 23 references from 15 respondents in Malmö. Despite more references in Malmö, there is a gap with less respondents actually correlating the photographic elements to masculinity. Regardless, the consensus is the same, as participants state MSM dating app users' profile photos mainly highlight body pictures and barely clothed individuals, mainly shirtless torsos. It is also noted that these individuals are in a gym environment, sometimes will showcase their fetish through an illustration, and are white (Caucasian). Profiles are frequently described as muscular, perfect, hot, and masculine. Participants note that it is common for said profile photos to be faceless, only focusing on the body. It was uncommon for participants to note that face pictures were included among MSM profile photos, although often preferred. The following answers illustrate this:

Copenhagen (Participant 36):

“Lots of shirtless profile pictures, both with and without faces. Generally I find that the userbase focuses strongly on sexual appeal, which to me is reflected in these profile pictures.”

Malmö (29):

“What I see: At least a third are either no picture uploaded at all, something random like a photo of a sunset, a meme, a quote - that kind of thing. Maybe another third that

are suggestive body pics that seem to have only just flown under the radar - chest photos are very common, upper body in general, clothed crotch, butt (clothed or not). A third are photos where you see the person's face.”

These similarities are also highlighted in the profile observations, as muscularity is privileged, and this is reflected with how shirtless photos were common and encompassed 1/3 of the profiles observed. These shirtless profile photos were frequently displayed by users who adopted a more masculine (categorical) self-identifier, such as *Jock*, *Muscle* and *Guy Next Door (GND)*, and were rarely displayed by bottoms. Lead profile pictures (which appear as a thumbnail before you click on the profile) often focus on shirtless, upper torso shots, or of the user wearing well-fitted, more revealing clothing to help emphasize their torso.

Additionally, alcoholic beverages would sometimes be present, mainly beer, as well as a bar environment for a backdrop for their photos, likely to act as masculine ‘window-dressing’ (a way to embody more stereotypically masculine traits). Suits and business-casual attire also frequently appeared, which could be a potential negotiation of masculinity.

5.1.2. Textual Masculinity

When it comes to profile textual elements in reference to masculinity, **Code 3** consisted of 4 references from 4 respondents in Copenhagen and 16 references from 14 respondents in Malmö. Despite this substantially lower textual-masculine correlation amongst Copenhagen respondents, it is worth noting that they frequently took this question space to instead discuss the pressures to display masculinity in the textual elements of their profiles, with 17 respondents touching on this (which will come into focus in *subsection 5.2.1.*). A consensus is that MSM users’ profile descriptions highlight an overwhelming emphasis on users looking for sexual encounters, sometimes illustrated through *NSA*, (slang for *no-strings attached*: meaning no romantic or sexual attachments, a one-night stand) *right now*, (slang for looking for sex at this moment) *fun/hook-ups* (slang for exclusively a sexual encounter), and sexual explanations regarding preferred sexual positions. Although sexual exploration is not necessarily

demonized by respondents, its dominance overtaking the majority of profiles is highlighted, as well as a frequent explicit calling for specific requirements/categorical preferences the other person must meet, which often emphasizes masculine traits (frequently self-marketed). This includes body features such as muscularity and having a large penis size. Users will also state that their masculine feature is only given in exchange for the same masculine features, such as ‘hung for hung’ (a large penis for another large penis) and ‘masc for masc’ (a masculine person for another masculine person). The below answers include some examples:

Copenhagen (14):

“‘XXL daddy looking for bottom toy’, etc. Tops always seem to be at least XL (a statistic impossibility)”

- The terms *XXL* and *XL* refer to *extra-extra-large* and *extra-large* respectively, as it relates to their penis size. Since bottoms are frequently objectified (in relation to femininity as referenced in the background), the word toy is used.

Malmö (3):

“I’d say there’s three types; the ones that are entirely blank (or non-descript), the ones that are just overly focused on sex and the ones that are trying to be serious. I’d say they’re common in the same order.”

- When they mention ‘serious’ it is likely a profile description that highlights looking for a long-term relationship, and so includes more personal information (hobbies, occupation, etc).

Once again profile observations show a similar story for both cities, as most self-identifiers are masculine, with *GND* being the most common and the same goes for preferred partners using masculine identifiers. When it comes to used hashtags (which help MSM dating app users filter-search their profiles), those that describe plentiful

body hair are most common, as it likely conveys more masculinity. Overall, profile descriptions (and in some cases, the names) often clearly state having preferences for masculine guys and some self-describe as having good sexual performance and a large penis.

It is now crucial to explore the differences between photographic and textual referencing to masculinity among MSM dating app users. For photographic elements, it is interesting to note that only survey respondents in Malmö reference crotch and butt pictures being a normalcy. The profile observations support this, as roughly 23% showcase explicit photos relating to male genital pants prints, with the majority using masculine identifiers, encompassing *GND* and *Jocks*, and are rarely shown by bottoms. Malmö profiles more frequently highlight app users wearing revealing clothing to intentionally emphasize often masculine features, such as thongs and underwear in more zoomed-in crotch shots, or tank tops when the focus is on biceps.

There were no other clear differences in survey responses regarding photographic elements, but Copenhagen profile observations showed infrequent male genital photos, encompassing 10%. *Manspreading* (when men spread their legs in a public setting) was drastically more present, often performed by those with masculine identifiers such as *Daddies*, *Military* and *Jocks*. Although muscularity is still common, there were many photos which highlighted reaffirming alternative identifiers, such as how lead profile photos often showcased the user in leather attire, which creates a more dominant-masculine narrative.

There were no textual survey response differences in relation to masculinity. Regarding profile observations, for Malmö there were slightly more non-masculine identifiers present, such as with people identifying as *Geek*, and more non-masculine partner identity preferences present, such as a desire for *Twinks* (although body and homo-normative, since twinks are still a ‘feminized’ majority/ideal for bottoms). In Copenhagen however, profile names more frequently allude to sexual acts, kinks and the user having an extra-large penis size. This is reflected in their descriptions, as masculine preferencing is more clearly outlined: such as one user commanding other users to have specific pictures ready to showcase their muscularity, others promote

requirements that define a hot guy such as being muscular, and some reiterate their more masculine features multiple times throughout their profiles, such as having a large penis. Since there are more guys who identify as *Leather* in Copenhagen, the photos to match this are explanatory. Overall, there is more sexual preferences and marketing.

5.1.3. Feelings towards Photographic and Textual Norms

Lastly, we look at **Codes 15** and **16** to understand participant feelings toward the photographic and textual norms of MSM dating app user profiles. **Code 15** showcased 18 references from 13 participants in Copenhagen, and 21 references from 12 respondents in Malmö. When it comes to users who like specific photographic elements, the consensus is that if the person's face is shown somewhere on their profile, then shirtless torso and other provocative images are acceptable. Clear face pictures convey that the MSM dating app user is comfortable with their sexuality, and it makes the app feel more 'human.' Profiles with no images, often common, are only accepted if the user sends a face picture through direct messages. A few participants were fine with the sexual photos often displayed, as they believe this is the nature of the app, a space mainly for hook-ups. This sentiment is shared with the textual elements of profiles, as a few users like the direct (straightforward) nature, such as how sexual preferences, roles and desires are clearly conveyed. This makes it easier to filter out profiles you prefer. The following respondent illustrates this:

Malmö (24):

"It is a great start to start a conversation and to weave out those who can't talk outside. Differ from Tinder, you can easily strike a conversation. Something I think is very much needed today, not only from a gay app perspective."

Profiles with more 'real' descriptions which introduce the person, or those with jokes, are preferred as the former is informative and the latter shows personality. There were no distinctive differences between Copenhagen and Malmö answers, and the same almost goes for neutral answers. Photographic and textual neutrality were far more common, where shirtless torso/body pictures, which are often muscular, are deemed

attractive but are difficult to compete against, leaving users feeling envious, and promotes a shallow and sex focused atmosphere. This is especially the case with headless torso photos, which feel inhuman and are easier to objectify. The following conveys this:

Malmö (29):

“Grindr desensitises you after a while. It is what it is. I'm not a person who would ever be attracted to or interested in a potential partner only judging from a single body part, whichever body part, that isn't their face. So I guess those roughly two thirds of pics being anonymous only works to further that objectifying, sexually harassing meat market type of vibe that Grindr has. Like it's not people. Which should make you as a user yourself feel like a shell yourself being there. I don't know. It's a dark place.”

However, this anonymity is somewhat understood by some users as people may not be ready to be open about their sexuality. It is conveyed that people should have the right to choose what they display and considering how diverse MSM dating app users are, this breakdown of face, bodies and blank profiles is logical. The only difference with respondents is that Malmö participants brought up crotch photos once more, stating that this (similarly to torso pictures) does not tell enough about a person. Textually, it is noted that profiles are often empty or exhibit short, monotonous descriptions, but someone notes this is a normalcy across dating apps in general and is not reduced to Grindr's restrictive (word count) design. These profiles are extremely selective, revolving around categorical identifiers such as sexual positions, what they are interested in, as well as sex topics, feeling like a sexual invite which many respondents are indifferent towards. Clarity is conveyed but often negatively. Since there is a lack of personal information, it is hard to make conversation or assess the person behind the profile. Instead, it feels like you have to meet a list of requirements to negotiate only sexual engagements with that user.

Code 16 showcased 22 references from 16 respondents in Copenhagen and 18 references from 11 in Malmö. Since this code focuses on dislike towards these photographic and textual elements, we can see how in Copenhagen the dislikes exhibit a

stronger contrast in comparison to those who were either neutral or liked such norms. The photographic consensus is that an environment of shirtless, buff white men is bad for the community's self-esteem as it makes its MSM dating app users feel like they must look a specific way to garner sexual interest. It also promotes a user base focused on sexual appeal and a hook-up culture, which comes across as aggressive, making some feel insecure and uncomfortable (even if the person has no issues with their body). It is seen as depressing to consider that queer men decide who to message based on these body pictures. As one participant notes:

Copenhagen (2):

“...It makes me feel inadequate since it makes it look like everybody has a perfect body (tall, muscular) and mine is not so. It also makes me feel guilty since it seems like I'm not doing enough towards achieving this goal of "improving" my body.”

Additionally, headless torsos/bodies are disappointing and either show that the person is fake or not comfortable being queer and seen in this virtual space. A textual consensus is that descriptions which often highlight demographic information and categorical identifiers such as ethnicity, body type and sexual position are uninteresting and insulting. The selective-demanding nature of profile descriptions, especially in regards to hegemonic masculinity and age, is seen as annoying and provides no space for fluidity within interactions, and are not fun to talk to. Profiles that are looking for fun but state ‘maybe something serious’ are seen as disingenuous. Blank profiles are strongly disliked and anonymity is believed to have gone too far.

5.1.4. RQ1 Summary

Questionnaire answers are relatively the same, other than the fact that Copenhagen participants significantly performed less for code 3, textual components of masculinity. Despite this, we can see the feelings and perceptions for these normalities for both are similar, highlighting that Copenhagen participants are aware of trends in profile description. Profile observations show greater variation in how masculinity, although consistently hegemonically aligned, is conveyed differently in the two cities through

different tactics. Photographic displays in Malmö are more sexually explicit but in Copenhagen it is marketed more to alternative masculinity that relies on creating a dominant-kink narrative. This is paired with demanding descriptions in Copenhagen for specific masculine traits. Non-masculine identifiers are of slightly more relevance in Malmö.

5.2. RQ 4: Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen experience different pressures to act masculine and exhibit traits that align with hetero(homo)normative ideals than MSM dating app users in Malmö?

To grasp the pressures applied to MSM dating app users regarding hegemonic masculinity and hetero(homo)normative ideals, the questionnaire was the focus.

5.2.1. Masculine and Homonormative Pressures

Starting with how photographic elements are impacted, **Code 2** for hegemonic masculinity garnered 17/23 references from 11/12 respondents in Copenhagen/Malmö respectively. Although this prevalence for Malmö is slight, Malmö had less respondents overall. The consensus for both cities is that many are pressured to visually pose as very masculine and dominant as this is preferred and impacts popularity. This is conveyed through ‘strong’ bodies. It is noted that masculinity is intentionally presented more through profile pictures than in real life. Someone states that pressures to exhibit masculine behavior is not prevalent in Sweden, but expressions are, which is displayed through showcasing the ideal body.

Copenhagen (2):

“It definitely impacts my desirability since everybody seems to be looking for the same masculine body type. Since it's hard to judge someone's personality by text, I haven't feel pressure to comply with other masculine and gay stereotypes in terms of my personality.”

Code 5 which garnered 18/23 references from 12/15 respondents from Copenhagen/Malmö shows this homonormative visual idealism. They showcase how sexual roles and identities are locked to the gender binary (heteronormative by nature), and participants must confide and show through appearances that you must look like ‘the others’ so you try to appear more stereotypically masculine or gay. Someone highlights how masculinity is embedded to the MSM community where sexual history and fetish culture ties it to an ‘oppressor’ role, which is a sexual ideal. Being a bottom means to be feminine and to be dominated by a strong male (a top). Since the prior subsection showed how masculinity is privileged, participants highlight that being perceived as heterosexual is more desirable than being feminine or gay. You must visually adhere to your sexual role so tops show masculinity through dominance, and one way is by sending penis pictures. Bottoms show femininity through submission, and butt pictures. This is regulated through body pictures as well, with fitness (especially muscles for tops) and youthfulness being ideal. As several participants noted, pictures hold more weight than your personality.

Copenhagen (41):

“As a top I feel the expectation to be masculine a lot. But also because I like feminine guys and in my experience they (like me) often are attracted to the contrast of finding someone opposite themselves. It determines which pictures I choose but not the way I act during chatting.”

Code 4 consisted of 17/30 references from 11/15 respondents in Copenhagen/Malmö focuses on masculine pressures through textual elements. The consensus is similar in both cities and relates to visual pressures, as participants feel like their (and others) profile descriptions and names should promote masculinity. The descriptions often include a very masculinized list of demands i.e. *“Be fit, my age, big cock”* (**Malmö: 38**). By some, femininity is noted to never be promoted. Textual homonormative pressures show a similar trajectory, as **Code 6** consisting of 27/32 references from 16/18 participants in Copenhagen/Malmö, highlight sexual roles and gender identities as being heteronormative restricted, tied to societal gender norms. It is noted how queer sex is positioned as heterosexual, and the language conforms to bodies and desires to stereotypes found in gay porn, which are heteronormative and sustains a top and bottom

dichotomy. Descriptions are called out for only being these stereotypes, lacking humanity.

Copenhagen (14):

“...The very fact that we call it ‘top’, ‘bottom’ and ‘side’ is inherent machismo, giving the ‘male’ (penetrative) role positive associations and the ‘female’ (receptive) role negative ones – and leaving the non-penetrative role complete outside, not even worthy of being counted. Sexual descriptions on dating apps are often the epitome of these...”

People also intentionally state being bisexual, curious, or even straight since heterosexuality is idealized in MSM space. Additionally, gay men who can pass as straight are privileged. It is noted that many masculine guys state they are only looking for feminine guys since they are ‘straight.’

Malmö (17):

“...being a bottom is perceived as less masculine than being a top. It's also more gay to be a bottom, apparently. I've encountered tops saying stuff like ‘I'm not gay enough to have a dick up my ass.’”

Overall, it is noted that these hegemonic masculine and homonormative pressures align to a hierarchy in the MSM community, where masculinity, heterosexual-passing is at the top, and feminine gays are at the bottom. Participants state how MSM apps allow you to regulate your perception, and the necessity to play into gender roles is perpetuated online. One must pretend more often than in-person as MSM apps draw more attention to superficial traits.

Copenhagen (39):

“...even built into the apps are the concept of ‘tribes’ which I had no idea was a thing before Grindr...the app promotes gay stereotypes in user's profiles but more so in how they write to others.”

- *Tribes* refer to the categorical identifiers.

Compliance is required to gain attention which results in gay men aggressively playing into their role. It was stated that showcasing nudity that aligns to said role helps to increase the likelihood of someone clicking you. Femininity could carry some ‘privilege,’ but it requires more prerequisites, such as having to be tied to youthfulness. Despite bottoms being placed into a feminine role, it is also mentioned how they likely feel pressured to be more masculine to not lose their male identity. Being the opposite of your stereotype can make you desired through fetishization, such as a twink, feminine top. It is noted that one could play around with roles if harmful stereotypes are not perpetuated or harm others.

There were several differences noted amongst respondents in Copenhagen and Malmö. Copenhagen respondents seem to note their own intersectional aspects as it correlates to how impacted they are by masculine and homonormative pressures. These same participants also highlight how whiteness is embedded in these ideals, further excluding non-white people, and making it more challenging for them to achieve a similar status. Malmö respondents reference these pressures more frequently, which was emphasized with how masculine privilege and an anti-feminine mandate are mobilized through textual components, reinforcing hegemonic masculine pressures. Additionally, homonormative pressures and problems received lots more elaboration.

5.2.2. An Absence of Masculine and Homonormative Pressures and Promotion

Based on these differences, it is unsurprising that Copenhagen participants feel less pressured to comply with homonormative and masculine stereotypes, as shown by **Code 21**. Quite a few participants stated that they grew out of these pressures but felt them when they were younger, such as a requirement to be the ‘perfect twink.’ Those looking

for a relationship state that it only impacts you if you are aiming for hook-ups. Some touched on how the privileged parts of their identity make these pressures obsolete, such as through already appearing masculine.

Copenhagen (10):

“being a white queer male that navigates the world and gay apps pretty easily i personally don't feel the pressure as much as i imagine others do (gender non conforming, people of color...)”

Code 19 was also more prevalent amongst Copenhagen participants, as they do not feel like these masculine and homonormative stereotypes are being promoted. Instead, MSM dating apps present a realistic representation of the gay community and an inclusive space. Since most people do look for hook-ups in this space, that is reflected on their profiles. With a large variety of styles, kinks, and people visible on Grindr, others are more comfortable expressing themselves.

5.2.3. Body Regulation Pressures

It is important to consider how pressures to display a specific body type align closely with masculine and homonormative stereotypes, as mentioned earlier. **Codes 8** and **9** highlight that these body pressures were more of a concern in Copenhagen. Having a body that is perceived as masculine is heavily valued and gains you more popularity. In relation to homonormativity, it is expected that your body type relates to your sexual role.

Copenhagen (2):

“...both language and pictures promote masculine bodies since you're only supposed to show your body when you're toned or muscular.”

5.2.4. Photographic and Textual Anonymity

Both participants in Copenhagen and Malmö touched upon the frequency of anonymity through profile photographic and textual means with **Codes 13** and **14** with the references and respondents being relatively the same. This anonymity is more common through textual means in Copenhagen and photos in Malmö which is supported by the profile observations. A consensus between both cities respondents show that anonymity is often through headless torso pictures or no pictures on profiles, or empty, very brief descriptions which only include categorical identifiers, preferences, and demands which often relate to sex. This is interesting as several people think this anonymity is due MSM users being ashamed of their sexuality, and so hide their identity and are often only interested in anonymous sexual engagements. This photographic anonymity which hides more of a user's identity could correlate to the greater homonormative and masculine pressures Malmö respondents feel.

5.2.5. Hypersexual Culture and Harassment

Throughout the prior codes, the prevalence of MSM dating apps creating an environment that is hypersexual and unsafe was brought up consistently, especially the former. **Code 17** showed more references to hypersexual culture in Copenhagen, but Malmö participants elaborated greatly on the issues and showcased it to be more problematic. A consensus between both cities is that sex is prioritized and operationalized through hegemonic masculine and homonormative stereotypes. This is seen as more prevalent online than in-person. People are more direct in virtual space with sexual advancements and can showcase a raunchier side. There is more aggression noted, especially if you show disinterest. There is no focus on sensual and personal dynamics, fostering a very impersonal hook-up scene. Additionally, the increased risk of pressures to do unprotected sex and potential STIs was brought up. Several users do comment on how the app's design perpetuates these issues.

Malmö (7):

“...the ‘snippet’ nature of profile information doesn’t tend to encourage users to get to know each other beyond the superficial metrics within the apps.”

Malmö (3):

“People often make sexual advances quite liberally then refer to ‘it’s Grindr’. I don’t think people would make the same advances in real life. I have a similar pattern myself. It’s just easier to cross boundaries when you’re talking to someone ‘not real’”

As shown by **Code 20**, only 5 participants per city believed that virtual and in-person interactions stay the same. Lastly, **Code 18** touched on the prevalence of unsafe scenarios and violence, which was slightly more referenced across Malmö. Across both cities participants mention experiences of sexual harassment and objectification, fetishization, and other users not listening to you and making demands. It is also common for people to skip your profile and privately message something your profile explicitly states not wanting. Derogatory language and unsolicited ‘dick pics’ are also common. Someone touched on what they consider an uncomfortable scenario of much older men only targeting 18–20-year-olds. To avoid this, the tactic is to put your profile to 21 as that is seen as too old for these types of men. Users note a higher chance of sexual advancement pressures. A respondent stated how they do not feel there is a space for in-experienced individuals, where they felt pressured to have sex at a young age and were sexually assaulted by another user.

5.2.6. RQ4 Summary

In Malmö, the pressures to abide by hegemonic masculinity and homonormativity is felt more by respondents. These pressures likely explain the pronounced issues of photographic anonymity in Malmö, as well as the hyper-sexual, harassment culture. Copenhagen participants brought *whiteness* into the scenario of both masculine and homonormative pressures, and also as a reason why they do not feel the need to comply – often being white themselves. However, more Copenhagen participants noted that these stereotypes are not promoted to begin with. Interestingly, body pressures, especially related to hegemonic masculinity, was a big issue for them.

5.3. RQ2: Do MSM dating app users in Copenhagen engage with homophobic and misogynistic, racist, and body shaming language on their profiles differently than MSM dating app users in Malmö?

Aspects of photographic and textual homophobia and misogyny, body shaming, and racism are examined across the questionnaire and the profile observations to comprehend these different forms of discrimination.

5.3.1. Homophobia and Misogyny

To examine homophobia and misogyny through femmephobia and anti-effeminacy we start with **Code 7** which consisted of 37/25 references from 16 participants in Copenhagen/Malmö, which already indicates a prevalence in Copenhagen. The consensus is that profile descriptions explicitly exclude categorical identities, as they are allowed to be more direct as they hide behind the shield of stating ‘it’s just preferences.’ They will state only desiring a specific categorical identity. To many, it feels very mechanical, as people cannot have a conversation without stereotyping you categorically based on your sexuality and gender identity. Every message is seen as a demand and includes derogatory language.

Participants note having to be within the homonormative binary to be a ‘turn-on’ (desired). When you fall out of this ideal, you are discriminated against. For example, the top-bottom binary is so heavily emphasized that identifying as versatile or switch is illegitimate. Despite bisexual men often being idealized due to a perceived notion of heterosexuality as noted in the prior subsection, they are subject to harassment, as they are said to not belong in MSM space and are accused of always preferring women. Ageism is rampant in relation to homonormativity, as a strict age range is stated on most profiles, which pairs poorly with the notion that age is a category one is expected to provide. Since being bottom is seen as feminine, and femininity is youthful, bottoms must be young. Femmephobia is common, as femininity is mainly a part of the equation if it is desired by someone who is straight (curious), exclusively wanting feminine or transgender men. Discrimination is often phrased in a positive way (the preference shield) i.e. *“love bears, femboys to the front, etc.”* (**Malmö: 38**).

Malmö (17):

“Yes, all the time. Lots of t-slurs (tranny etc). It's fairly common for people to conflate trans women and trans men. It's very common for guys who are new to gay dating to try to use me as a stepping stone into the "real" gay dating. They might say something like "I'm very into tomboys", and act like they're flattering me. It's awful.”

Many participants note Grindr is already seen as a morally poor space, so the discrimination is unsurprising. Some state it is reasonable to list boundaries to not waste others time, but it is often conveyed in a discriminatory way. A select few excuse it as preferences, where it is noted that you should not have to hook-up with someone you are not turned on by, just to be nice.

Profile observations support the questionnaire answers by showing how homonormative ‘narrative’ creation is common amongst MSM app users. Visually, one solidifies their profile by aligning photos to their kinks, sexual positions, or their categorical identification. In Malmö this was done frequently by those who bottom, as they showed butt photos. In Copenhagen this was shown by those who identify by *Leather* highlighting BDSM attire, toys, and environments. In this case, photos are commonly related to a kink in their description.

Textually, masculine queerness often had positive attributes assigned to it while feminine queerness was objectified and placed into a bottom role. With Malmö, profiles often desired those of the *Bisexual* categorical identity, and there was explicit referencing to feminine ‘queer’ behavior as problematic and unnatural. In Copenhagen, textual homonormative promotion was more pronounced, where tops included demands in their profile which emphasized a submissive other. Some bottom profiles included self-objectification, stating a desire to meet the needs for the dominant other. Tops frequently coded their profiles to adhere to dominance, especially as it relates to BDSM. It can be said that Copenhagen men are likely trying to play into this dominant-submissive fantasy to adhere to their BDSM profile coding, whereas in Malmö the textual segregation is more subtle.

Additionally in both cities, there was a severe lack of feminine-coded self-identifiers and preferred partner preferences (such as *Queer* or *Transgender*), except in the case of *Twinks* (arguably homonormative) being desired in Malmö. Therefore, more profiles in Malmö exhibited signs of femininity. Copenhagen photos significantly lacked femininity, and descriptions often included emasculation tactics, such as through degrading bottoms and challenging other men's masculinity.

5.3.2. Body Shaming

Code 10 within the questionnaire showcased body discrimination, where the prevalence and consensus across both cities are similar. MSM dating app users often state and will only date their body preferences. People are often grouped into categories based on their body type which often correlate to their demographic information and identities.

Malmö (29):

“Other stereotypes include the twink/otter/bear/etc shenanigans, which I think have a similar effect as top/bottom, putting people into boxes they maybe never would've related that much to. Just to fit into something, to fit into what some stranger fantasises about.”

Weight was stated to often be discriminated against on profiles, and those considered fat are excluded. Some note that fatphobia is a bigger issue than being specifically masculine. It is stated that if you are not a twink or muscular, you are excluded. The ideal is correlated to being *white*, *muscular*, and *fully functional*. Functionality likely relates to being younger since old age is often listed alongside undesired bodies. If you are not this ideal, you must obtain aspects to gain desirability and avoid shaming.

Profile observations support the prevalence of muscularity visually, where gym photos often included men showcasing their bodies. Additionally, it is common for users to highlight their alternative body identities by showing a specific feature. How this is done in both cities is different. In Malmö, gym photos are more common and used by those who identify as *GND*, and bottoms more often try to showcase their thin bodies.

Copenhagen men included more *Bears*, so they often legitimize this status by trying to highlight body hair and their largeness. Arguably, Malmö photos exhibited a more homonormative ideal, and Copenhagen men emphasized establishing alternative bodies.

Textually, the *Jock* identity was utilized by all except those who bottom, likely due to wanting to be perceived as feminine, and the *Muscle* identity was always used by those who identify as versatile, potentially to reinforce their legitimacy and masculinity. Once more, masculine identifiers and partner preferencing are common in both cities, but the difference is that *Daddies* and *Twinks* as partners are more desired in Malmö, whereas *Bears* and *Leather* are more commonly used identities in Copenhagen. More of their profile names often aligned to this alternative body identity. These body identities are more alternative, which is not as common in Malmö.

5.3.3. Racism

Regarding the questionnaire, the Textual Racism parent code is more prevalent in Copenhagen for overall references and participants. **Code 12** discusses racism targeted towards others, where the consensus is that descriptions state only looking for specific races, and/or will explicitly state those excluded. Race-based bullying and assumptions are frequently experienced by text and far more common in an online space versus in-person. Many state that being racially outside of the norm, non-white, means you must establish legitimacy, and muscularity is the main way mentioned. Lastly, many state that race and sexual position often determine body expectations. If you are Asian and a bottom, you do not have to be as muscular, and white bottoms can be skinny and more feminine than someone who is non-white. Penis size is also related to race and the masculine-feminine binary, so it is noted how Black men are expected to have a larger penis, and Asians a small one. Once more a few people phrase this as preferencing which they see as reasonable, but many times it exists by excluding the other. A small few note that racism does happen but is nowhere as frequent as it is in the UK and US.

Malmö (3):

“Definitely. It’s common to see things such as ‘no asians’ or ‘looking for bbc’ ...”

- *BBC* is an abbreviation for *big black cock*, often expected from Black men.

Code 11 showcased only a few examples of how racial self-marketing is expected, in which all respondents were from Copenhagen. They note how if you are a certain race, you are expected to behave in a specific way.

Copenhagen (48):

“yes! me being middle eastern has definitely added pressure. People expect me to ‘act like a perker’ (derogatory term for middle eastern ppl in danish). They expect me to be extremely aggressive and violent when i personally dont like that at all.”

- *Ppl* is an abbreviation for *people*.

Profile observations only support code 11 as self-racial promotion and fetishization was only shown by people of color to help market themselves. This only took place in Malmö whereas Copenhagen had no signs of racism which shows the opposite information to the questionnaire.

5.3.4. RQ2 Summary

It is rather consistent in the questionnaire that non-masculine sexuality and gender expressions and body types are excluded. Since whiteness is a part of this homonormative identity, non-white people have more bodily and sexuality/gender expectations marked onto them. If the user is feminine, they are expected to be white, bottom, and less muscular than their top counterpart. Those outside of the strict top-bottom dichotomy lack legitimacy. Based on these norms, fatphobia, ageism, racism and transphobia are common and some state that being Asian, fat and feminine are on the lowest bar of a hierarchy. It is noted that this discrimination is much more pronounced online than during in-person interactions, but it is also stated that it is improving for the better. This is contrasted by a belief that discrimination happens often, but not clearly, as people have learned to be subtle because they know it is

socially unacceptable. A debate on whether this is preferencing or discrimination is often highlighted. **Code 22** highlighted those who have not experienced discrimination which is consistent across both cities. They often say they do not experience nor see it. These users are mainly white and are all above 40.

Malmö (30):

“...Age, weight, sexual preferences are often discriminated against in profiles (‘no fatties’, ‘no old’, ‘no fags’). It’s so offensive that no one would use such expressions in real life. But a profile allows for some form of shielding from getting feedback right away, and many just feel entitled to do.”

A key questionnaire difference is that Copenhagen participants frequently mentioned how privileged aspects of their identity allow them to avoid discrimination, such as already fitting into the homonormative identification, or their white identity providing more leeway for adopting stereotypes. This correlates with prior subsections on why they felt less pressured, except for with body muscularity. Copenhagen participants also noted racism more frequently.

The profile observations support the questionnaire as pictures and text are selected based on their masculine or feminine expression, sexuality, body type and race, where norms and segregation are sustained. Although more masculine expressions and homonormative gender identity and sexualities are prevalent in both cities’ profiles, photographic elements in Malmö exhibited more to the ideal: muscular, youthful bodies, as well as more femininity in the form of *Twinks*. Textual components also privileged the masculine norm, but the discrimination was subtle. In Copenhagen’s case, alternative bodies and identities are reinforced photographically, but their descriptions and usernames are aggressively built around this alternative identity, and a dominant-submissive narrative closer to BDSM. This marketing of alternative bodies/identities makes homophobic and misogynistic discrimination more pronounced, except in the case of racism, which was only found infrequently in Malmö through self-marketing.

5.4. RQ3: Is there any correlation with how MSM dating app users' photographic and textual masculine and homonormative displays differ by (a) age or (b) race or (c) sexual position in relation to Copenhagen and Malmö?

The prior three subsections highlight that identity greatly influences what MSM app users wish to show on their profile as they relate to masculine and homonormative normalcies. Thus, this section will be briefer when going over shared trends between both cities and differences.

5.4.1. Age

The questionnaire shows that ageism was frequently called out as it relates to sexual position and body expectations. A clear point is that because being a bottom is correlated to youthfulness, older bottoms note often being replaced. Some older guys on the other hand admit complying to the *Daddy* category which is related to their bodies. Ageism was mainly mentioned by those above the age of 40. This was consistent for both cities. The profile observations provide more insight into this as the demographic for Copenhagen was mainly all people over the age of 35, whereas the age distribution among profiles in Malmö were evenly distributed. This could explain why there were more explicit photos in Malmö which predominantly came from younger men. Gym photos being more common also relates. Since they are further away from this age ideal, the men in Copenhagen cannot rely as often on youthful bodies to promote masculinity, so instead the kink narrative is one way to exhibit dominance. This likely explains why there are less displays of femininity as well.

5.4.2. Race

The questionnaire also highlighted that race impacts how users engage with masculinity, femininity, and the sexual roles they are allowed to exhibit, where white individuals can more freely operate both sides of the gender binary. Such racial intersectional reflection was much more common in Copenhagen, and racism was more emphasized. Due to limitations with performing profile observations on Scruff version

7.1.0 (54142), examining racial correlations is mostly obsolete (see *subsection 6.3.*). Despite this, we can discern that people of color do racially self-promote.

5.4.3. Sexual Position

The questionnaire shows how many are aware that their sexual position greatly regulates what pictures and text they display. As mentioned, tops know they must display dominance and masculinity, and bottoms femininity and submission. This influences the nudity they show. The sexual role binary makes those who identify as side and versatile feel alienated. This also plays into the gender binary, as gender non-conforming and transgender men note having to choose and negotiate masculinity.

Copenhagen (41):

“Since I am a cis white gay man I don’t feel the pressure of society that much, other than a sort of patrolling of my femininity. Like, since I might pass as straight, I’m not allowed to be feminine since that reflects “badly” (because of heteronormative ideals) on straight men. Within the gay community I also feel the expectation to be masc as a top.”

➤ *Masc* is an abbreviation for *masculinity*.

Copenhagen (23):

“I’m a trans man, I definitely feel like I have to prove my masculinity a lot of the time. A lot of the guys I’ve talked to have expected me to be feminine and submissive.”

Profile observations solidify this masculine-feminine binary in regard to sexual roles, as those who top were more likely to self-identify as masculine such as by *Jock*, show shirtless photos of their torso, and pictures of their crotch-penis bulge. Bottoms tried to highlight femininity through pictures of their slim, smooth (twink) bodies and butt. Those in Malmö could rely on this more frequently than profiles in Copenhagen due to

age, so the top-bottom dichotomy was reinforced through a dominating narrative with textual reiterations of top dominance and the bottom submission in relation to BDSM and overall, more sexual marketing such as profile names that allude to a large penis from those who top. Visuals often are used to cement this, such as those who identify as *Military*, *Daddies*, and *Leather* manspread in leather attire.

6. Discussion

Through engaging with these similarities and differences for both cities from the prior section, we can deconstruct the hypothesis. Indeed, gender normative pressures help to influence the consistent narrative that impacts common trends of self-(re)presentation and displays of online disinhibition among MSM dating app users. Virtual placemaking shapes the unique way this is performed by users in this space, which helps to explain geographic shifts in data and gender engagements. Thus, MSM dating app users in both cities' profiles show photographic and textual elements that privilege and sustain hegemonic masculinity, hetero(homo)normativity, and discriminatory language. This *gay ideal* encompasses men who are non-effeminate, white, young, athletic, and handsome (Saraiva, et al., 2020), and the profile observations and questionnaire answers reinforce this by lifting those who do and segregating or fetishizing those who do not. This is why *age*, *race*, and *sexual position* all play major roles in how these profile attributes are displayed.

Głowczyński's (2023) *mobile sense of place* helps to explain why MSM apps sense of place is geographically specific, and so there are variations in how masculinity and hetero(homo)normative ideals manifest despite being privileged in both spaces. Since users in Malmö profiles were closer to this homonormative ideal, especially regarding age, their photographic and textual portrayals aligned with more traditional masculinity and homonormativity, by using their muscular or thin bodies, and partial nudity that align with their sex roles, to reinforce masculine or feminine coding. This frequency of youthfulness is likely why non-masculine identifiers are more common in Malmö. Malmö users expressed feeling *more* pressured to abide by these normalcies (except for masculine body pressures), which could explain the greater reference to an overly sexual, harassment culture, and photographic anonymity.

In Copenhagen, profiles are much more heavily marketed to adhere to their alternative bodies and identities that are not as prominent, which is reinforced photographically and textually to create a dominant-submissive narrative that is close to BDSM. One could argue that this means those in Copenhagen feel less obligated to adhere to these normalcies and could be dismantling the stigma attached to kink culture. This normalizing behavior is mentioned by users in both cities generally. However, this alternative profile marketing makes homophobic and misogynistic discrimination more pronounced and is generally sustained through creating masculine dominance. This is because profiles observed in Copenhagen were older, meaning they cannot rely as easily on hegemonic masculinity and homonormative portrayals, and must use this unified narrative to solidify their legitimacy. This explains why Copenhagen participants felt more pressured to exhibit a masculine body, as they lack this more than their counterparts in Malmö. Copenhagen participants mentioned more often how their privileged identities (such as being white or cisgender) help them to avoid abiding to stereotypes, which is why hegemonic masculine and homonormative pressures are felt less (although the profile observations suggest otherwise during a need for masculine renegotiation of the alternative) but they also note racism more frequently as a problem.

It is safe to say that MSM dating app users in Copenhagen do **not** abide more frequently to hegemonic masculine ideals, hetero(homo)normativity, and engage in discriminatory language more than MSM dating app users in Malmö. Instead, it is a more nuanced discussion that both go about it uniquely through digital placemaking. If anything, those in Malmö show a closer alignment to these norms and more pressure to execute them, but in Copenhagen their profile renegotiations bring about explicit forms of discrimination more often.

6.1. Hegemonic Masculinity, Anti-effeminacy, Body Expectations and Race

As Miller (2015) notes, aesthetics are crucial in MSM dating culture which is only further amplified by the traditional masculine branding of these apps which promotes anti-effeminate language, whiteness preferencing, and body muscularity expectations (Raj, 2011; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016;). Many questionnaire participants supported this when stating the influence of the apps categorical design in perpetuating

these normalcies. This gay ideal is contingent on fit, youthful, physically attractive bodies (Miller, 2015), so the drive for muscularity is higher amongst MSM (Yelland Tiggemann, 2003), and their profiles are mainly based on highlighting this physicality (Hatala and Prehodka, 1996). Not meeting this normative masculine body leads to alternative body categories, where their subgroup identity is centralized around marketing this alternative body, which may come at the expense of discriminating the other, as bears reinforce their masculinity through hair and largeness, in opposition to the slim twink culture by demonizing femininity (Miller, 2015). This notion was supported when discussing the results, especially in the case of Copenhagen's profile observations. Resolidifying one's status comes at the expense of the other. The prevalence of explicit fatphobia was common amongst questionnaire respondents since it is opposite to this body ideal.

Queer masculinity is already alternative and subordinated, so MSM often try to hold onto a privileged aspect of their identity by performing traditional masculinity (Miller, 2015; Rose and Johnson, 2017). This is shown on MSM apps by visually presenting semi-clothed muscular bodies, and descriptively referencing fitness and requesting masculinity from other partners (Miller, 2015) which is a shared consensus in the results. The MSM profile branding around sexual roles is crucial because it plays into this gender dichotomy, as the top with the penetrative masculine role, and the bottom being the penetrated feminine role. Therefore, the bottom identity engages with *penetrated masculinity*, which is already subordinated through queerness, and is reinforced as an inadequate masculine form to the hegemonic (Reeser, 2009). Masculinity depends on the subordination of femininity, which is replicated through the top and bottom dynamic, and so effeminate men stereotypically conform to avoid further subordination and to gain relevance from the dominant other (Han et al., 2014a; Miller and Behm-Morawitz, 2016). However, Miller and Behm-Morawitz (2016) showed how users referencing themselves as feminine is very infrequent, which is concerning as this study shared similar results, where profile observations showed feminine self-identification was substantially missing and only called for in the form of twinks, a normalized MSM identity. Those who note not being within the gender and sex role binary are excluded.

Hetero(homo)normative ideals are tied to whiteness, and so racial minorities are viewed as a commodity/fetish, likely amplified in predominantly white countries (Raj, 2011; Miller, 2015; Held, 2017). Race is tied to sexual roles, and people of color are often placed into preconceived sexual positions (Teunis, 2007) where Asian queer men are assumed to be bottoms, feminine and submissive, and Black men as tops, masculine and dominant (Han et al., 2014a; Miller, 2015). Reeser (2009) contextualized this through highlighting how white men sustain their position at the top of the masculine hierarchy through positioning Asian men as lacking masculinity, and Black men as having an excess. Not only were the questionnaire participants aware of these masculine-feminine, sexual position, body, and racial dynamics, but they often play into it as it increases their popularity.

6.2. Self-(re)presentation, Queer Digital Geographies, and Toxic Online Disinhibition

Data is impacted by daily spatial interactions, which then is infused to the placemaking of MSM virtual dating space (Bonner-Thompson, 2023; Głowczyński's, 2023). Feminist queer geography highlights this bond between data, identity, and power, through how digital infrastructures exist in relation to identity and bodily norms. MSM apps interface restrict its users to these categorical identities, and so impression management is emphasized often through choreographed photos and social attraction (relating to nearby surroundings) to create an ideal persona which incorporates place-based norms. (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Oakes et al., 2020; Waling et al., 2022). This could be why masculinity and homonormative displays had a sense of geographical unity during the profile observations.

Dating apps by design encourage this self-(re)presentation, which consist of the manipulation of given-off (nonverbal) cues, which are harder to regulate in-person, and so users often exaggerate small parts of their identity which often creates a stereotypical representation (Oakes et al., 2020). As the results highlight, this is very crucial to MSM profile success. Since traditional masculinity has somewhat been scrutinized in recent years, some men try to not excessively showcase manhood (Waling et al., 2022). Although masculinity was very prevalent in profile observations, the *Guy Next Door*

(often correlated to a ‘nice guy’) identifier was the most prominent, potentially to negate excess masculinity, without identifying to a more alternative subgroup. Overall, many questionnaire participants noted MSM dating app representations are a façade. With queer digital geographies, it is important to consider that data is incomplete and broken, and as influenced by everyday perspectives, it often fails to capture important in-person narratives such as bodily processes as mentioned with self-(re)presentation theory (Bonner-Thompson, 2023).

Bonner-Thompson (2023) study highlighted how participants were afraid of their data being revealed when it came to their sexuality. This could potentially explain the frequent anonymous nature of MSM profiles as noted by the profile observations and the questionnaire, especially through photographic means. Users may share a similar skepticism when contemplating what may happen with their personal data. These apps allow users to perform dissociative anonymity, an aspect of toxic online disinhibition, where through this hidden identity, allows for users to engage in more frequent sexual advancements and discrimination (Miller, 2015). This lack of physical identification (invisibility) was noted as a ‘shield’ by many participants, which they note as a main reason for these amplified problems.

6.3. Research Contribution, Limitations and Future Studies

MSM exclusive online dating apps often exhibit hegemonic masculinity and hetero(homo)normativity which thrives on discriminatory tactics to sustain these ideals. This exploratory research was an attempt to adapt this concept by showing how digital placemaking can morph how these phenomena are performed, even in very close geographical context. Contemporary understandings of self-(re)presentation and queer digital geographies allow us to contextualize how these intersectionality’s that sustain a masculine hierarchy are translated to a digital space, while online disinhibition explains its amplification. A feminist epistemology and moving hypothesis allowed this thesis to employ flexible methods and analysis tools to capture the unpredictable and allow for triangulation as a way to counter the inevitable bias that comes with non-positivist research. Therefore, this research provides a nuanced contribution to feminist, cultural, and digital geographies by showing how place-based norms, as mediated through

idealized profile curation, restrictive MSM app designs, and sexual orientation related online anonymity, contribute to geographic unity with how gender, sexuality and discrimination is performed in online queer male space.

Limitations were inevitable. Profile observations were conducted on version 7.1.0 (54142) of Scruff, which no longer includes race as a category in users' demographic information. This eliminates the possibility of correlating race with displayed preferences on profiles, impacting research question 3. Scruff's profile guidelines are stricter than Grindr's, particularly regarding nudity and offensive language, especially racism. This reduces instances of profile nudity and explicit racism which could be more prevalent. Scruff was originally marketed towards masculine men (Oakes, 2020) but now aims to be more inclusive towards all MSM. Regardless, their original branding may still influence its potential user base. For the questionnaire, webpage moderation decisions took a long time, causing over-reliance on Scruff messaging for recruitment. Questionnaire anonymity was maintained by not using cookies, but this may have decreased participation rates since progress was only saved upon completion, and the questionnaire was longer than anticipated. Concerns about anonymity persisted due to the requirement of logging in through Gmail, despite not recording Gmail information. The login barrier was eventually removed to boost the response rate which means respondents could participate multiple times.

Future studies of comparative MSM digital spaces should focus on specific forms of discrimination, such as fatphobia, misogyny, and racism, as their intricacies could not be fully explored in this thesis due to the many components needing comparison and the limited timeframe. This also applies to future examinations of the hypersexual culture these apps encourage, as this was frequently a concern for many participants. Additionally, only one app was used for the profile observations to generalize the MSM dating community, so it would be most appropriate to conduct such research over several MSM apps.

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Appendix

List of Tables:

Table 1 – Thematic Analysis Code Development:

A table showing the code development process from the topic categories (parent codes) and clarification for what children code fall under them. The children code was developed by the background literature and the author experiences with MSM online culture and dating apps. This children code aimed to identify basic elements from the raw data (questionnaire answers) to access the topics (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The refined code condensed the initial children code.

Parent Code Categories	Children Code	Refined Children Code
<p>Photographic Masculinity: Data that alludes to profile pictures showing signs of masculinity: shirtless, muscularity, and provocative content (often genitalia). Such masculine displays are often hegemonic hetero(homo)normative which often correlates to their sexual role or based on alternative masculinity as determined by body type or kink.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photos on partial (often upper body) nudity, muscularity 2. Photos of penis crotch bulge 3. Pressures to visually showcasing masculinity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Photos of partial nudity, crotches, muscularity 2) Pressure to visually showcase masculinity
<p>Textual Masculinity and Anti-effeminate Discourse: Data that alludes to profile names and descriptions highlighting signs of masculinity: Direct references to manhood, muscularity, and dominance over others. Penis size marketing and sexual performance included. These masculine descriptors are often hegemonic(homo)normative (see <i>photographic section</i>). Masculine privileging and misogynistic, anti-effeminate language are included. <u>Intersectional</u> interpretations are included.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Descriptions on sex, sexual performance, penis size 5. Descriptions of masculine privileging, misogyny, anti-effeminacy 6. Pressure of textually showcasing masculinity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Descriptions on muscularity, (sex)ual performance, penis size 4) Textual masculine privileging, pressure, anti-effeminacy
<p>Photographic and Textual Homophobia: Data that alludes to profile pictures and descriptions showcasing queer (homonormative) stereotypes such as masculinity and femininity determining profile photos and descriptions including categorical selections such as sexual role. This includes self-marketing and explicit preferencing of homonormative values and the exclusion of those perceived as lacking queerness. <u>Intersectional</u> interpretations are included.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Photos aligning to a (sex)uality-gender categorical choice 8. Descriptions aligning to a (sex)uality-gender categorical choice 9. Descriptions of (sex)uality-gender identity preferences, exclusion 10. Pressure to exhibit (sex)uality-gender identity norms 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5) Photos, pressure aligning to a (sex)uality-gender identity 6) Descriptions, pressure aligning to a (sex)uality-gender identity 7) Descriptions of (sex)uality-gender identity preferences, exclusion
<p>Photographic and Textual Body Regulation: Data that alludes to profile pictures and descriptions highlighting preferences and the marketing of specific body types, likely hegemonically masculine or homonormative. Alternative body types are fetishized, grouped, or shamed. <u>Intersectional</u> interpretations are included.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Photos showcasing body preference and self-marketing 12. Descriptions of body self-marketing 13. Descriptions of body preferences, fetishization, shaming 14. Pressure to exhibit a specific body type 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8) Photos, pressure of body self-marketing 9) Descriptions, pressure of body self-marketing 10) Descriptions of body preferences, fetishization, shaming

<p>Textual Racism: Data that alludes to profile descriptions highlighting preferences and the marketing of a specific racial identity. This includes racial fetishizing and exclusion. <u>Intersectional</u> interpretations are included.</p>	<p>15. Descriptions of racial self-marketing 16. Descriptions of racial preferences, fetishization, discrimination 17. Pressure to exhibit racially expected traits</p>	<p>11) Descriptions, pressure of racial self-marketing 12) Descriptions of racial preferences, fetishization, discrimination</p>
<p>Photographic and Textual Anonymity: Data that alludes to a lack of profile pictures and descriptions.</p>	<p>18. Profiles of faceless (body) photos, no photos 19. Descriptions with minor, no (personal) information.</p>	<p>13) Profiles of faceless (body) photos, no photos 14) Descriptions with minor, no (non-sexual) info</p>
<p>Feelings toward Photographic and Textual Normalcies: Data that alludes to feelings in correlation to their perception of the common photos and descriptions.</p>	<p>20. Enjoyment or neutrality with profile photo and description norms 21. Dislike, frustration with profile photo and description norms</p>	<p>15) Enjoyment or neutrality with profile photo and description norms 16) Dislike, frustration with profile photo and description norms</p>
<p>Hypersexual Atmosphere, Risky Behaviour and Violence: Data that alludes to the encouragement of a hook-up culture, sex priority, and risky scenarios such as ‘raw’ sex in this space. Acts of violence such as assault are included.</p>	<p>22. Alludes to a hypersexual, sexual risk culture 23. Mentions of unsafe scenarios and violence</p>	<p>17) Alludes to hypersexual, sexual risk culture 18) Mentions of unsafe scenarios and violence</p>
<p>Absence of Masculine, Homonormative Pressures and Discrimination: Data that indicate that these spaces do not encourage masculine and queer (homonormative) stereotypes, and that they do not change how users interact, or that the participant does not feel pressured to abide to these stereotypes. Participants also note not experiencing discriminatory language.</p>	<p>24. Masculine and queer stereotypes are not promoted 25. Users’ interactions are not changed in this virtual space 26. Does not feel pressured to abide to masculine and queer stereotypes</p>	<p>19) Masculine, queer stereotypes are not promoted 20) Users’ interactions are not changed in this virtual space 21) Does not feel pressured to abide to masculine, queer stereotypes 22) Has not experienced discrimination</p>

Table 2 - Summative Content Analysis Table:

Keywords based on each form of discriminatory element applied to the profile observations and a summary of their photographic and textual similarities and differences between both cities.

Keywords	Thick Description	Annotations (Photographic and Textual)
<p>Hegemonic Masculinity: Manly, Dominant, Traditional Manhood, Muscular, Large Penis Marketing. Sexual Roughness</p>	<p>Muscularity is privileged, often aligned to a masculine identity, and is illustrated through body visuals, and sometimes their environment. Malmö men utilize more sexually explicit photos, and Copenhagen men through manspreading and kink attire. The prevalence of masculine self-identifiers, masculine hashtags, sexual marketing, and masculine partner preferencing for both cities confirm this. In Malmö, non-masculine identities were slightly relevant, and Copenhagen showed more explicit sexual marketing, demands and masculinity.</p>	<p>Similarities: Muscularity is privileged. Shirtless photos are common, often related to a masculine self-identifier and rarely displayed by bottoms. Lead profile pictures often focus on their torso.</p> <p>Some feature an alcoholic beverage, often beer, and/or a bar environment; suits and business casual attire are common.</p> <p>Malmö: Several explicit photos relating to male genital pants prints, often by younger men, with more masculine self-identifiers, and rarely bottoms.</p> <p>Revealing clothing which often align to the, usually masculine, features the person wish to show off.</p> <p>Copenhagen: Infrequent explicit photos relating to male genital pants prints. Manspreading is common and often done by those with masculine self-identifiers.</p> <p>Lead photos showing leather attire is common due to frequent leather identifier, creating a more dominating-masculine narrative. Most profiles are older, so masculinity is reinforced through alternative masculinity, not just muscularity.</p> <p>Similarities: Most self-identifiers are masculine, <i>Guy Next Door</i> the most common, always led by tops, and preferred partner identifiers are masculine. Body hair is the most common profile hashtag.</p> <p>Profiles descriptions state preferences for masculine guys and self-reference having good sexual performance and a large penis.</p> <p>Malmö: Non-masculine self-identifiers and partner preferences are slightly more present.</p> <p>Copenhagen: Profile names allude to sexual acts, kinks and having a large penis size. Descriptions include more demands</p>

		<p>for and references to masculine traits. Sexual preferences, sexual marketing, and kinks more visible.</p>
<p>Homophobia: Homonormative Promotion, Non-homonormative Exclusion</p>	<p>Common visual homonormative narrative making through attire to confirm sexual position, identities, and kinks. In Malmö, less frequently unless reaffirming bottoming, and in Copenhagen more evident with BDSM and kink to Leather identity. Frequent textual correlation of queer masculinity as positive and feminine objectification. In Malmö, bisexuality is a partner preference and bottom profiles marketed for tops. In Copenhagen, frequent sexual preference hashtags, top descriptions set as kink-dominant, are more demanding to bottoms, and infrequent bottom descriptions self-objectify. Attractiveness is masculine identities.</p>	<p>Similarities: Homonormative narrative making through visuals is common, often aligning to kink, sexual position, or self-identifiers. Often done through attire.</p> <p>Malmö: Less visual homonormative narrative making, mainly illustrated through butts, displayed solely by those who bottom.</p> <p>Copenhagen: More clear homonormative narrative making, illustrated through BDSM: leather attire, tools, toys, and environments, correlating to <i>Leather</i> identity. Common for photo to correlate to a kink in the description.</p> <p>Similarities: Homonormative Masculine privileging, as masculine queerness is positive and feminine queerness is objectified and assigned to bottoming.</p> <p>Malmö: <i>Bisexual</i> was a frequent partner preference identity, potentially aligning to ‘heterosexual’ aspect and more masculinity.</p> <p>Infrequent but explicit referencing to non-masculine queer men as problematic and unnatural, whereas relaxed nature seen as masculine and natural.</p> <p>Few cases of Bottoms with their sexual position as profile name, who sell their profile in relation to sexual fun with a Top.</p> <p>Copenhagen: Homonormative promotion more explicit, with direct demands coming from Tops which emphasizes submissiveness, and few cases of Bottoms self-objectifying, referencing submission to a dominant other. Hashtags illustrate performance preferences.</p> <p>Tops frequently associated with dominance, especially in relation to BDSM activities and kinks. Sexiness often connected to identifiers of dominant and traditionally masculine men.</p>
<p>Body Regulation: Body Shaming, Alternative Body Fetishization, Alternative</p>	<p>Alternative body identity visually supported through showing aligning features. Gym photos highlight</p>	<p>Similarities: Very common for users to visually support their alternative body identity through highlighting a</p>

<p>Bodies Grouping, Muscularity Promotion</p>	<p>muscularity, which is frequent in Malmö, as well as bottom body confirmation. In Copenhagen, Bear body confirmation. Muscular identities promoted and likely solidify sexual roles. In Malmö, Daddy and Twink bodies are more preferred. In Copenhagen, Bears and Leather identities are more common, and profiles to market alternative bodies.</p>	<p>specific feature.</p> <p>When gym photos are present, they show the users body, and muscle flexing, to promote muscularity. They are mainly from masculine self-identifiers.</p> <p><u>Malmö:</u> Gym photos more common, mainly from <i>Guy Next Door</i> identity.</p> <p>Bottoms solidify their alternative body through highlighting their butts or thin bodies (also aligning to femininity).</p> <p><u>Copenhagen:</u> More Bears mean more users solidify their alternative body through photos to highlight largeness and hair.</p> <p><u>Similarities:</u> The Jock identity is used by all except those who exclusively bottom, and Muscle identity always taken by versatile people. Potentially to reinforce masculine sexual role/identity.</p> <p><u>Malmö:</u> Daddies and Twinks partner preference identities are significantly more common, potentially relating to their body type.</p> <p><u>Copenhagen:</u> Bears and Leather self-identifiers are more common. Hashtags detail body type. More profile names are linked to their alternative body.</p>
<p>Racism: Racial Marketing, Racial Fetishization, Racial Exclusion</p>	<p>Racism towards others was not found. In Malmö only self-racial promotion infrequently existed</p>	<p><u>Malmö:</u> Self-racial promotion conveyed, but not common, by people of colour, in which one case self-racial fetishized.</p> <p><u>Copenhagen:</u> No examples found.</p>
<p>Misogyny: Femmephobia, Anti- effeminate</p>	<p>Feminine self-identifiers and partner preferences are uncommon. In Malmö, only Twinks had prevalence and visually promoted, but feminine traits demonized in contrast to masculinity. In Copenhagen, bottom role is degraded, emasculation is textually deployed, and feminine self-identifiers are severely lacking, especially visually</p>	<p><u>Similarities:</u> Severe lack of feminine self-identifiers and feminine preferred partner preference</p> <p><u>Malmö:</u> The only feminine identifier with prevalence for preferred partner preference is twink. Such femininity reinforced through parts of the body they specifically show.</p>

	contrasting to Malmö.	<p>Masculine traits are called for while feminine traits are demonized in descriptions.</p> <p><u>Copenhagen:</u> Clear degradation of the bottom role, as submissive servants. Emasculation tactics used to challenge masculinity or suggest bodily largeness means greater masculinity.</p> <p>The absence of feminine self-identifier is more lacking. Lack of visual displays to suggest femininity. More variations of masculinity shown, setting an anti-effeminate illustration.</p>
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List of Figures

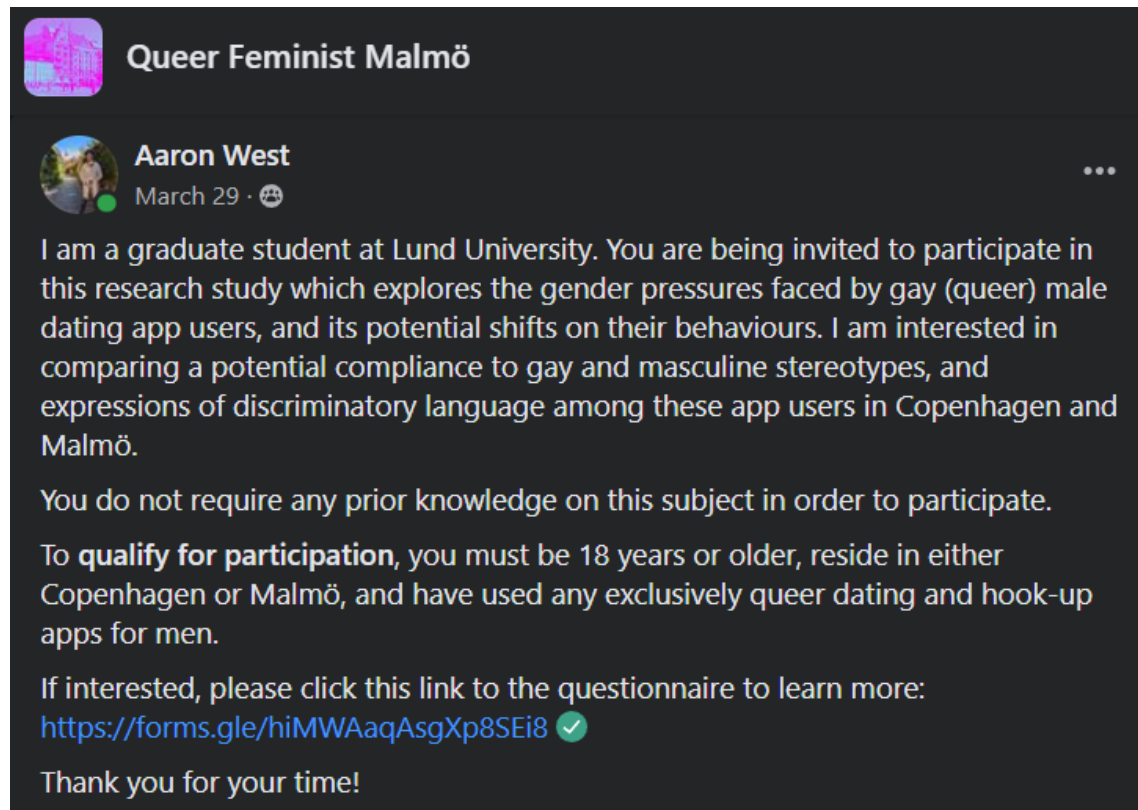



Figure 1 – Questionnaire Recruitment Text: This was self-administered, posted to the target demographic where they are asked if they would be interested in participating in an anonymous questionnaire. A brief description of the project and participation criteria is provided. Similarly, overly technical language when posting about the study is avoided. (Alessi & Martin, 2010). Those who are interested can click the link which takes them to the questionnaire introductory page with the more detailed study description.



Gender pressures and discriminatory engagements among queer male dating app users

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will require the completion of the questionnaire. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer. This questionnaire should take approximately **20 minutes** of your time.


Your participation will be anonymous and you will not be contacted again in the future. Internet cookies will not be used to secure confidentiality. This means your answers will not be saved unless you submit your form. **Progress will be lost** if you refresh or close the window. Your answers will be coded only for the purpose of this study and will remain anonymous. You will not be paid for being in this study. This questionnaire involves minimal risk to you. The benefits, however, may impact society by increasing knowledge on the geographic complexities of pressure and prejudice in the LGBTQ+ community. **More info on the study** can be found below:

[Link for Computer users](#)

[Link for Phone users](#)

If you have any further questions about this study you may contact me, Aaron West, at aa3008we-s@lu.se.

- **Disclaimer:** The term *Queer* is used in this study to encompass all non-‘straight’ (heterosexual) sexual orientations.
- **Content warning:** A question in this survey will ask the participant to comment on discriminatory language they have seen, engaged with, or have experienced while using queer male dating apps.

 Saving disabled

* Indicates required question

To **qualify for participation**, you must be 18 years or older, reside in either Copenhagen or Malmö, and have used any exclusively queer dating and hook-up apps for men. *

Selecting ‘**I understand and wish to participate**’ on this survey implies you meet this criteria and consent to participate. Thank you very much for your time and support!

I understand and wish to participate

Next Page 1 of 6 Clear form

Figure 2 – Introductory Page (Questionnaire Section 1): This is the first page of the questionnaire which includes all the information discussed in the ethics section of this paper, as supported by Alessi & Martin (2010): an explanation of what participation requires, the participation criteria, benefits, risks, and more information on the study. Implied consent based on this criteria was explicitly listed and agreement was required to move onto the other sections. Emphasis on participation being anonymous, voluntary and the time it would take for completion was clearly conveyed. Two links were provided, one for phone users and one for computer users, to take the participant to a study information webpage.



The image shows a webpage layout for a study. At the top left is a painting of a man shaving. To its right is the title 'GENDER PRESSURES AND DISCRIMINATORY ENGAGEMENTS AMONG QUEER MALE DATING APP USERS' in large, bold, black letters, with 'In Copenhagen and Malmö' below it. Further down, it says 'Lund University, Human Geography Graduate Thesis' and includes a disclaimer: 'Disclaimer: The term Queer is used in this study to encompass all non-\'straight\' (heterosexual) sexual orientations.' Below this is a section titled 'Study Information' with a paragraph of text. To the right of the text is an illustration of a man looking at a phone. Below the text is another illustration of a man thinking. At the bottom, there are two sections: 'Questions?' with an email address and 'Survey link' with a URL.

GENDER PRESSURES AND DISCRIMINATORY ENGAGEMENTS AMONG QUEER MALE DATING APP USERS

In Copenhagen and Malmö

Lund University, Human Geography Graduate Thesis

Disclaimer: The term *Queer* is used in this study to encompass all non-\'straight\' (heterosexual) sexual orientations.

Study Information

LGBTQ+ online environments are prevalent, and its anonymity allow many queer internet users a space for sexuality and gender exploration and/or engagements with other queer individuals who are unattainable in-person. Dating and hook-up applications (apps) exclusively for queer men, such as Grindr, grant its users this experience. However, discriminatory language and strict body expectations are of concern in these spaces and its potential connection to exclusion and the encouragement of 'traditionally' masculine and gay stereotypes.

This study is a spatial comparison between queer male dating and hook-up app users in Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden. It is to understand if these app users in both cities comply to masculine and gay stereotypes, and express discrimination differently. Despite the geographic proximity between Copenhagen and Malmö, 'normalized' cultural and societal expectations could shift the gender and body pressures experienced by queer men. This could result in varying displays and engagements among queer male dating app users in both cities. Such research adds to the discussion of how inclusive-labelled LGBTQ+ spaces can be exclusive, how specific cultural and societal pressures sustain stereotypes, and that even in 'progressive' countries prejudice thrives and is potentially more pronounced online.

Questions?
Email me, Aaron West at: aa3008we-s@lu.se

Survey link
<https://forms.gle/hiMWAaqAsgXp8SEi8>

Figure 3 – Study Information Webpage: Two webpages were designed in Canva (one layout for phone users and one for computer users) to provide more information on the purpose of this study if they were curious and for ethical reasons. This was separated from the questionnaire introductory page so that it could focus more on the participation aspects while avoiding cluttering.

The image shows a digital questionnaire interface with five distinct question sections. Each section is enclosed in a light grey rounded rectangle. The questions are as follows:

- Section 1:** "Do you reside in Copenhagen or Malmö?" with radio buttons for "Copenhagen" and "Malmö".
- Section 2:** "What is your age range?" with radio buttons for "18-23", "24-29", "30-35", "36-40", "41-50", and "51+".
- Section 3:** "What ethnicity best describes you?" with radio buttons for "Asian", "Black", "Latino", "Middle Eastern", "Mixed", "Native American", "White", "South Asian", and "Other:" followed by a text input field.
- Section 4:** "Which sexual position best describes you?" with radio buttons for "Bottom", "Side", "Top", "Vers Bottom", and "Vers Top".
- Section 5:** "Please tick all the queer male dating/hook-up apps you have used" with checkboxes for "Adam4Adam", "Grindr", "Growlr", "Hornet", "Jack'd", "Scruff", and "Other:" followed by a text input field.

At the bottom of the form, there are navigation buttons for "Back" and "Next", a progress indicator (a blue bar followed by a grey bar), the text "Page 2 of 6", and a "Clear form" link.

Figure 4 – Demographics (Questionnaire Section 2): This section included the only multi-choice questions which focused on demographic information to understand which of the two cities the user is from (which is a requirement in the participation criteria), the age range of the participant, their ethnicity, their sexual position, and the MSM exclusive dating app they have used (another participation criterion). As explained in the background section, the MSM community have a small homonormative niche of what is the ideal gay man, so one's age range and ethnicity could provide correlation to how they feel about pressures in relation to masculine and gay stereotypes and discriminatory language, since both are regulated in relation to the masculine hierarchy. Grindr's investor presentation (2022) was used to determine the age ranges and the ethnic categories were based on what is available in the ethnicity categorical identity dropdown menu on the app. This is because Grindr has the most users of any MSM dating app (Oakes et al., 2020) so participants are likely the most familiar with it.

Additionally, sexual position is also a key identifier many MSM app users identify around, especially considering there is always a sexual position profile display option. This often influences users abiding to masculine or effeminate stereotypes which could add another intersectional layer to the answers provided.

Please describe what **profile pictures** you most commonly see on male dating apps and how you feel about them.

Your answer

Please describe the **profile descriptions** you most commonly see on male dating apps and how you feel about them.

Your answer

Back Next Page 3 of 6 Clear form

Figure 5 – Photographic and Textual Norms (Questionnaire Section 3): This section included open-ended questions which focus on the participants describing common pictures and descriptions included with MSM profiles, as well as their feelings toward them. These questions were originally tailored around participants describing how they view masculinity in correlation to these MSM profile photographic and textual components, but this is considered a leading question as some may not even have initial perceptions of these profiles as masculine. As noted by Malhotra (2006), leading questions should be avoided at all costs to reduce influenced bias. Hence why it was crucial to group these questions away from the stereotype and pressure questions of section 4.

The image shows a digital questionnaire interface with five distinct question boxes, each containing an open-ended question and a text input field. The questions are:

- 1. Do you think queer male dating app users often display **language** or **pictures** that promote masculinity and gay stereotypes? Please elaborate on your answer.
- 2. To what extent do you feel **pressured** to comply with masculine and gay stereotypes when presenting your profile and engaging with other men on these apps?
- 3. To what extent do you feel complying to masculine and gay stereotypes impacts your **desirability** (popularity) among other app users?
- 4. Do you think using these apps **change** how you and others act or present yourselves in that app's space versus in-person interactions? Please elaborate.
- 5. Do you think any aspect of your identity (race, age, sexual position, gender identity, etc.) could make the **pressure** to comply with masculine or gay stereotypes more or less strict? Please specify which identities and elaborate.

At the bottom of the form, there are navigation buttons: 'Back' and 'Next', a progress indicator (a teal bar followed by a grey bar), the text 'Page 4 of 6', and a 'Clear form' button.

Figure 6 - Stereotypes and Pressures (Questionnaire Section 4): This section included open-ended questions which focus on participants detailing the extent to which hegemonic masculinity and hetero(homo)normative ideals are promoted in photographic and textual aspects of MSM profiles, along with the pressures to comply, potential behavioural changes such compliance cause on participants, and the extent of said pressures in relation to aspects of their identity. This section is especially important for answering research question 4 while adding another layer to the intersectionality perspective of this study.

Do queer male dating app users express discriminatory language frequently and clearly? Please elaborate.

Your answer

Back Next Page 5 of 6 Clear form

Figure 7 – Discrimination (Questionnaire Section 5): This section is unique in that it only includes one open-ended question. This question is isolated from the rest of the study and was intentionally positioned last as it asks participants to provide the most sensitive information. It touches on the discriminatory language participants may have engaged with when using MSM dating apps. Although prior questions may have prompted participants to share such information, none of said questions engage with this topic as directly. As touched on by Malhotra (2006), placing questions that are more sensitive towards the end of the questionnaire also increases the participants likelihood to answer the question as by this point, the project's legitimacy should be solidified, and rapport created.

Thank you for your participation!

Please use the below space to comment on anything else you wish to discuss on male dating and hook-up apps:

Your answer

Back Submit Page 6 of 6 Clear form

Figure 8 – Thank You Page (Questionnaire Section 6): This page not only expresses gratitude to the participant, but it provides a 14th 'question' which serves as an opportunity for the participant to add anything else the questionnaire may have missed.

Do you reside in Copenhagen or Malmö?

48 responses

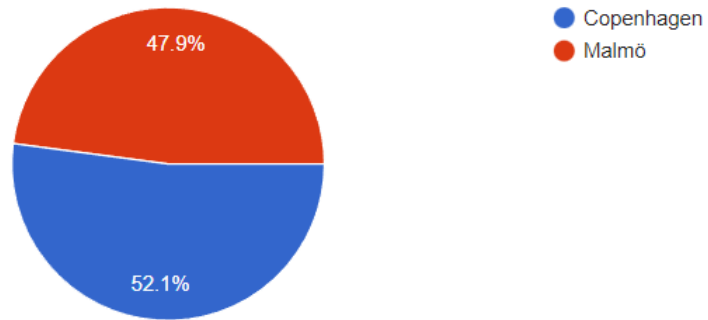


Figure 9 –Participant Residential Breakdown: Answers from Questionnaire Question 1

What is your age range?

48 responses

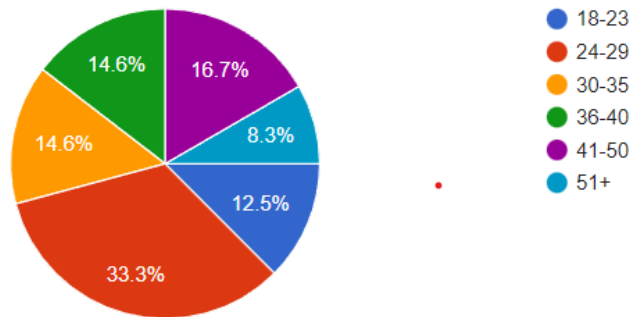


Figure 10 –Participant Age Breakdown: Answers from Questionnaire Question 2

What ethnicity best describes you?

48 responses

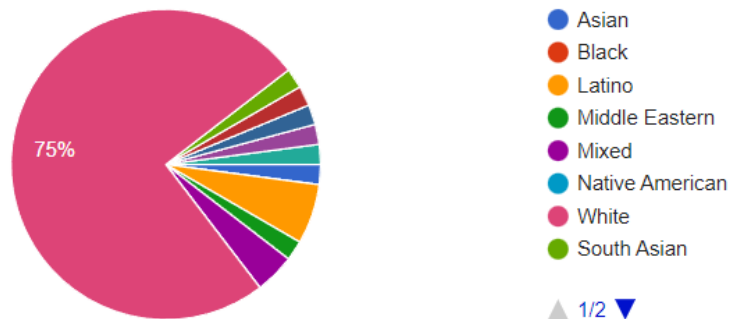


Figure 11 –Participant Ethnic Breakdown: Answers from Questionnaire Question 3

Which sexual position best describes you?

48 responses

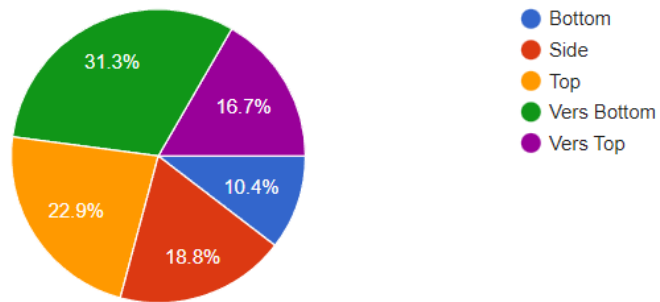


Figure 12 –Participant Sex Breakdown: Answers from Questionnaire Question 4

Please tick all the queer male dating/hook-up apps you have used

[Copy](#)

47 responses

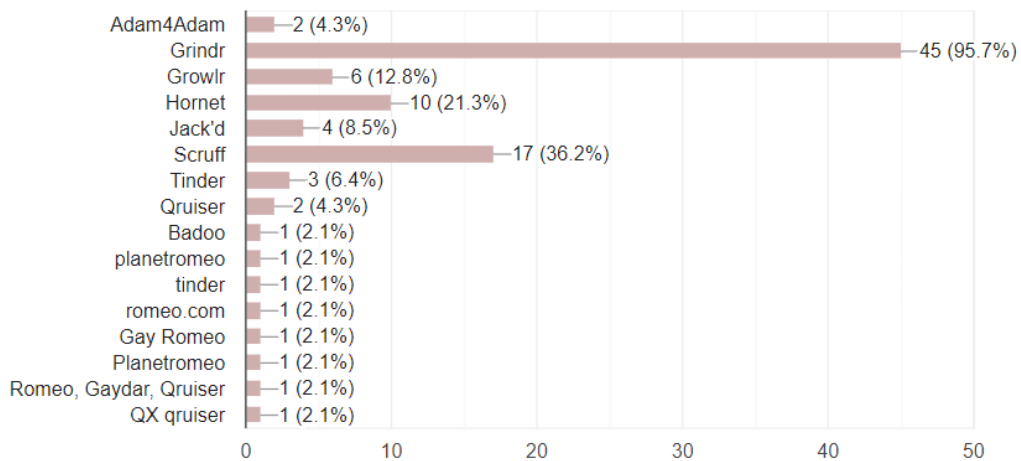


Figure 13 –Participant App Use Breakdown: Answers from Questionnaire Question 5

Name	Files	References	Created on	Created by	Modified on	Modified by
Textual Racism	15	19	26/04/2023 17:5	AW	02/05/2023 17:5	AW
Textual Masculinity and Anti-effeminate Discourse	18	32	26/04/2023 17:5	AW	02/05/2023 18:2	AW
Photographic Masculinity	24	41	26/04/2023 17:4	AW	02/05/2023 17:3	AW
Photographic and Textual Homophobia	21	82	26/04/2023 17:5	AW	02/05/2023 17:5	AW
7. Descriptions of (sex)uality-gender identity preferences, exclusion	16	37	26/04/2023 18:2	AW	02/05/2023 18:2	AW
6. Descriptions, pressure aligning to a (sex)uality-gender identity	16	27	26/04/2023 18:2	AW	02/05/2023 18:2	AW
5. Photos, pressure aligning to a (sex)uality-gender identity	12	18	26/04/2023 18:1	AW	02/05/2023 17:5	AW
Photographic and Textual Body Regulation	16	41	26/04/2023 17:5	AW	02/05/2023 18:1	AW
Photographic and Textual Anonymity	15	25	26/04/2023 18:0	AW	02/05/2023 14:1	AW
Hypersexual Atmosphere, Risky Behaviour and Violence	18	29	26/04/2023 18:0	AW	02/05/2023 15:4	AW
Feelings toward Photographic and Textual Normalcies	24	40	26/04/2023 18:0	AW	26/04/2023 18:0	AW
Absence of Masculine, Homonormative Pressures and Discrimination	20	57	27/04/2023 13:5	AW	02/05/2023 12:5	AW

Figure 14 – Nvivo Codebook: An example screenshot showing the parent and a few children code in Nvivo, as previously shown in Table 1. The parent code ‘Photographic and Textual Homophobia’ is highlighted and the only tab open to show its children code. Each child code ‘reference’ is a data extract from a questionnaire answer that match the child code, therefore being coded for. All children code references contribute to its associated parent code reference total. The same goes for ‘files’ which is every participant who had atleast one reference under that code.

Data extract	Coded for
it's too much like hard work I mean how much paper have you got to sign to change a flippin' name no I I mean no I no we we have thought about it ((inaudible)) half heartedly and thought no no I jus- I can't be bothered, it's too much like hard work. (Kate F07a)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talked about with partner 2. Too much hassle to change name

Figure 15 – Coding Guidance Example (from Braune and Clarke, 2006): A screenshot of a table from their paper which summarized pairing a data extract with applicable children code, serving as an example to guide the coding process.